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Ramos: Creatures of Philippine Lower Mythology

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CREATURES OF PHILIPPINE LOWER MYTHOLOGY, by Maximo D. Ramos.
Quezon City: University of the Philippines Press, 1971. xix, 390 pp.

This book is a version of the author's doctoral dissertation (1965) at the University of the Philippines. In it he attempts two major tasks: (1) to identify Philippine "creatures of lower mythology" by names, traits and functions, (2) to suggest what place this information might have in the elementary school curriculum (p. 3). The volume is really two books in one.

After an introductory chapter (1-20) in which he lays the ground work for what follows—and takes a kindly crack in passing at myself (4)—Dr. Ramos neatly catalogues his creatures in the next four chapters: Demons, dragons, and dwarfs (21-53); Elves, ghouls, giants (54-87); Merfolk, ogres, and vampires (88-113); and Viscera suckers, werewolves, and witches (114-39). A chapter on the importance of mythology (140-70) introduces the second half of the volume, which examines these beliefs for their relevance in life (171-216) and for their implications for elementary education (chapters 8-12; pp. 217-87). The summary chapter (288-339) has 12 tables which contain the essentials of Ramos' findings on the creatures he chose for study. There are several useful appendixes and a bibliography and index.

Let me admit my bias as an anthropologist and then state that I am much more grateful to Dr. Ramos for the first 140 pages than I am for the rest of his book. He brings together a lot of material about his subject—and never mind if there is little sifting or weighing of the evidence. Once you get beyond Chapter 5, however, there is too much unsupported speculation and opinion for my taste. Others may well react differently.

There is, however, one feature of this study which those with similar interests will keep in mind. The author uses a framework of analysis adopted from that of Wayland Hand (341)—which is good—but, like the missionaries he complains about (304), Dr. Ramos sometimes allows European preconceptions to force Philippine creatures into categories they really do not fit in. It is as if he classified a lizard under *Water creatures*, calling it "lizard (swimming aspects)" and again under *Land creatures*, calling it "lizard (land-running aspects)," overlooking the fact that the lizard was rather a combination of both, a *reptile*. It is a truism that when myths and beliefs move from one time and place to another they are changed in the process. The European categories are not always cleanly represented in the Philippines: a little empirical research, letting the *people* describe these creatures, will often turn up a quite different, quite "confused" view of reality. But it is the people's view.

FRANK LYNCH