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What Made the Masses Revolutionary? Ignorance, Character, and Class in Teodoro Agoncillo's *The Revolt of the Masses*

Regarded as a classic in Philippine historiography, Teodoro Agoncillo's *The Revolt of the Masses* published in 1956 is examined to understand the author's explanation of what made "the masses" revolutionary. The study finds a profound incoherence: Agoncillo posited literacy and political consciousness in explaining the explosion in the Katipunan's membership, but throughout the book the dominant characterization of the masses was one of ignorance, gullibility, impulsiveness, irrationality, and treachery. The study explains this contradiction in light of Agoncillo's blending of literature and history, the educated elite's unquestioned assumptions about ignorance, and the ethos of the postwar "proletarian" writer.

KEYWORDS: THE MASSES • PHILIPPINE REVOLUTION • HISTORIOGRAPHY • LITERATURE • CLASS ANALYSIS • EDUCATION

Published in 1956 or over six decades ago, Teodoro A. Agoncillo's *The Revolt of the Masses: The Story of Bonifacio and the Katipunan* has been hailed a classic in Philippine history, although it has not acquired that status in Southeast Asian studies (Ileto 2011, 519; Curaming 2012).¹ It has been most influential in forming the consensus that “the masses”—instead of the educated *ilustrados* and the native elite—must occupy the center stage of the nationalist historiography of the revolution that took place at the end of the nineteenth century. Portrayed as “betraying” the revolution but eventually joining it when they saw that it was likely to succeed, the educated and wealthy propagandists and elite revolutionaries thus lost their leading role in this critical moment in the national story. As Reynaldo Ileto (1979, 4) puts it, the book by its very title “indicates Agoncillo’s purpose—to rectify the tendency of historians before him to regard the revolution as the handiwork of upper-class, Hispanized natives.” The book was arresting. Agoncillo became “the most notable revisionist,” as John Schumacher (1982, 448) later pointed out.

In this historic action, the masses were led, in Agoncillo’s narrative, by the proletarian Andres Bonifacio. In Milagros Guerrero’s (1977/2015, 11, 16) assessment, “Agoncillo was the first academic historian to analyze the Revolution in terms of the contradiction between different classes in Philippine society”; as such, his work was “the first significant and controversial contribution to revolutionary historiography.” Agoncillo defined the Katipunan as “a proletarian movement” (*ibid.*, 110) and “a distinctively plebeian” (Agoncillo [1956] 1996, [1] 1). The designation of the Katipunan as “plebeian” (*plebe*, *plebeya*) was first essayed by Isabelo de los Reyes (1899, 78), but it was Agoncillo who “develop[ed] the hypothesis at greatest length” (Fast and Richardson 1979, 68).²

Subsequent historians would build on Agoncillo’s perspective, with Renato Constantino’s (1975, 166, 167) radical presentation of Philippine history hailing the Katipunan as the “historic initiative of the masses,” even though he placed Bonifacio’s class origins not in the proletariat but in the “lower middle class.” Ileto (2011, 499) admitted that in his doctoral dissertation proposal written in 1970 he “applauded Agoncillo’s *Revolt* for showing that the armed independence movement ‘was initiated by laborers and artisans in Manila and that the upper classes were only reluctantly drawn into the struggle.’”

Agoncillo’s class perspective, however, ignited critiques as soon as the book saw print. Jose Hernandez and Simeon del Rosario (1956) denounced the book as a Marxist-Communist interpretation of the 1896 revolution, which in their view tarnished its glory.³ As Ileto (2011, 509) has adduced, “In framing the story of Bonifacio and the Katipunan in terms of an organized movement drawn from the masses that is betrayed by the educated and propertied class, Agoncillo was providing a historical linkage to the Huk rebellion” (*cf.* Guerrero 1977/2015, 14), which the Philippine state, with the assistance of US intelligence personnel, was trying to quash at that time. Looking back, Rommel Curaming (2012, 598), explains, “The very notion that revolution was the handiwork of the masses and that the middle class had ‘betrayed’ the supposedly highest expression of Filipino nationalism sounded too Marxist for certain sectors.” In Ileto’s (2011, 517) formulation, “Agoncillo’s *The Revolt of the Masses* was controversial just by its title alone.”⁴

In this milieu, Agoncillo’s manuscript attracted controversy even before it was published. In fact, the book’s publication was delayed for a number of reasons, including Emilio Aguinaldo’s complaint that he was negatively portrayed in it; the objections of the Catholic Church to the book’s anticlericalism and to the use of public funds to defray its publication; and various state actors’ apprehension about Agoncillo’s Marxist interpretation of history (Agoncillo 2001; Guerrero 1977/2015, 13–14; Hila 2001, 57–61; Ileto 2011, 509, 512). As Agoncillo (2001, 139) put it, the manuscript was already with the Bureau of Printing when Pres. Ramon Magsaysay “peremptorily ordered” the cessation of publication due to a complaint. “This book was suppressed for eight years,” bemoaned its author (*ibid.*). The solution was found in the government’s transfer of its right to publish the work to Agoncillo, who then let the University of the Philippines (UP) publish the book in 1956.

Why the Masses Revolted: Excavating an Answer

In time the old critiques were “completely forgotten,” as Agoncillo (*ibid.*, 142) reminisced. The book became a guiding light and inspiration for the period of student activism and social unrest in the 1960s and the early 1970s—with Agoncillo (1967) proudly writing the introduction to his student Jose Ma. Sison’s *Struggle for National Democracy*.⁵ The initial burst of ideologically driven criticisms of the book gave way to academic assessments of *The Revolt of the Masses* that began to appear in the late 1970s. Only those critiques

that focus on “the masses” and the Katipunan are taken up in the succeeding paragraphs.⁶

Agoncillo’s class analysis of Philippine society and of the Katipunan has been critiqued by, among others, Guerrero (1977/2015, 24–25), who pointed out that Marxist categories such as “bourgeoisie,” “petite bourgeoisie,” and “proletariat”—as well as group labels used in Philippine history, such as *principalia*, *ilustrados*, *cacique*, and *inquilinos*⁷—“have imprecise, overlapping meanings” and “each of these categories is internally differentiated.” In fact, a kernel of this criticism was already found in Nicolas Zafra’s (1956, 500) early critique when he wrote that “there is much confusion in the author’s mind as regards his categories. What he calls the ‘masses’ . . . can be interpreted in many ways.” Zafra (*ibid.*, 501) argued that “What the author’s criterion is by which a person may be identified with the ‘masses’ is obviously not at all clear,” and the “confusion” becomes “confounded when he speaks of the ‘middle class.’”⁸

The proletarian label attached to the Katipunan has also been contested. In *Roots of Dependency* Jonathan Fast and Jim Richardson (1979, 68) noted the “over-simplification and looseness of terminology” in Agoncillo’s work. Subsequently, Richardson (2013, 399–451) has provided data on the class composition of the Katipunan based on information on 136 persons who had joined the movement prior to 1896, most of whom held leadership positions in the Katipunan’s branches and popular councils. None of them were poor or held low-paid occupations because many of them were employed by private companies or the colonial state; “Their wages or salaries were either around or above the median for the city in the mid-1890s” (*ibid.*, 401).⁹ Also contrary to Agoncillo’s representation of the Katipunan, a significant number of the 136 cases were highly literate.¹⁰ However, based on information from the Cuerpo de Vigilancia, the colonial state’s intelligence service that clandestinely gathered information from 1896 onward, Rene Escalante (2017, 461–62) has given a list of mostly manual occupations held by Katipunan members in Mandaluyong that yielded a regular, although not high, income.¹¹ Data assembled by Michael Cullinane (2014, 27–35) on 234 individuals who participated in the April 1898 uprising in Cebu, including forty-five leaders, indicate that 97 percent of them belonged to the broadly defined category of *empleados* (salaried employees), *principales* (municipal officeholders), or family members of these or other *empleados* and *principales*; 54 percent of them had also obtained varying levels of secondary education. Thus, what

we have is a complex picture of the Katipunan in which leadership posts (prior to 1896) were held by those who were economically secure and a followership (in 1896) in which young blue-collar workers predominated, at least in the one branch (Mandaluyong); as the revolution expanded to other areas (as in Cebu in 1898), the participants came from a wide section of salaried workers and municipal political elites. In this light Agoncillo’s (1956, 46; 1996, 48) portrayal of the Katipunan as composed of the “lowest stratum of society” is far from an accurate representation.

While admiring Agoncillo’s book, Iletto (2011, 499) took Agoncillo to task for not “describing how Filipinos in various strata of society actually perceived the events around them” at the end of the nineteenth century. He said Agoncillo was guilty of “imposition upon his data of reified concepts of ‘revolution,’ ‘nationalism’ and ‘class struggle’” (*ibid.*). A close associate of Agoncillo, Guerrero (1977/2015, 23–24) observed incisively, “Apart from the tacit recognition that the masses supported the Revolution in terms of material aid and their lives, what do we know of their real role, their expectations and demands of the Revolution? Paradoxically, the biggest gap in the history of the revolt of the masses is an adequate treatment of the masses.” Iletto’s (1979) *Pasyon and Revolution* was meant to fill this gap by explaining the perspective of the Tagalog peasantry based on indigenous notions framed in the idioms of the Pasyon, although his work has serious limitations, as Schumacher (1982, 454–67) and Joseph Scalice (2018) have shown.

Analyzing Agoncillo’s historiography that converts the problems of writing history into the problems of history itself and in which history supplants biography but biography persists as the structuring principle of history, Neferti Xina Tadiar (2004, 175) has exposed Agoncillo’s historiography as “a work of psychology” that “fulfills the two conditions for the founding of a national subject by recourse to psychological forms.” Agoncillo, Tadiar (*ibid.*) contends, used psychology “as a logic of explanation” for the behavior of Bonifacio and the masses and as the “logic of attachments and sympathetic action” such that psychology becomes “a cause of the narrative, determining the very mode of inscribing history, which produces its authorial subject.” “As equally a work of literature as a work of history,” *The Revolt of the Masses* contains a “master narrative” in which, driven by “abnormal psychology,” “Bonifacio’s tragedy is the enabling condition of the triumph of the Filipino nation” (*ibid.*, 161, 181). What is more, contrary to enthroning the masses, Agoncillo “plays out the affective alignments that enable and secure the

proper affiliation of the nation with an emergent, privileged class to which he belongs” (ibid., 176). In the end, Agoncillo props up the ilustrado as the national subject, Tadiar argues. But what was the behavior of the masses? What would make the reader turn away from the masses and toward the ilustrados that Agoncillo ostensibly displaces from national prominence? Did readers, in fact, turn away from the masses?

Notwithstanding these critiques, the central question remains: According to Agoncillo, why did “the masses” rise up in arms against Spain at the end of the nineteenth century? As Agoncillo (2003, 52) himself said in a paper first published in 1978, we need to understand “Why the masses plunged into a savage fray against the Spaniards.” Although generally unrecognized, he provided an answer to that question in *The Revolt of the Masses*, and this article intends to make his answer explicit. Agoncillo’s text contains an implicit theory to explain the revolutionary ferment, but his perspective was contradictory, if not derogatory of the masses, as will be explained. His perspective needs to be understood because it was not given attention as the book went on to become a milestone in Philippine historiography.

This study excavates Agoncillo’s theory of why the masses revolted by doing a close reading of *The Revolt of the Masses*, analyzing relevant aspects of the general narrative as well as the character studies that are revealed in particular words and phrases that Agoncillo used in describing Bonifacio, the Katipunan members, and the masses in general. This study provides a manual count of the number of times that words and phrases referring to the masses appear in the text; the count is not meant to be taken as precise but rather as a window to Agoncillo’s thinking and narrative approach. Before presenting the results of this textual analysis, the article revisits Agoncillo’s biography and intellectual trajectories to understand his milieu in the 1940s, which resulted in an approach that intermingled literature and history and was suffused by “proletarian” influences and sensibilities. Agoncillo’s theory and narrative of the revolutionary masses are then explicated, followed by an exploration of possible reasons for and the implications of his manner of characterizing the masses.

Intellectual Trajectories

The Revolt of the Masses is the published version of a manuscript that, according to Agoncillo, he wrote in a four-month period from late (presumably October) 1947 to January 1948 (Hila 2001, 58 n. 2; Agoncillo

2001, 143). It was written as an entry to the Republic Contest on Bonifacio and the First Epoch of the Revolution (Medina 1993, 134). Evidently, he already had in hand the requisite materials to complete his manuscript in a relatively short span of time, suggesting he started data collection soon after the war ended and even during the Japanese occupation from 1942 to 1945. The 35-year-old Agoncillo was not keen on the contest, but Leopoldo Yabes, Agoncillo’s contemporary who pioneered the research on Ilocano literature,¹² urged him, and eventually his wife “taunted” him into joining (Hila 2001, 57–58). Agoncillo’s work was “unanimously adjudged the best entry” (Agoncillo [1956] 1996, [i] vi) by a panel of judges composed of the journalist, parliamentarian, and exponent of Spanish and Philippine languages Jaime C. de Veyra¹³ as chair and the Katipunan member and Tagalog novelist Faustino Aguilar¹⁴ and the librarian and writer Eulogio B. Rodriguez¹⁵ as members. The book was published in 1956 by the UP College of Liberal Arts, although Agoncillo was not yet a UP faculty member at that time. It carried a frontispiece, a letter by the dean, Tomas S. Fonacier,¹⁶ who had wooed Agoncillo to choose UP as his publisher over two other options (Ocampo 1995, 183). The letter of Fonacier trumpeted Agoncillo’s work as “a public document which is of great value to a proper understanding of the cultural history of the Philippines” (Agoncillo [1956] 1996, [i] vi).

It was not Agoncillo’s first work that had won an award. In 1940 he received a special prize in history for a text written in Tagalog, which was entered in the first Commonwealth Literary Contest (Medina 1993, 134). In 1941 he “published a historical work, *Ang Kasaysayan ng Pilipinas* (History of the Philippines), written jointly with Gregorio Zaide” (Ileto 2011, 497). History, however, was not Agoncillo’s undergraduate degree, but rather Philosophy, which he completed at UP in 1934; in 1939 he obtained his MA History degree, also from UP—which had transitioned from its “golden age of liberalism” in the 1920s to the flourishing of nationalism in the 1930s (Ordoñez 2003, 73–74). But according to Agoncillo (2003, 41) the history he learned was principally political history. He took courses with Leandro H. Fernandez, who he later described as having authored only two books: his doctoral dissertation and a “mere textbook for children,” apart from which Fernandez “had not written anything worth noting” (ibid., 9, 21–22). Agoncillo, who was born on 9 November 1912 in Lemery, Batangas, had come from a wealthy and landed family, and in the first half of the twentieth century, when according to the 1939 census only 1.3 percent of the population aged 20 to 65

years old had a college degree (cf. Commission of the Census 1941, 247–52),¹⁷ he was part of a minuscule highly educated elite.

Agoncillo began writing in the late 1920s and early 1930s, his earliest published works being Tagalog poetry. Until the 1940s, “most of his writings . . . consisted of Tagalog poems and short stories in Tagalog and light essays in both Tagalog and English” (Ileto 2011, 497). He continued to devote his time to literary pieces “until the late 1940s when he began to write magazine articles on colorful rebels, bandits and revolutionaries of the past” (ibid.).¹⁸ In 1948, the year he won the Bonifacio biography competition, he became a substitute Tagalog teacher at the Far Eastern University (FEU), which gave him the opportunity for the first time to publicly express the “Filipino point of view,” which would become the hallmark of his historiography (Ocampo 1995, 139; Hila 2001, 27–28). The FEU was impressed and offered him a permanent contract, which he accepted, causing him to resign from the Cosmopolitan Colleges (Ocampo 1995, 140).

His shift to become a history professor came in June 1958 when, after an initial attempt by Yabes failed, Dean Fonacier offered Agoncillo a position as full professor, with Fonacier pleading to Agoncillo to join the UP History Department to add weight to its faculty (ibid.). The move to UP entailed a downgrade in salary, but Agoncillo’s wife once again became the critical factor for she wanted him to have a less hectic schedule than at FEU (Hila 2001, 39), although Agoncillo would now be in the company of some of those who had publicly criticized his book when it appeared just a couple of years earlier. He was then 46 years old. At UP Agoncillo developed a huge following, and he remained on its faculty until his retirement in 1977 (Medina 1993, 131). He was asked by UP president Vicente Sinco to write a textbook on Philippine history (Hila 2001, 39); this textbook first appeared in 1960, and since then several editions have appeared (cf. Totanes 2010), which have been utilized extensively in colleges around the country, but especially in the UP system. Agoncillo solidified his position as the foremost Filipino historian of his time; as Leslie Bauzon (1993, 134) put it, “The place of Professor Agoncillo in Philippine historiography is permanently secure.”

As can be gleaned from this brief biographical sketch, Agoncillo’s career commenced in literature. Contrary to what he had been taught as a student at UP that “literature and history did not mix” (Agoncillo 2003, 41), he would eventually articulate the view that history and literature were so deeply intertwined: “While so much history is needed for the proper understanding

and appreciation of literature, it is also true, on the other hand, that so much literature is needed to make history” (ibid., 48)—Agoncillo leaving us with the interesting ambiguity of whether literature is needed to write history or to actually make history. In any event, he objected to the view of history as an objective science, declaring that “Historical facts do not interpret themselves. Facts assume significance only because historians make them so” (ibid., 32). For Agoncillo, in undertaking the indispensable task of interpretation, the historian “should not fear bias or prejudice; as a matter of fact, he should be open about it and not try to hide his bias under false pretenses”; what the historian ought “strive mightily to attain is impartiality, which is not the same as objectivity” (ibid., 33–34).

Agoncillo (ibid., 32) admitted that “interpretation is a highly personal matter.” In recreating the past, the historian “should provide his readers not only with the bones of history, but with flesh and blood as well” (ibid., 40), that is, the historian must write with literary flair. The blending of literature and history in Agoncillo’s *The Revolt of the Masses* needs closer study¹⁹—although we can say, with Hayden White (1973), that this classic work in Philippine historiography has a metahistory, a deep literary structure. Agoncillo (2003, 39), however, made the explicit distinction between “the historical imagination” and “the literary imagination,” saying concerning the former: “imagination, limited though it is by the materials already established as authentic and credible, is a very important element in historical writing” (ibid.). At the same time, “In the process of re-creation, the personality of the historian plays an important role. He displays his passion, his prejudices, and emotion—in brief, his humanity—and as such he cannot help being affected by the events and personalities he is re-creating” (ibid.).

In narrativizing the past, the historian “cannot hope to be detached” from his or her “heritage and surroundings” (ibid., 34), which are “conditioning factors,” along with other factors such as “the degree of sensitivity, sharpness of feeling, keenness of insight, range and depth of vision, and, not the least, the ability to express ideas and feelings with precision and clarity” (ibid., 35). Given the differences in “conditioning factors,” historians would differ naturally in their interpretations of the past.²⁰ What matters is that the historian should stick “to truth as he sees it in the historical materials,” leaving judgment to the “long run,” which is “not fettered by the tyranny of the current fashion and current prejudices” (ibid., 35).

Another important point about Agoncillo's beginnings in literature was his exposure to and absorption of a left-leaning worldview. In a paper written in 1978 that traces the beginnings of Philippine literature, Agoncillo (ibid., 101) noted that in the first decade of the twentieth century "many Tagalog writers who had read Marx, Bakunin, and other European leftists, began criticizing contemporary social conditions in accents unmistakably socialistic," although the second decade championed romanticism, which many poets mixed with nationalism. Agoncillo (ibid., 102–3) went on to say that "The 1930s saw the emergence of college-bred writers who challenged the literary dogma of the old school" and that "Literary activity became more intense when President Manuel L. Quezon, importuned by the Philippine Writers' League, a left-of-center association of writers in Tagalog, English, and Spanish, initiated the Commonwealth Literary Contests in 1940, which gave substantial prizes to winners in all categories of writing, including history." As we saw earlier, Agoncillo was one of those winners for a historical text in Tagalog.

Agoncillo (ibid., 105) also reported that "The late 1930s saw the development of leftist or proletarian literature mainly as a response to or an emulation of the leftist tendency of prominent writers in mainland United States." At a time when "within there was social turmoil, the peasant revolt; outside there was a world on fire, particularly in China," Salvador P. Lopez advocated "a socially committed Philippine literature," converting writers such as Amado Hernandez, who "for a long time" had been "totally innocent of socially conscious literature" (Alegre and Fernandez 1984, 164–65, 174). In this atmosphere, Agoncillo (2003, 105, 106) reported that "the so-called progressive writers in English and Tagalog suddenly became aware of the importance of economics and politics," and these writers "began to talk and write as though they were the official spokesmen of the peasants and workers."²¹

S. P. Lopez (1940, 197), who won the 1940 Commonwealth Literary Contest for *Literature and Society*, defined proletarian literature as "the interpretation of the experience of the working class in a world that has been rendered doubly dynamic by its struggles." It necessitated the writer to have class consciousness and political orientation, believing that revolution was "a part of the historical process" (ibid., 199). The writer "may be proletarian regardless of his class origin or status, provided he recognizes the nature and intensity of the class struggle and the potency of such struggle in moulding

the structure and temper of society, and believes 'true justice and the logic of history to be on the side of the common people'" (ibid., 197). In this milieu, the writer must abide by "the theory of the social conditioning of literature," with the writer "reflect[ing] with more or less accuracy the conditions of the society in which he lives" (ibid., 196). Agoncillo would appear to be one such proletarian writer mindful of social classes, even as his own approach to history recognized the mediation of conditioning factors that impinge upon the historian's interpretation of the past.

From this immersion in and practice of proletarian literature, Agoncillo turned to writing the manuscript that won the Bonifacio biography contest, a manuscript that exemplified his approach of fusing literature and history. In the remainder of this article, we analyze Agoncillo's *The Revolt of the Masses* in order to extract an explanation of why the masses rose up in arms against Spain at the end of the nineteenth century.

Bonifacio's Role as Political Entrepreneur

Ileto (1979, 4) has described Agoncillo's "classic work" as having "brought Andres Bonifacio the recognition due him (which had been suppressed during American rule)"—although Nick Joaquin (2005, 92–93) disagreed with the assertion concerning Bonifacio's alleged suppression.²² Agoncillo himself stated, "Kaya kung may nagawa ang aking *Revolt* [So if my *Revolt* has accomplished anything] it is giving Bonifacio his due" (Ocampo 1995, 127). What is crucial is the way Agoncillo defines Bonifacio's catalytic role in mobilizing the masses to wage the revolution. As the founder of the *Katipunan*, Bonifacio is seen as a necessary condition for the revolution.

In the early part of the book Agoncillo ([1956] 1996, [74] 78) uses the literary strategy of doing a "character study"²³ of Bonifacio, based on interviews of persons who had known the Supremo but filtered through Agoncillo's "conditioning factors":²⁴

Thus Bonifacio, calm and persevering and humble, made of the *Katipunan* a militant entity that infused a ferocious courage and a desperate hope in the minds of its members and his co-workers. With a will-power that overcame the indignities of poverty and a quiet personality that invited the respect of his superiors in intellectual attainments, he was able to succeed where men better born and nurtured had floundered and failed.

Bonifacio was lowly and little educated, possessed of social inferiority, which Tadiar (2004, 164) contends was Agoncillo's "imputation of Bonifacio's psychological weakness—his 'inferiority complex.'" Nonetheless, in Agoncillo's (ibid., [73] 77) portrait, Bonifacio was "always calm and composed" and he possessed the "will power" or determination as well as the "personality" that made the Katipunan a "militant entity." Bonifacio was said to be "tolerant and broadminded" (ibid., [75] 79). This personality, in Agoncillo's (ibid.) sketch of Bonifacio, was rounded off with "a strong moral sense," complemented by his taciturn character as someone who "was not given to loquacity, for most of the time he kept to himself, putting in a word or two as occasion arose."

A few pages later the reader is told of other supposed character traits of Bonifacio in which his reticence and broadmindedness disappear, in Agoncillo's (ibid., [91] 95) attempt to illumine the Supremo's connection to the masses and explain his ability to mobilize them: "Andres Bonifacio, more blunt, direct and mercilessly demagogic, had, by virtue of his fanatical zeal, affected the masses more than did Jacinto. His one-track mind did not admit of compromise or alternative avenues. He had only one purpose, one manner of approaching it, and to this his whole being was ferociously dedicated."²⁵

In the book's concluding chapter, Agoncillo (ibid., [286] 289) provides additional positive traits of Bonifacio:

his modesty, coupled with his tolerance and even temper, . . . made him the natural leader of the *Katipunan*. . . . He was patient . . . tight-lipped and usually given to meditation. Such a man, intense in his feelings, resolute in his aims, greatly influenced in his thought and actions by the doctrines of the French Revolution, calculating in his plans, and careful in his outward expression—such a man alone was destined to be a great organizer.

The platitudes about Bonifacio's personal qualities would continue on for a couple more pages that described his "equanimity," industry, hard work, tolerance, his not being superstitious, and his love for God, country, and "fellow-men" (ibid., [287–89] 290–91).

However, these positive traits were prefaced by descriptions that echoed those found in the book's earlier chapters. Bonifacio was described as "a

man so devoid of formal education and tradition, so simple in his ways, in a word, so common" (ibid., [285] 288). His "qualities of leadership" that made the Katipunan "a success" were disagreeable: "Because he was one-sided in outlook, he never bothered to imagine or invent pitfalls, alternative plans and possibilities such as would serve to confuse the mind and weaken one's resolutions and will-power" (ibid.). He was too blinkered, not given to rational planning and the thoughtful weighing of options, presumably because his "one-track mind" was propelled by a "will-power" that turned out to be "fanatical zeal." But this "will-power" strengthened his resolve and made him succeed. Compared with the middle class, "his intellectual shortcomings and weaknesses became his strength" (ibid.). His subpar intellect had its "advantage": "had Bonifacio dilly-dallied or had he shown the least fear and doubt of results, the *Katipunan* would never have been what it was. It would have been a tragic failure" (ibid.).²⁶

Thus, Agoncillo offers a highly uneven characterization of Bonifacio. For all that he was said to be, Bonifacio connected with the masses because, not only was he one of them, he was also an effective but merciless demagogue, someone who remorselessly tapped into the prejudices of the populace and reached out to them through emotional appeals. Agoncillo (ibid., [284] 287) explained Bonifacio's effectiveness by asserting that the latter "belonged to the lowest class." As such, he "grasped the situation correctly and, making his appeal through the medium of the language of the masses, whipped the passion and prejudices of the people against the rule of the *caciques*" (ibid., [284–85] 287–88). Agoncillo implied that, although Bonifacio was one of the masses, he had the ability to distance himself from the crowd and identify the levers that he could pull to coax, cajole, convince, enthuse, and arouse the masses. Thus memorializing Bonifacio, Agoncillo (ibid., [285] 288) wrote: "If for no other achievement than the founding of the revolutionary society, Bonifacio deserves immortality."

Yet, Bonifacio's alleged "one-track mind," which prevented the Katipunan from becoming a "tragic failure" as a stillborn organization, would become his own undoing and "misfortune" (ibid., [308] 310), as evident in Agoncillo's presentation of the troubles in Cavite. The praises given to Bonifacio's personal qualities served as a benchmark from which he would fall as seen in Agoncillo's (ibid., [291] 293) coup de grâce in the answer to his own question: "But why did Bonifacio become the victim of his own methods and of the very society which he founded?" Agoncillo (ibid., [292]

294) argued that in Cavite Bonifacio “created a situation that augmented rather than diminished the tension to a point where it would snap” because “he thought that as the recognized Supremo his words would be listened to unquestioningly and without mental reservations.”

His mistake, then, lay in this: that he took everything for granted and, flattered to the limit by the signal honor of having been asked to intervene [in the factional disputes in Cavite], he disregarded the psychology of regionalism. His actuations upon setting foot on a region about which he was ignorant, actuations that gave rise to suspicions . . . were fatal to the cause for which he was called upon to mediate. (ibid.)

Amid the “intrigues” and “mutual distrust” and the Supremo wanting to “have his own at all cost” (ibid., [293] 297), Bonifacio “lost his mental balance” (ibid., [309] 313) and his “personality suffered modifications that were in direct contrast to the character that had made him the unchallenged organizer and leader of the early *Katipunan*” (ibid., [293] 297)—a “character” that Agoncillo himself had posited. As a psychological seer, Agoncillo (ibid., [308] 310) averred that Bonifacio “had developed into a personality opposed to his real character [sic] and so was forced by circumstances beyond his control to act in a way that gave his colleagues grounds to accuse him of that which was alien to his real intent or purpose.” This episode remains highly contested in Philippine history.²⁷

At the outset, Agoncillo also portrayed Bonifacio as wanting in military skills, a judgment concurred in by other historians, such as Onofre D. Corpuz (2006, 268–70, 287–89) and Nick Joaquin (2005, 88, 97). Agoncillo ([1956] 1996, [160] 161) wrote that the *Katipunan* fighters “were not only lacking in arms and ammunition, but [were] also poorly trained and deficient in military leadership.” In the end, the revolution needed someone with “bravery and brilliant military leadership” (ibid., [179] 180) in the person of the ambiguously classed Aguinaldo:²⁸ “It was not until Emilio Aguinaldo entered the scene that they found a leader who could give battle to the Spaniards on something like equal terms” (ibid., [160] 161). “Aguinaldo became the undisputed military leader of the revolution” (ibid., [186] 189), and he met “the enemy’s offensive in a series of battles that would determine the future of the revolt of the masses” (ibid., [184] 187). In sum, Agoncillo (ibid., [295] 299) asserted, “Bonifacio, though a great organizer, was not a

brilliant military leader” such that “when the Revolution broke out in all its fury and tragic implications his services became almost negligible.”

It would appear that Bonifacio’s skills at political mobilization was his greatest asset to the *Katipunan*. Bonifacio was a “political entrepreneur,” who had “credibility” and was able to use intentionally the “terms and symbols,” “cultural themes,” and “moral codes” meaningful to the masses (Popkin 1979, 259–66). Bonifacio, “an excellent organizer,” concurred Joaquin (2005, 97), was indispensable to the *Katipunan*, and without him this movement could not have been launched.

How then did Bonifacio mobilize the masses? Apart from founding the *Katipunan*, *The Revolt of the Masses* explains Bonifacio’s political entrepreneurship through “The Power of the Written Word,” as chapter 6 is titled. The *Kalayaan*, the movement’s periodical only a single issue of which came out in March 1896 with 2,000 copies (Agoncillo [1956] 1996, [79] 85), carried the manifesto *Ang Dapat Mabatid ng mga Tagalog* (What the Tagalog Should Understand), widely attributed to Bonifacio, and the poem *Pag-ibig sa Tinubuang Bayan* (Love for the Native Land). It also featured works of Emilio Jacinto and Pio Valenzuela. As a result of *Kalayaan*’s dissemination, “hundreds of people nightly joined the *Katipunan* The people became conscious of their rights and duties to their country, thinking only of the time when they could fall upon the Spaniards and declare themselves free and independent” (ibid., [97] 100). Agoncillo (ibid.) exclaimed, “Bonifacio himself was surprised at the rapid growth of the society, for from the time of its founding to January 1, 1896, it did not have more than 300 members, but from the middle of March to the outbreak of the Revolution, the membership increased to 30,000.”

How did *Kalayaan* produce such deep conviction on the part of its readers? Agoncillo (ibid., [91] 95) stated that the manifesto *Ang Dapat Mabatid* “For sheer bravado and cold logic . . . is unrivaled,” but he did not analyze the text. He called *Pagibig sa Tinubuang Bayan* “mediocre as a poetical piece,” but it was “nevertheless inspiring to the masses who had known what it meant to suffer injustice and cruelty and economic bondage”; the words of the poem “by their power would strengthen them in their hour of weakness, words that would enkindle in their breast the fire of defiance” (ibid., [94–95] 98). Agoncillo (ibid., [95] 99) concluded that Bonifacio, “although he was not a poet, judged properly,” “gave them this fire and this strength with which to pursue the elusive ideal” of freedom.

Thus, Bonifacio, employing “the versatility of a language whose prosody he was able to grasp with a certain degree of competence” (ibid., [96] 99–100), managed to mobilize a large following for the revolutionary movement. Years later Agoncillo (2003, 52) wrote, “One is perhaps justified in saying that it was literature that made history when the Revolution of 1896 flared up.” Anthropomorphizing literature as historical agent, Agoncillo drowned out Bonifacio and the masses.

Although he never analyzed Bonifacio’s written texts, Agoncillo ([1956] 1996, [10] 9) described their impact on the masses, who presumably could read—with Bonifacio’s writings a huge contrast to “the reading fare of the masses” that formerly consisted of novenas and “the endless stream of booklets and pamphlets dealing with the miracles of the saints.” Confronted with Bonifacio’s writings, the masses became convinced of the worthiness of the Katipunan’s cause as they responded to what they read or to what somebody must have read for them. Agoncillo (ibid., [97] 100) declared, “The people were now prepared for the supreme sacrifice by the power of the written word.” Seemingly as a result of this development, in chapter 9 Agoncillo (ibid., [151] 154) attributed to the masses, who had been “prompted . . . to think and move as a nation seeking national redemption,” a detailed list that indicted the Spaniards of fifteen counts of abuses. This implicit theory of mobilizing the masses posited literacy, comprehension, and intelligence; people were moved by what they read and heard, acquiring a political consciousness of their “rights and duties” and their state of exploitation, resulting in commitment, numbers, and political action.

Based on a single slice of time, the proposition about Bonifacio’s ability to mobilize the masses through the printed word is, however, at variance with Agoncillo’s preponderant description of the masses. As in Agoncillo’s characterization of Bonifacio, there is also a major incoherence in Agoncillo’s portrait of the masses, as will now be explained.

The Masses as Revolutionaries

As Agoncillo (2001, 143) put it in a nutshell, the Philippine Revolution of 1896 “was conceived by the plebeian leader of the masses, . . . participated in by the masses, and carried on by the masses.” Apart from Bonifacio, the other major character in *The Revolt of the Masses* are “the masses,” a sociological category that is treated as a character that acts and speaks and moves the story along a plotline. Although “the masses” is a linguistic device that

agglomerates innumerable discrete individuals with limitless complexity and heterogeneity, in Agoncillo’s historical imagination “the masses” (like “the people”)²⁹ is reified as “someone” with a definite form, with a set of specific thought patterns, motivations, behavior, agency, and peculiar psychology. In Agoncillo’s “character study” of the masses, they are shown as waging the revolution against Spain but, for the most part, not out of political or ideological or any other rational conviction.

Tadiar (2004, 165) has observed that, like Bonifacio, the “psychological constitution” of the masses “also suffered untoward modifications,” citing as evidence a passage from the book from around the time of Bonifacio’s execution. However, from the outset Agoncillo’s text overflows with references to the, as he saw it, inherently negative character and constitution of the masses that make them incapable of rational thought, not just during the “abnormal time” marked by the “abnormal psychology that pervaded the revolutionists toward the close of the first epoch of the national struggle for emancipation” (Agoncillo [1956] 1996, [307] 309). The characterization of the masses is consistent throughout the narrative, except in their response to the printed word—with which the dominant character study of the masses sits uneasily as an explanation for why they rose up in arms.

From chapter 1 until the end, except for five chapters, the various terms used to portray the masses are found. These chapters and the instances in which positive and negative terms concerning the masses appear are summarized in the table on page 154. The count, manually done and therefore subject to error, refers to occurrences of distinct words and phrases that serve as descriptors of the masses. Of the book’s sixteen chapters, eleven chapters contain unflattering descriptions of the masses, while ten chapters carry positive terms. The negative depictions outnumber the positive by nearly three to one. These figures are merely indicative, but they underscore Agoncillo’s overwhelmingly negative characterization of the masses.

The most number of positive descriptions of the masses appears in chapter 11, “Enter Magdalo,” when Aguinaldo comes into the scene and the focus is on Cavite. In this chapter we find such phrases as: “the response of the masses to the struggle for liberty” “inspired” “the rebels” (ibid., [181] 182); “The military successes of their soldiers drove the people to join the movement for national emancipation” (ibid., [178] 179); “The masses, in particular, remembering that the defeat of their soldiers would mean a return to slavery, more than ever gathered strength and determination to

thwart the attempts to impose once more the will of the friars” (ibid., [194] 196). In these instances, the masses are depicted as capable of responding constructively to the revolution and as determined to get out of their colonial bondage.

In other chapters, however, the negative representations of the masses abound. On the very first page of the book the readers are told, “the broad masses groaned and grew numb under the spell of poverty and profound ignorance” (ibid., [1] 1). The remainder of chapter 1 reinforces the dominant characterization with such terms as “the ignorance of the masses,” “the ignorant peasants,” and “the ‘heritage of ignorance’” (ibid., [5, 6, 10] 5, 6, 9), although it also describes the Spanish colonial administration as “ignorant” and “stupid” (ibid., [7] 7). In chapter 3, even as intellectuals are supposedly belittled, the attribution of ignorance is embellished as narrowmindedness that resulted in seeming courage and hope, which was actually reckless impulse: “the members of the intelligentsia class did not have the courage and abundant hope, the dash and the careless abandon of the masses, whose unsophisticated mind could not see the various possibilities that might accompany a mode of action” (ibid., [41] 43).

Number of instances of positive and negative terms concerning the masses in Agoncillo’s *The Revolt of the Masses*, by book chapter

BOOK CHAPTER NUMBER	POSITIVE TERMS CONCERNING THE MASSES	NEGATIVE TERMS CONCERNING THE MASSES
1	1	3
3	2	3
4	2	2
6	1	2
7	1	6
9	1	2
10	1	6
11	3	2
13	1	7
15	0	1
16	5	18
Total	18	52

In chapter 7, “Betrayal,” Agoncillo offered a further contrasting characterization of the “middle class” and the masses. The “mass of the people” were “victims of subtle or overt exploitation,” a phrase that echoed a statement found in chapter 1: “The ignorance of the masses was taken advantage of by those in power,” which suggested that the condition of the masses was not of their own choosing (ibid., [5, 99] 5, 103). In the 1980s Agoncillo (2003, 6) described Filipinos during the Spanish epoch in general as “ignorant and generally prevented from being educated until the second half of the nineteenth century,” indicating that Spanish rule hindered them from acquiring education; although a few did get educated belatedly but the “mass of the people did not.” One wonders: had the masses been educated, would they then have been like the “middle class” that had no courage and hope?

In their ignorance, the masses “are not accustomed to the intricacies of the rational processes and are moved by the impact of feeling and passion and refuse to see, if reminded by their intellectual betters, the probable effects of their planned action” (Agoncillo [1956] 1996, [99] 103). In other words, the uneducated masses were ignorant and thus irrational, emotional, impulsive, and illogical. Unable to think broadly, they could not appreciate the implications of and make connections between their action and its consequences, between cause and effect. In the same chapter, the “prostrate masses” are said to be “ignorant . . . in a society where ignorance is rampant” (ibid., [103] 106).

In contrast, in view of their putative rationality, “the middle class trembles with fear of the consequences that stern reason repudiates in its love of order and sequence” (ibid., [99] 102–3). Although “the intellectuals who lived in their world of books . . . were ignorant of the power of the masses” (ibid., [113] 117), “the intelligentsia . . . feared the immediate emancipation of the masses who, it was believed, would run berserk and make the country one whole carnival of wreckage if given the political and economic weapon that they had never before possessed” (ibid., [103] 109). Despite the inconsistencies, Agoncillo’s descriptions echoed and amplified De los Reyes’s (1899, 78) condensed statement: “Anyway, it is seen that the Katipunan was a fearsome association, because it was composed of plebeian and ignorant people, because the plebes think little, but with that little they die before they break from it” (De todos modos se ve que el Katipunan era

una asociación temible, por lo mismo que se componía gente plebeya é ignorante, porque a plebe piensa poco, pero con ese poco se muere antes de arrancárselo).

But perhaps the masses were indeed to be feared because of, as another passage puts it,

the most important factor in any situation that called for dangerous action, to wit, the will-power of the militant masses, the fanatical belief in ultimate success, the all-pervading readiness to die for a cause, since in their minds there was enthroned the strong conviction that they had nothing to lose and everything to gain. Between a glorious death, certain and swift though it might be, and slow death occasioned by cruelty and ignominious slavery, the downtrodden people preferred the former. (Agoncillo [1956] 1996, [113] 117)

Fanaticism made the masses “militant” and ready to give up their lives.³⁰ The masses—said to have made a mental calculus of what they would lose and gain—had “the power” to “hurl themselves barehanded against any and all weapons of destruction” (ibid.). Chapter 10 ends with similar words: “the masses, led by their leaders, hurled themselves against the oppressors with a ferocity and tenacity that surprised the hitherto cocky Spaniards” (ibid., [171] 173). This attack happened as the masses had been “goaded to fury and desperate action” and were “thirsting for vengeance” (ibid., [165, 167] 168, 169), terms used in chapter 10. In chapter 11 we read that the “strength and determination” of the masses were especially manifest in the case of “religious fanatics” (ibid., [194–95] 196).

These descriptions indicate that Agoncillo saw the masses as taking up collective political action because of their ignorance, irrationality, fanaticism, resignation, and determination, causing them to hurl themselves against the enemy as though their bodies were weapons. In chapter 7, however, Agoncillo issued a saving grace through a positive statement about the masses that could assuage the elite: “One supreme merit of the revolutionists, and a noble one, was that they did not allow class distinctions to interfere in their struggle. They were surprisingly tolerant and understanding” (ibid., [114] 118–19).

Other supposed traits of the masses appear in other chapters. For instance, “the common people . . . had very little of the virtue known as

discretion,” and therefore the Katipunán “could not be kept a strictly private and delicate secret” (ibid., [137] 141). In explaining how the Spanish authorities found out about the underground movement, Agoncillo found it expedient to blame “the common people.” Governor General Blanco’s policy of attraction failed because “The spirit of the time, the excited mental state of the people long brutalized and thirsting for vengeance and who by now had found an outlet and an opportunity for sweet revenge, was propitious for the uninhibited release of brute strength” (ibid., [167] 169). In Agoncillo’s pen, the revolution was an act of vengeance, propelled by emotions gone berserk; the masses gave vent to anger through the unhindered “release of brute strength.”

Their “excited mental state” was highly unstable and unreliable, easily susceptible to being swayed away from their commitments. Amid the troubles in Cavite described in chapter 13, Bonifacio was said to have known, “to his bitter disappointment, that the mind of the masses was being poisoned to make him ridiculous and in other ways deprive him of respect” (ibid., [227] 229). A couple of paragraphs later, Agoncillo (ibid., [228] 230) reiterated: “The unschooled masses, usually gullible enough to believe news that was difficult to verify, were infected with the venom of the rumor and were led to believe that Bonifacio was not the man they had thought him to be.” But it was not enough. In the next paragraph, Agoncillo (ibid., [229] 231) asserted again:

Such rumors, flying at an unbelievable speed and passing from mouth to mouth among the most credulous, could only result in an unfortunate belittling of Bonifacio’s character. The untutored masses, so easy to be influenced to action in the search for freedom and honor, as they had been influenced by Bonifacio himself, were also the easiest to be swung from their loyalties by any means other than legitimate and just.

In that same paragraph, Agoncillo (ibid.) underscored that Bonifacio was “an easy victim of their credulity” and that “those to whom [the masses] should be thankful were in most cases repaid with hostility and venomous malice at the least sign of error.” The masses, “unschooled” and “untutored” and therefore ignorant, “because of a sudden exercise of freedom that was won with blood and tears, had acquired habits of thought that were tinged with suspicion” (ibid., [307] 309). Amid their credulity, they wallowed in

“jealousies and suspicions” (ibid., [308] 310) as to end up turning their backs treacherously against their revolutionary leader. Agoncillo’s recourse to “venom” and “venomous” implied that the masses were like a snake in the grass. In Agoncillo’s (ibid., [229] 231) words, this betrayal was “saddest of all.”

The lesson seems to be—even for those who would mobilize them for a revolutionary cause—that the masses are dangerous: they cannot be trusted. It validated the so-called fears of the “middle class” that Agoncillo repudiated but in the end confirmed. While the middle class betrayed the revolution, the masses betrayed Bonifacio—betrayers all, in Agoncillo’s schema. Despite the detailed discussion of the arrest, trial, and death of Bonifacio in which the author recounted the actions of specific individuals, Agoncillo’s narrative concomitantly suggested that, apart from Bonifacio himself, the masses were responsible for Bonifacio’s death because of their disloyalty, unfaithfulness, vengefulness, and gullibility. Their abandonment of Bonifacio, who Agoncillo portrayed as spiraling downward psychologically, set the stage for the succeeding events in Naic and his eventual assassination.

In the final summary chapter, Agoncillo (ibid., [277] 279) underscored once more the ignorance and irrationality of the masses: they were “goaded and led by herd instincts”; the “ignorant and starving masses” were “confused, hopeless, abused” (ibid., [278] 280); the Spanish friars held the “unlettered commoners” “obedient and ignorant and superstitious” (ibid., [279, 283] 281, 286). Fanatical, excitable, unreflective, and hasty, the Katipunan fighters started “with the emotive cry of freedom, followed with the instinctive resort to physical force to realize the primitive urge to be free” (ibid., [290] 292). Their fight for freedom was not the fruit of the intellect, but merely the outcome of a primitive impulse. Moreover, their grievances were “fundamentally economic in character” (ibid., [151] 153), rather than political. In essence, the revolution was a mammoth emotional outburst, and, in that sense, it was doomed to fail, but not before the Spaniards got punished, they who were the other “ignorant” party in this drama.

On the final page, when Agoncillo (ibid., [311] 314–15) recounted his encounter as a young historian with an “old man who in his younger years had fought the Spaniards,” the final description of the masses appeared positive: the old man “spoke of the men, crude in their learning yet pure and undaunted in their aims, who left family and home to pursue the illusive ideal of freedom, not for themselves but for the coming generations who

were their fear and faith and hope.” Agoncillo finally restrained himself from using “ignorant”; instead, the masses were “crude in their learning,” but they were to be admired because their “aims” were “pure and undaunted,” granting the masses a nobility not found among the “middle class.”

However, in the predominant representation found in *The Revolt of the Masses*, the masses were ignorant, irrational, undisciplined, emotional, reckless, and gullible; if left to themselves, they were incapable of organized action; but once organized by a demagogue, they fought with blind rage and ferocity. Given their erratic behavior, they first idolized, then victimized, Bonifacio (thus implicitly absolving Aguinaldo of responsibility for the murder of Bonifacio). Given their ignorance, the masses acted inexorably toward this dismal end.

It is ironical that *The Revolt of the Masses* denigrated the masses and yet played a strategic role in edifying Bonifacio and glorifying the revolutionary character of the masses. Sensing that the masses constituted political energy and potential, many readers ignored, minimized, or bypassed the problematic technique of Agoncillo’s personification of the masses and his attribution to them of negative characteristics—making it possible later on to equate cognitively the two abstract concepts of the nation and the masses (Curaming 2006, 99; Claudio 2013, 50).³¹

An Unchanging Opinion

In an interview with Ambeth Ocampo (1995, 20) held in August 1984, Agoncillo stated that “*The Revolt* was written at the spur of the moment, because it was a contest.” Given the deadline, Agoncillo said he had “no time even to edit. Now, if I have to edit, I will edit the phraseology but not the facts. The facts will stand and my conclusions will stand. The editing will be in the phraseology because it was unpolished” (ibid.). Given the lag between manuscript completion in early 1948 and the book’s publication in 1956, there was sufficient time to edit the manuscript, even if only for its “phraseology.” In fact, Agoncillo (2001, 143) admitted in 1976 that he “decided to leave the book substantially as I wrote it in the late 1947. However, I changed or deleted a word or two here and there.” Consequently, the recurring negative depictions of the masses in the published version leave no doubt as to the author’s deliberateness. Agoncillo meant exactly what he wrote in describing the masses.

In a conversation with Ocampo (1995, 82–83) held in September 1984, Agoncillo explained that the issue was “whether the Revolution of 1896 was a mass movement or a middle class movement, or a movement of the upper class.” He then elaborated that “my mass is the ignorant people at that time, mostly ignorant, or if they were educated, they were hardly educated to compete with the ilustrados” (ibid., 83). Even though “there were a few of the middle class” in the Katipunan, it could not be disputed, he argued, “that the masses really founded and composed the Katipunan, but [sic] they sustained the Revolution. It’s very clear from the context of the book” (ibid.). From the 1940s to the 1980s, a half-century span, Agoncillo’s portrait of the masses as ignorant did not falter. And out of the attribute of ignorance came all the other character traits the masses were said to have possessed.

Agoncillo’s Conditioning Factor and the *Walang Pinag-aralan*

Agoncillo was notable for his use of sources. As Curaming (2012, 597) says, “his command of the sources on the Philippine Revolution was similarly impressive. . . . The explanatory evidential endnotes were so exhaustive and meticulous in *Revolt* that the total reached 56 single-spaced pages, with some notes running to between three and five full pages each. It was an impressive display of scholarly authority.”³² Yet, for Agoncillo’s descriptions of the masses, there is not a single reference to a source material. Agoncillo’s depictions of the masses were evidently based on his own interpretations and preconceptions that, as we have seen, did not change in the course of his lifetime. This literary strategy sprang from an unquestioned assumption and belief about social life, akin to the “conditioning factors” from which, Agoncillo (2003, 34–35) himself had said, the historian could not “hope to be detached.” In this instance, it is not possible to footnote premises that are deeply buried in one’s worldview.

In denigrating the masses, Agoncillo deployed what appeared to him as self-evident notions because his thinking was pervaded by the prevailing and therefore taken-for-granted sentiment of the times. In depicting the masses negatively, Agoncillo articulated the common assumption held by the educated elite, ironically perpetuating the views of the “middle class” that he ostensibly disparaged in his book as well as those of Spaniards who “blamed native resistance on deficient, misguided, and warped native minds” (Mojares 2006, 459). As Ramon Guillermo (2002, 283) has observed, “Manifestations of social unrest in the fifties were viewed by the academic establishment

simply as ‘wars of misunderstanding’ which could be overcome by stamping out ignorance among the masses by means of education.” The generalized perception among intellectuals of that period—and Agoncillo was one of them—explained away the occasional uprisings of the masses as caused by ignorance, with education as the cure. The same perspective was at work in *The Revolt of the Masses*.

Undoubtedly, most of the colonized natives in the late nineteenth century lacked formal education and would not have possessed knowledge obtained from the classroom. They would have been ignorant of the latter type of knowledge, but many would have had the wealth of indigenous practical knowledge of the agricultural, botanical, aquacultural, and other sciences. Many would have had expertise in traditional forms of medicine (Planta 2017). The masses, therefore, were not bereft of knowledge. But the educated absolutized their own knowledge as the only “true” knowledge, and whatever knowledge the masses might have possessed was thereby trivialized as irrelevant and erroneous for being either incomplete or distorted and therefore “untrue.” Ignorance was defined in terms of negation or deficit, in a process that relativized this supposed lack in relation to the educated’s knowledge, taken as the norm or knowledge-base. It was a clear illustration of the observation that “Ignorance, like knowledge, is socially constructed and negotiated” (Smithson 1989, 6).³³

Agoncillo’s construction of the ignorance of the masses was not only self-serving for him and the class to which he belonged, but it was also implicated in unfounded—hence irrational—leaps in logic.³⁴ The epistemological assumption of the formally educated presumed that only with the knowledge obtained from formal instruction could one develop the intellect and thus assess information in order to reach rational decisions that then gave birth to appropriate action, unshackled from superstition and magic. Even more pernicious was the jump from epistemology to morality in the suggestion that “true” knowledge from formal education (nurtured by the scientific enterprise and insulated from ecclesiastical interference) enthroned reason, which gave rise to the individual capacity for virtue and the determination of moral value and rectitude—a thinking ultimately traceable to the Enlightenment worldview.

Given this worldview, education in the Philippines, as a technology for social development and social differentiation, has been regarded at the individual level as a barometer of a person’s character, with a higher level of

education achieved assumed to mean a higher level of both knowledge and of morals. In Spanish *maleducado* (literally, badly educated) means rude or ill-mannered, a pejorative term that applies with force to the unschooled and the poorly educated. The *sin educación* (uneducated) is equated with the *maleducado*; thus, the ignorant for want of education are also deemed flawed in character. It was the Spanish colonial ruler's mentality, borne, too, of racism;³⁵ it had been imbibed by the few native elites who had obtained a formal education and had sought, as though by right, to distance themselves from the rabble. With the US occupation of the Philippines came "the easy accommodation of the Filipino intellectual elite to the new order" as they "saw much in the new order that satisfied their aspirations for secularism and libertarianism" (Mojares 2006, 492). In the American colonial mass education system, the curriculum provided a place "for what the Filipinos called 'Good Manners and Right Conduct'" (Smith 1945, 14), based on the premise that secularist morals could be learned only in the classroom.³⁶ The educated wealthy saw themselves as an exclusive stratum high above the masses of illiterate people, the hubris of the educated revealed in the phrase *walang pinag-aralan* (uneducated), a Tagalog adjectival phrase utterable as an insult or even a curse. From this point of view, education was seen as stamping out ignorance and eradicating bad morals. The classroom was regarded as the space for producing individuals who had the dual capacity to make rational choices and to distinguish right from wrong—and act beyond impulse or unpremeditated spontaneity.³⁷

The prejudice of the highly educated against the poorly educated and uneducated was at the heart of the heated exchange between Daniel Tirona and Bonifacio at the meeting in Tejeros, which Agoncillo described in detail.³⁸ Bonifacio, who "grew up in a proletarian environment, with all its filth and poverty and keen struggle for a bare existence," "reached only the primary school" because his parents had died (Agoncillo [1956] 1996, [65–66] 69). Nonetheless, "he instructed himself in Spanish and read books avidly" (ibid., [66] 70).³⁹ At Tejeros, Bonifacio presided over a tumultuous meeting that elected the officers of a revolutionary government. Sensitive and susceptible to the educated elite's prejudice against the *walang pinag-aralan*, he asserted that "whoever would be elected should be recognized and respected regardless of his social condition and education" (ibid., [212] 211). Bonifacio lost the presidency to Aguinaldo, who won in absentia, but was eventually chosen as director of interior.⁴⁰ However, Tirona, who had studied

law, protested, saying: "The position of Director of Interior is an exalted one and it is not meet that a person without a lawyer's diploma should occupy it" (ibid., [213–14] 215). In other words, he was calling Bonifacio *walang pinag-aralan* and *maleducado* and thus unfit for office, made even more degrading by Tirona's setting the bar too high at the level of a lawyer's degree. As a result, "Bonifacio felt insulted and he turned crimson with anger"; he took his pistol to shoot Tirona, but Artemio Ricarte grabbed Bonifacio's hand to prevent further trouble (ibid., [214] 215). "Bonifacio, frustrated and deeply wounded in feeling," dissolved the gathering and annulled the election results (ibid.). Agoncillo wrote this episode dramatically, but whether it was written empathetically is something to be established—even though Agoncillo (2003, 39) stated that the historian "cannot help being affected by the events and personalities he is re-creating." If he did empathize with Bonifacio, it might have dented his deeply held views about the uneducated.

Richardson (2013, 402) contends that Agoncillo, together with De los Reyes, represented the Katipunan as led by uneducated individuals—contrary to the evidence presented earlier—because he was ultimately "ilustrado," and he "appraised Philippine society and social status from an elevated ilustrado perspective," even if Agoncillo, like De los Reyes, "challenged the conventions and conservatism of their peers." Richardson stressed that "both were well to do; both went to university in times when very few Filipinos could" (ibid.), as the earlier biographical sketch of Agoncillo has shown. In fact, according to Iletto (1979, 18), the term *pobres e ignorantes*, the poor and ignorant, was "the common ilustrado term for the masses," *ilustrado* here referring broadly to the wealthy native elite. This background, this "conditioning factor," gave Agoncillo and other highly educated and wealthy individuals a rarefied view of themselves in relation to the Katipunan leadership and the masses that supported the movement. Consequently, it seemed natural for Agoncillo to condescend to Bonifacio, the leaders of the Katipunan, and the masses. Nevertheless, as Tadiar (2004, 178) asserts, "this 'irrationality' and 'abnormal psychology' exhibited by the masses"—if such epithets are valid—"is very much a part of the behaviour of the *ilustrado* class too"—and, so it would seem, of the author himself.

The "Proletarian" Writer

In a conversation with Ocampo (1995, 92) held in October 1984, or about three months before his sudden death on 14 January 1985, Agoncillo

protested, “What is Marxist about it? . . . I knew nothing about Marxism when I wrote it.” Such disavowal by Agoncillo must be understood in the context of his stance toward the declaration of martial law in 1972. In 1967, two years after Marcos had first won the presidency, Agoncillo had added to the textbook he had coauthored with Oscar Alfonso a chapter titled “The Continuing Crisis,” which “was devoted to a series of crises involving Marcos’s contentious path to the presidency, the rise of student activism, the deterioration of peace and order, and a ‘witch-hunt’ that occurred toward the end of 1966” (Totanes 2010, 331). Agoncillo, however, appeared to have had face-to-face conversations with Marcos, suggesting a level of familiarity (ibid., 331, 333). In the textbook’s next edition that came out in 1977, this time coauthored with Guerrero, a new chapter, “Under Martial Law,” appeared in lieu of “The Continuing Crisis.” This replacement chapter, as Vernon Totanes (ibid., 324) has commented, “reads like a Marcos press release”: it “showed that Marcos’s imposition of martial law resulted in improvements in the peace and order situation, infrastructure, labor conditions, and so on, and that restrictions on civil liberties were in the best interests of the people” (ibid., 336). In another paper completed in March 1977, titled “Background of the Martial Law Regime in the Philippines,” Agoncillo (2003, 421) unequivocally saw Marcos’s declaration of martial law as necessary “in order to arrest [the country’s] descent into chaos” and “to institute a moral regeneration.” He saw the Communist New People’s Army as a “patent danger . . . whose purpose was to seize power and topple the existing government of the Republic” (ibid., 423). The author who had inspired countless student activists could not walk to the end of the road with them.

The Revolt of the Masses must therefore be analyzed specifically in the context of the 1940s and 1950s, which could be stretched to the 1960s, which, for Agoncillo at least, was worlds apart from the 1970s. In that earlier period, Agoncillo was not incognizant of socialism as an ideology, and he would have been aware that in 1938 the Socialist and Communist parties in the Philippines had merged, despite organizational and ideological differences (Saulo 1969, 32–35). In *The Revolt of the Masses* Agoncillo ([1956] 1996, [115] 119) described the Katipunan, “together with its offspring, the Revolution” as “fundamentally a mass-idea based on utopian socialism.” On the same page, he referenced Felipe Calderon as concluding that the “socialistic character of the Katipunan” negated the contention made by Spanish writers “that the upper-class Filipinos were its real supporters and directors” (ibid.).

In the history of Agoncillo’s book, apart from his wife, two persons played key roles: Yabes and Fonacier. After their capture in 1952, William and Celia Pomeroy identified “some associates who were Communist sympathizers,” and those mentioned included Yabes and Agoncillo (Ileto 2011, 512). In the November 1947 issue of *The Newspaperman*, the periodical of the Newspapermen’s Guild of which Agoncillo was a member, Agoncillo published an essay called “The Katipunan Newspaper,” which he had extracted from the book manuscript that he was to complete in early 1948 (ibid., 504). Along with Agoncillo’s piece was one written by Jose Llanes, a staff member of the *Manila Times*, titled “The Peasants’ War,” which harked back to *The Peasant War in the Philippines*, an anonymously authored monograph that had appeared in 1946 that spoke of Bonifacio as a “plebian” and of the Katipunan’s membership as “mostly of the masses” (ibid., 505 n. 13). *The Peasant War in the Philippines* was reprinted in 1958 in the Golden Jubilee issue of *The Philippine Humanities and Social Sciences Review* of which Fonacier was the editor and Yabes was the managing editor.⁴¹ Evidently Agoncillo circulated in the company of “proletarian” writers, as understood in S. P. Lopez’s sense.

In *The Revolt of the Masses* Agoncillo ([1956] 1996, [98] 102) did employ a two-class framework that pitted “the masses” against the “middle class, more particularly, the intellectual segment.” In fact, Ileto (2011, 511) reports that the original manuscript “utilized more pronouncedly Marxist language such as ‘proletariat’ instead of the term ‘masses’ that appears in the toned-down 1956 version.” As Guerrero (1977/2015, 13) has also noted, Agoncillo did use “such categories as ‘bourgeoisie’ and ‘proletariat’ in his description of class differences among the Filipinos.” Even in the published version, Agoncillo’s descriptions of the “middle class” indicated that he conformed with the theory that material interests determined political action and that, therefore, class interests predominated over any patriotic sentiments the “middle class” might have nurtured. Unlike the masses, the so-called middle class preferred gradualism: “They want changes in the *status quo*, but these changes must come slowly and by degrees” for they regarded the “evolutionary process” as “the only valid step toward social amelioration” (Agoncillo [1956] 1996, [102] 103). The “middle class” had the “attitude” of “fear” of an uprising by the masses as it would be “destructive of their interests and acquired respectability” (ibid., [99] 103). Agoncillo (ibid., [115] 119) also posited animosity based on class relations: “The rich element, which had everything

to lose and practically nothing to gain personally, generally was not unaware of the hostility of the society towards the wealthy, the landlords in general, including the friar-suzerain.”

Steeped in Marxian class analysis in the period of the book’s writing and publication, Agoncillo must have been influenced by another set of “conditioning factors” that was closely intertwined with the mindset of the educated: the idea that the proletariat could not on its own develop “a ‘spontaneous’ *socialist* consciousness” because of their “being entangled in the capitalist relations of production” (Azad 2005, 524, 525). The working class, in this perspective, needed to be taught to see the entire social system and, in Lenin’s words, “learn to apply in practice the materialist analysis and the materialist estimate of *all* aspects of the life and activity of *all* classes, strata, and groups of the population” (ibid., 525). The specific theoretical contribution of Lenin to Marxism, affirmed by the Bolshevik victory in 1917, was the centrality of “the vanguard party of the proletariat” that constituted “both the *ontological* and *epistemological* foundation of the proletarian struggle for emancipation and socialism” (ibid., 529). The “consciousness of the vanguard party [was] largely articulated and directed by the intellectuals within the party and especially in its leadership cadres. As such, it [was] a consciousness open [only] to the intelligentsia” even as the intelligentsia was transformed by being in and of the vanguard party, as Alvin Gouldner (1974, 28) argued. The “embarrassing presence and authority of intellectuals in a ‘working class’ movement” was concealed by “scientific” socialism and the “objective” theory of historical materialism (ibid., 23, 25). The intelligentsia that had acquired socialist consciousness became indispensable even if their own class position was unaltered. The presence of intellectuals would not dilute the proletarian character of the revolution, as Agoncillo (1963, i) himself wrote: “the Bolshevik revolution of Russia was a mass revolution in spite of the leadership of highly intellectual revolutionaries like Lenin, Trotsky, Bukharin, and others, who gave the communist movement in Russia a highly sophisticated philosophy and methodology.”

Thus, the “proletarian” writer, although not a member of the proletariat, was necessary in order to interpret, in S. P. Lopez’s (1940, 197) words, “the experience of the working class” because the latter could neither represent nor interpret their experiences given that the “*unmediated* and direct relationship between *thinking* and *being* of the working class” was deemed an impossibility in the schema of materialist dialectics (Azad 2005, 524). Not

divesting themselves of their class position and the “conditioning factors” that impinged upon members of their class, intellectuals like Agoncillo could not only be sympathetic to the masses but actually also know, penetrate, and expose the so-called objective reality that the working class could not apprehend. In their “vanguard” role, such intellectuals could presume that the masses were ignorant, emotional, and irrational, needing to be saved from themselves.⁴² Agoncillo (1963, i) emphasized, however, that the 1896 revolution “had no such sophisticated philosophers or intellectuals, for the so-called educated men involved in the revolutionary upheaval were little better than the ignorant masses who received the total impact of the armed struggle.” They were all *pobres e ignorantes*, in his view. Agoncillo as a “proletarian” writer operated with unquestioned assumptions that were shared in his intellectual milieu, and those who read *The Revolt of the Masses* also largely bought into this worldview.

Conclusion

Because it is regarded as a classic in Philippine historiography, *The Revolt of the Masses* deserves close scrutiny. This study has examined Agoncillo’s text to reveal an implicit theory on what made “the masses” revolutionary. At one level, the book explains the explosion in the masses’ participation in the Katipunan as due to the reading of Bonifacio’s texts that appeared in the single issue of *Kalayaan*, the periodical of the Katipunan, those texts putatively connecting to the masses’ experiences and feelings of injustice and bondage. In this singular instance, the masses were presumed to be literate and thoughtful. Bonifacio’s campaign materials, as it were, made him most effective in political mobilization. Bonifacio was seen as a great organizer, although Agoncillo also referred to him as one of and with the masses, as a merciless demagogue, fanatical, of one-track mind, and stubbornly determined. These qualities supposedly connected him to the masses, who in Agoncillo’s predominant portrait were not literate but ignorant and therefore behaved in irrational, emotional, unreflective, impulsive, gullible, reckless, illogical, fanatical, vengeful, obstinate, and treacherous ways. Thus, the masses were revolutionary but not in a revolutionary way because they were driven primarily by passion rather than political thought.

These contradictory traits became pronounced in Agoncillo’s literary approach to historiography. Although this approach needs further study, particularly by students of literary criticism, we can say that Agoncillo’s

fusion of literature and history resulted in a rhetorical strategy in which “the masses” did not only stand for a sociological category but were also and more importantly ascribed a specific set of traits that rendered them as a character in the narrative, largely static but behaving predictably to move the plot forward to its tragic ending. Bracketing aside Aguinaldo, who was the military leader the Katipunan was said to have needed from the start, we can say that Bonifacio and “the masses” are the two main protagonists in the tragedy that is *The Revolt of the Masses*. Their actions unfolded in a historical narrative with a deep literary structure, amid the comingling of empirical historical data with rhetorical devices that could not be footnoted. When Bonifacio made his alleged mistakes in Cavite, the ignorance of the masses, which purportedly explained their behavior, doomed the Katipunan’s founder. Victims of colonialism, the masses victimized and devoured their own leader, thus confirming their fearsomeness, as the so-called middle class and Agoncillo himself had postulated. The masses needed a new leader who ostensibly would not be one of them, Aguinaldo, the “true liberator” who moved the nation closer to its dream of selfhood.

Based on an incoherent character study that was not recognized and therefore not reconciled, Agoncillo’s perspective on what made the masses revolutionary was highly contradictory, positing literacy in explaining the impact of Bonifacio’s texts, but otherwise depicting the masses throughout the book as ignorant. In the former case, he was the historian who deliberately took account of the historical data and applied the most plausible interpretation possible. In the latter case, he was writing based on what he himself referred to as “conditioning factors,” precritical aspects of his worldview that remained tacit and unquestioned. The factors that shaped his historical imagination, as argued in this study, included the condescending attitude toward the poor and uneducated, which Agoncillo shared with other wealthy and educated members of his class, and the political superiority and authoritative consciousness of the “proletarian” writer as a vanguard over the working class, which Agoncillo shared with other “proletarian” intellectuals. The interaction of both of these factors created a shiftless paradigm.

As a literary strategy, the book’s politically charged abstraction of the masses lent it an almost ineluctable force, its mesmeric effect obscuring the concomitant reification and vilification of the masses. As a category, “the masses” became indelibly associated with the Philippine Revolution and thus celebrated as the “genuine” agents of history, the revolution thus

becoming unthinkable without the masses. That Agoncillo’s contradictory and disparaging characterizations of the masses were imperceptible to most readers meant that the latter were likely to have partaken of the same “conditioning factors” in which Agoncillo was immersed. For this reason, just as the writing of a text that became a classic occurred in a specific historical context, the reading of such a text that led to it being hailed a classic also transpired in a given historical context. Writer and readers—beginning with the board of judges in 1948—would appear to have shared the same expressed sentiments and unspoken assumptions. Ultimately, therefore, the success of *The Revolt of the Masses* as a work of history was not so much about the masses as it was about the intellectual elite. Embodying the split subject, these members of the intelligentsia were uncomfortable with and even questioned the role of the rich in the nation’s history, the social class to which many of them belonged, but at the same time were unable to divest themselves of the presumptive elements, the mindset and prerogatives of their class. Their sentiments were for the poor and downtrodden—captured in Petronilo Bn. Daroy’s (1966, 38) “our sentimental love for the masses”—but they could not transcend the privileges and social dominance of their class and their putative superiority over those who knew nothing about what they knew. Agoncillo was their prophet, and *The Revolt of the Masses* became a sacred text.

Notes

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- 1 In celebration of the centenary of the Philippine Revolution, Agoncillo’s book was reprinted by the University of the Philippines Press, labelling it the “1996 edition.” A “second edition” had been planned in 1976, but it did not materialize (Hila 2001, 79). This article cites extracts from both the 1956 and 1996 editions. Full and shortened parenthetical citations of this book are also to both editions, with the original publication year 1956 and its corresponding page reference enclosed in

square brackets to distinguish them from those of the 1996 edition. A page number enclosed by curly brackets inside square brackets indicates that it has been supplied by this author.

- 2 De los Reyes and Agoncillo had a distinct understanding of “plebeian” as referring to the uneducated and lowest stratum of society, but used in that sense the word did not correspond to its meaning in ancient Rome, where plebeians denoted all citizens who did not belong to the patrician caste; some plebeians became wealthy and powerful members of the Senate. Once attached to the Katipunan, the “plebeian” label “has stuck like a limpet” (Richardson 2013, 399). De los Reyes’s use of “plebeian” and eventually Agoncillo’s were consistent with the practice in New Spain, where, since the seventeenth century, *plebe* was “the term which the viceregal authorities themselves used to refer to the most marginalised members of society” (Mawson 2013, 699), a term that referred specifically to the “multi-ethnic underclass of criminals, idlers, vagabonds, fugitives and runaway soldiers and sailors who transgressed the social norms of genteel Spanish society” and as such were deemed to have “absorbed all the worst characteristics of its constituent subgroups” (Mawson 2016, 101). Many were apprehended as criminals and, as a form of “social cleansing” (Mawson 2013, 694), were sent to the Philippines to serve as soldiers of the empire.
- 3 The other major critique of the book centered on Agoncillo’s anticlericalism. Initially in *The Manila Times* and then in *Philippine Studies*, Zafra (1956, 495), together with four female faculty members of the UP Department of History, criticized the book for being anti-Catholic Church insofar as Agoncillo blamed the Spanish friars for the ills of colonial society, as though “the friars did nothing worthwhile or uplifting among the Filipinos.” There were also debates on specific historical points, such as the location of the “Cry” that launched the revolution and the credibility of Dr. Pio Valenzuela as a source.
- 4 Agoncillo was not the first to use “The Revolt of the Masses” as a book title. In 1932 an English translation of *La Rebelión de las Masas* by Jose Ortega y Gasset, which first appeared in 1930, was published by W. W. Norton with the title *The Revolt of the Masses*.
- 5 Thanks to Lisandro “Leloy” Claudio for alerting me to this fact.
- 6 Not included here is Glenn May’s (1996) critique of *The Revolt of the Masses*, which focuses on the dubious nature of Agoncillo’s sources on Bonifacio and his unqualified faith in interviews (cf. Aguilar 1999). Some aspects of May’s critique will be brought up in a later section that deals specifically with Bonifacio.
- 7 Guerrero (1977/2015, 24) translates these terms, respectively, as “the ‘principal’ residents of a town, descendants of the pre-Spanish nobility”; “the ‘enlightened’ or educated Filipinos”; “wealthy, politically powerful citizens, who might not necessarily be educated”; and “tenants in either private or religious haciendas.”
- 8 In this article I retain Agoncillo’s term “the masses,” but the reader is well advised to see this ambiguous term as always bearing invisible quotation marks. In an undated paper, “Manila in the 1890s,” Agoncillo (2003, 319) mixed up his class categories by stating that “the base” of native society “was occupied by the masses or the lower middle class—those who worked with their hands, those who had a small business venture like *sari-sari* stores or stalls in the market, those employed as clerks or hired help in the government offices, and those who were jobless.”
- 9 Of the 136 cases, 45 (about one-third of the total) held a diversity of occupations: “a cook, a postman, a lottery ticket seller, a pharmacist, 2 mechanics, 2 bookkeepers, and so on. There were three barbers, 3 tailors, and 3 waterworks employees” (Richardson 2013, 400). The remainder of the 136 cases (91) could be grouped occupationally into “definite categories”: clerks (*escribientes*), 32; employees or clerks (*dependientes*) and agents or representatives (*personeros*), 21; tobacco workers, 15; printers, 11; service personnel in the colonial army, police force, and customs, 12 (*ibid.*).
- 10 Five were university graduates; three had started law courses but were unable to complete their studies; “and several of the *escribientes* had completed at least two or three years of the *segunda enseñanza* . . . and would therefore have been regarded as well educated by the standards of the day. The printers would likewise need to have attained a relatively high standard of literacy” (Richardson 2013, 400).
- 11 Escalante (2017, 461–62) records the following occupations of Katipunan members, ranging from overseer (*encargado*) to “laundry man (*maglalaba*), tailor (*mananahi*), collector (*cobrador*), supplier of fodder (*zacatero*), carriage driver (*cochero*), milk seller (*mangagagatas*), administrator (*katiwala*), plowman (*mag-aararo*), vendor (*magtitinda*), boatman (*bankero*), barber (*manggugupit*), fireman (*bombero*), day laborer (*jornalero*), and shoemaker (*magsasapato*). Two occupations that could be considered white-collar jobs were writer (*manunulat*) and teacher (*maestro*).
- 12 A “Rizalist,” Leopoldo Yabes (1912–1986) joined the teaching staff of UP in 1948, the year Agoncillo won the Bonifacio biography contest. He became professor of English, Humanities, and Philippine Institutions and served as dean of the graduate school of the UP College of Arts and Letters. He was also managing editor of the *Philippine Social Sciences and Humanities Review* and *The Diliman Review*. See Yabes 1963, 84; Mojares 2014, 112 n. 2.
- 13 Jaime C. de Veyra (1873–1963) was resident commissioner to the US House of Representatives from 1917 to 1923 but was a journalist through different stages of his life (Manuel and Manuel 1986). In the years leading to the Bonifacio biography competition, De Veyra was chair of the Institute of National Language (1937–1944) and historical researcher at the Office of the President (1946). Agoncillo was a “technical assistant” at the Institute of National Language from 1937 to 1941 (Medina 1993, 131); he must have known De Veyra personally. Later on Agoncillo wrote that “De Veyra had written learned monographs in history and letters, especially Filipino literature in Spanish, but many of them are of interest only to men of his intellectual caliber” (Agoncillo 2003, 99). It was not a flattering description because, right in the same paragraph, Agoncillo referred to Rafael Palma and Teodoro M. Kalaw as having “better claim to posterity than many of their contemporaries” (*ibid.*). Agoncillo also explained that De Veyra “like most of his contemporaries, did not write much history during this period, probably because he was preoccupied with his duties as a government official” (*ibid.*, 18).
- 14 Faustino Aguilar (1882–1955) was a Tagalog novelist in the social realist mode; he was a journalist and editor of *Taliba*. He stated that his purpose for writing was to represent the poor and downtrodden and to free the mind from blind faith (Glorioso 1971, 315). He was director of the Bureau of Labor (1918–1923), secretary of the Senate (1923–1933), and second secretary of the Department of Labor (1933–1939) (Almario 2015). In the Katipunan he was a messenger and then a secretary of the Department of War as well as of the Republic of Malolos (*ibid.*).
- 15 Eulogio B. Rodriguez (1893–1949) was appointed chief of the Filipiniana Division of the National Library in 1924; he succeeded Teodoro M. Kalaw as director in 1940 “and continued to serve in that capacity during the Japanese occupation” (Manuel and Manuel 1995, 391). He is “remembered

as one of the most well-respected national librarians, blessed with the great ability to deploy the written word in prose and poetry" (*BusinessMirror* 2018).

- 16 A trained historian who hailed from Laoag, Ilocos Norte, Tomas Fonacier (1898–1981) became in 1947 the second Filipino chair of the UP Department of History, but in 1948 he was appointed dean of the newly formed UP Iloilo, which he helped found. In 1950 he was summoned back to the main UP campus to become vice dean and later dean of the College of Liberal Arts. He was editor of the *Philippine Social Sciences and Humanities Review*.
- 17 The 1939 census also revealed that, among the literate population 10 years old and over, only 32.3 percent read newspapers and magazines regularly (Commission of the Census 1941, 288).
- 18 Zaide, too, "dashed off short stories," but according to Agoncillo (2003, 24) this activity "sometimes affected the veracity of his facts," suggesting that Zaide's literary practice adversely affected his historical writing.
- 19 Tadiar (2004, 176) has faulted Agoncillo for "his blatant 'literary' embellishments and dramatizations of particular scenes (such as Bonifacio's death)."
- 20 Despite this avowed openness to different interpretations and Agoncillo's (2003, 48) own statement on the legitimacy as historical sources of "what is termed floating or oral literature, such as myths, legends, and traditions," he brushed aside Iletto's (1979) *Pasyon and Revolution* and its attempt to explain the frame of meaning that informed the collective action of the revolutionary Tagalog masses with the exclamation, "Ay naku! Wala iyon" (Ow, shucks! That's nothing) (Ocampo 1995, 93). He added, "Conjecture iyon. [That's conjecture] What is history there? . . . What is your basis for making this statement?" (ibid.).
- 21 Composed in 1978, the text hints at a distancing by Agoncillo from this literary trend; as mentioned later in this article, Agoncillo changed his ideological stance in the late 1970s.
- 22 "The argument that [Bonifacio] was 'downgraded' in American days because he was a revolutionary doesn't hold water. Didn't Aguinaldo lead a revolution; aren't Rizal's writings dangerous and inflammatory?" (Joaquin 2005, 92–93). Joaquin (ibid., 92) informs us that in fact "it was an ilustrado group, headed by Don Fernando Maria Guerrero of *El Renacimiento*, that started the Bonifacio cult back in the early 1900s, when the Supremo was all but forgotten, and Aguinaldo and Rizal were getting all the attention."
- 23 I owe the notion of a "character study" of Bonifacio and the masses as a rhetorical (literary) strategy to Caroline S. Hau.
- 24 On Agoncillo's uncritical use of oral testimonies and selective use of memoirs, see May's (1996, 113–35) *Inventing a Hero*.
- 25 May (1996, 114, 117) posits a "bizarre duality" in Agoncillo's "invented" portrait of the early and late Bonifacio: "a basically good man, an effective organizer, and a charismatic leader in the period leading up to the revolution; a difficult, intolerant, hypersensitive, politically inept, subversive character in the final months of his life." Although Agoncillo posits a psychological breakdown in the later Bonifacio, I argue that Agoncillo's characterization of Bonifacio was conflicted from the outset.
- 26 Joaquin's (2005, 93) description of Bonifacio's character "based on the attitudes of the men who knew [him]" was similarly deprecating: "He was not charming, he was not likeable; he had a rough temper; he was impatient, rash and domineering, he had the insecurity of the poor, the touchiness of the upstart." However, see May (2007) for evidence showing Bonifacio as consultative, deliberative,

and democratic, especially in the crucial matter of deciding on whether or not the Katipunan would go to war at that time.

- 27 Joaquin (2005, 93) asserted: "Not apocryphal at all are the stories of his behaviour in Cavite, which turned Caviteño feeling against him and ultimately led to his killing." Bonifacio was "a displaced person" in Cavite where "virtue seemed to have gone out of him: he lost authority and direction" (ibid.). However, the revolutionary general from Imus, Cavite, Santiago Alvarez (1992, 346)—son of Mariano Alvarez, Bonifacio's uncle-in-law (Agoncillo 1956, 178; 1996, 179)—had an altogether different view: "Supremo Andres Bonifacio did not recognize the so-called government of the 'Philippine Republic,' not out of treachery but in defense of reason (*katwiran*), the reason of the People in Revolution (*Bayang Naghihimagsik*) confronted by the covetous and illegitimate rules inconsistent with what had been agreed upon in the meeting held in the friar-estate of the Priests of Tejeros, San Francisco de Malabon (General Trias)." Arnold Azurin (1993, 83) has declared: "The crux of the matter is that it was the Aguinaldo-led regime of opportunism and treachery that uprooted the original revolutionary goals of brotherhood, equality and native birthrights, and implanting in the process an avaricious form of self-aggrandizement through the cult of the clique. This group quite logically and suddenly aborted the Revolution." For Azurin (ibid., 81), it was Agoncillo who had a "myopic vista" such that he "inflated his Cavite parochialism to superimpose it upon the history of the national struggle for liberation."
- 28 Agoncillo ([1956] 1996, [178] 179) described Aguinaldo's background briefly: "Born in Cavite el Viejo (Kawit) on March 22, 1869, of the farmer class, he was sent by his parents, Carlos Aguinaldo and Trinidad Famy, to Manila at the age of eleven to study in the *Colegio de San Juan de Letran*. In his second year in this institution his father died and, left without funds with which to continue his studies, he returned to his native town to take charge of their farm. On January 1, 1895, he took the oath of office as *capital municipal* or mayor, and in the evening of the same day he was initiated into Masonry." Interestingly, Agoncillo refrained from labelling Aguinaldo's class position and did not categorize him as either "plebeian" or "middle class."
- 29 On the conjuring in Rizal's novels of "the people," an opaque and ambiguous term, that was seen as a revolutionary agent but which also degenerated into the "masses," see Hau 2017, 186–90.
- 30 Tadiar (2004, 171) observes that "Agoncillo 'himself' is this split subject in whom the 'abnormal psychology' of the masses is contained"; he "behaves 'like' the fanatical masses"—but note the absence of inverted commas around "fanatical."
- 31 Never required to read Agoncillo's book and hardly with any strong preconceptions, I decided to read it in 1997 and was shocked at Agoncillo's depictions of the masses (Aguilar 1998). In reviewing Caroline Hau's *Necessary Fictions*, Guillermo (2002, 284) included the observation that "According to Agoncillo, the masses' capacity for revolution . . . actually resides in their being unaccustomed to 'the intricacies of the rational processes' and in their being ignorant of the probable effects of their own planned action." However, in most cases Agoncillo's portrayal of the masses has gone unnoticed or unremarked upon for its negativity.
- 32 However, May (1996, 118) has argued that, "while Agoncillo uncovered a number of new sources, his research was far from exhaustive."
- 33 Today "We live in an age of ignorance," and agnotology has emerged as the study of ignorance making (Proctor and Schiebinger 2008, [v]).

- 34 Agoncillo also described the Spaniards and the middle class as ignorant, but his use of ignorance in their case was not sustained and is thus excluded from this analysis.
- 35 As Mojares (2006, 459) put it, "A basic theme in the [Spanish] attack against natives was the racist denigration of their mental and moral abilities. Natives are biologically deficient in the abstract and philosophical forms of knowledge, it was argued."
- 36 The textbook titled *Good Manners and Right Conduct* was written by Gertrude E. McVenn (1918), described in the book's front matter as "Principal of Training Department, Philippine Normal School, Manila."
- 37 On a larger scale of world history, this phenomenon fits the arrogance and presumed superiority of literacy over orality. Acts 4:13 (NIV) records that "When [the members of the Sanhedrin] saw the courage of Peter and John and realized that they were unschooled, ordinary men, they were astonished and they took note that these men had been with Jesus." The unschooled were not supposed to behave with confidence in the presence of the highly literate Sadducees, Pharisees, and scribes.
- 38 Agoncillo ([1956] 1996, [75] 79) described an early exchange between Bonifacio and Tirona that occurred in Valenzuela's house: "Tirona became heated, though Bonifacio remained calm and showed no signs of excitement."
- 39 Bonifacio could read Spanish and reportedly "passed the night poring over volumes" (Agoncillo [1956] 1996, [67] 71). Agoncillo (ibid.) listed the titles of books read by Bonifacio. In contrast, Aguinaldo could not read and write Spanish. In Scalice's (2018, 40) view, lack of proficiency in Spanish would "make Aguinaldo one of the masses and Bonifacio not." Yet, for Agoncillo, Bonifacio was definitely from and of the uneducated masses.
- 40 May (2007, 471) argues that "just about every extant source except Ricarte's memoir" suggested that "the elections that took place at the Tejeros meeting were rigged," that "the elections were marred by irregularities." "The results of the Tejeros meeting were largely preordained, given the reality that there was now a consensus among the [Magdalo and Magdiwang] revolutionaries that a different leader and a different approach to military organization were needed" (ibid., 472).
- 41 In 1961 Carlos Albert, who would become vice mayor of Quezon City from 1972 to 1975, complained to the city fiscal, who then filed a case against Fonacier and Yabes for "incitement to sedition" for having published the monograph. The Supreme Court (1961) dismissed the charge "for lack of merit."
- 42 Given the minuscule proletarian class that then existed in the Spanish Philippines, a large majority of "the masses" at the end of the nineteenth century and even until the postwar period would have been composed of peasants. Marxist theory is ambivalent about the potential and capacity of peasants to undertake collective political action, with intense debates on whether the peasantry constituted a social class. This deep uncertainty—ignorance—in theory has fostered extreme ambivalence regarding the peasantry, resolved, in Agoncillo's case, by dismissing them as all ignorant anyway. For succinct discussions of the peasantry as a class and the peasantry in political action, see part 4 of Shanin 1987.

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