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Casper: The Wounded Diamond

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Book Reviews

THE WRITER AND THE DIAMOND-CUTTER

THE WOUNDED DIAMOND: Stories in Modern Philippine Literature. By Leonard Casper. Manila: Bookmark, 1964. 152 pp.

The most provocative point about Professor Leonard Casper's latest publication is the title. Professor Casper's views on the individual writers treated in the book are, in substance, those he has expressed in his previous works. But the insight crystallized in the metaphor of the wounded diamond is something new and something valuable. The image illuminates the premises that underlie Professor Casper's judgments as a critic of Philippine literature.

The first demand that Professor Casper makes of the Filipino writer is relevance of subject matter. Professor Casper begins with what today is almost a truism: Philippine society is in process of transition. The young republic is in a hurry to grow up, anxious to attain a measure of industrial self-sufficiency, determined to play its role in the family of nations. This eagerness to assert itself has made the country extremely self-conscious. Hence, the current preoccupation of its intellectual leaders with problems of determining the national identity and of dissecting or defining the Filipino personality.

To this task of national self-analysis, the creative artist brings neither a set theory of social change nor a preconceived vision of what the Filipino ought to be. He has nonetheless his own contribution to make. The role of the creative artist is not to prescribe, only to understand: "modern men write *for* self-knowledge more commonly than *from* self-knowledge." The creative process, then, becomes essentially a way of knowing, "the experiencing of one's inexperience."

History and geography have conspired to introduce potentially divisive elements in Philippine culture. The search for national identity is complicated not only by the struggle to achieve present national objectives, but also by the physical environment that has fostered re-

gionalism among the Filipinos and by the historical accidents that have exposed the archipelago to different cultural influences. But it is precisely this area where the stresses in the cultural fabric are most pronounced that provides the creative artist with the most promising and the most challenging material for his fiction. The artist makes his most valuable contribution when he is able to articulate the tensions, the conflicting forces that beset his society. In the task of illuminating the problems of his society, the creative artist must borrow the diamond-cutter's technique. He must locate the planes of cleavage in his society and cut along the flaws.

Professor Casper requires that the writer be "responsive to the dilemmas of his time and locality." But commitment to society is not enough; command of the craft is also required. The creative writer is not engaged merely in exposition. The author's insight, the theme, must be dramatized, must be made to emerge from the material. The discovery of the insight on the part of both reader and writer can only be through technique. Like the diamond-cutter, the writer must know not only where to wound the stone, but also how to release its brilliance.

Professor Casper begins his reconnaissance of Philippine literature with a review of Jose Rizal's novels. By beginning with the *Noli Me Tangere* and the *El Filibusterismo*, Professor Casper is able to clarify what he means when he asks the creative artist to "cut along the flaws". Rizal is a model diamond-cutter, an example of the writer "responsive to the dilemmas of his time and locality." His novels explore the issues which divided the Philippines of his times and articulate with such clarity the crucial alternatives of revolution and reform that the Spanish government executed him on the grounds of sedition.

Professor Casper does not present an exhaustive analysis of Rizal's novels. But he does offer a point of departure for a literary exegesis of the *Noli* and the *Fili*. This is enough to call attention to something even the most devoted Rizalistas are prone to ignore: the *Noli* and the *Fili* are works of literature. They are, Professor Casper argues, modern novels and deserve to be treated as such. The great bulk of the studies on the novels, however, consider them primarily as propaganda tracts or as social documents, and only secondarily, if at all, as literary creations. It is ironic that scholars, in ignoring the literary dimensions of the novels, actually fall into the same error that led the Spaniards to execute Rizal.

The lack of literary analysis of Rizal's novels is only a reflection of the broader problem that hampers the growth of Philippine literature: the absence of "systematic criticism-in-depth." There are few trained critics who can help the Filipino writer decide "whether he is an imaginative writer, a non-imaginative writer, an unimaginative writer, or an imaginary writer." This lack is something students of Philippine

literature are only too well aware of. Professor Casper's volume of critical essays will be welcomed by them as a gem to be treasured.

One may sometimes differ with Professor Casper's views regarding particular authors or particular works. On the whole, however, Professor Casper's criticism is bound to exert a healthy influence on both the writer and the reader of Philippine literature. It is surely an encouraging sign that Professor Casper thinks highly enough of Philippine writers to apply to their works criticism of the most exacting kind. Relevance of subject matter, soundness of insight are factors that Professor Casper takes into consideration. But he refuses to accept content as a substitute for craft. It is Professor Casper's willingness to subject Philippine literature to close, formal analysis that makes discussion profitable and disagreement possible.

EDILBERTO DE JESUS, JR.

ON A HISTORY OF PHILIPPINE ART

ART IN THE PHILIPPINES. By Dominador Castañeda. Quezon City: University of the Philippines Office of Research Coordination, 1964. 147 pp. Illustrations, 259 pp.

In a country that refuses to recognize its artistic heritage, one welcomes almost any book that attempts to shed some light on this neglected field. Dominador Castañeda's *Art in the Philippines* must certainly be the towering exception. To wander beyond the zealous praises of the Roces brothers and beyond the table of contents with its impressive classification of local architecture, painting, and sculpture into three periods: the Spanish, the American, the Modern, is to stray into a welter of grammatical errors, misspellings, lapses of thought, sloppily organized chapters, endless opinions and subjective criticism, unintended humor ("Destruction almost always is a direct result of war"), biographical chit-chat.

Castañeda's chapters on churches of the Spanish Era set the tone for the rest of the book. Though he discusses churches by regions, he leaves out as large and individual a geographical unit as Bicol. Or else, he designates a rather broad term, "Northern Churches", for a section that treats of Ilocos without the merest mention of Cagayan. He remains mysteriously silent on the reasons that prompted him to group churches of Pampanga and Bulacan under a single heading, though earlier he had at least mentioned characteristics common to Ilocano churches: nearly all of them are in "barn style" [sic], of large dimensions, and of a squat silhouette. Nor does he explain why he notes this church rather than that; San Miguel de