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## **Casper: Modern Philippine Short Stories: Arcellana: The Philippine PEN Anthology of Short Stories 1962**

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# Book Reviews

## THE ANTHOLOGIST AS TEACHER OR ENTERTAINER

**MODERN PHILIPPINE SHORT STORIES.** Edited with an introduction by Leonard Casper. New Mexico: The University of New Mexico Press, 1962. xxvi, 235 pp.

**THE PHILIPPINE PEN ANTHOLOGY OF SHORT STORIES 1962.** Edited with an introduction by Francisco Arcellana. Manila: Regal Printing Company, for the Philippine Chapter, International PEN, 1962. vi, 260 pp.

The metaphor of the journey suggests itself in a comparison of Leonard Casper's *Modern Philippine Short Stories* and Francisco Arcellana's *The Philippine PEN Anthology of Short Stories 1962*. The first is an educational tour while the second is a pleasure trip. Dr. Casper takes us back to a well-remembered country where he leaves us leisure to contemplate the familiar monuments and discover other landmarks we might have missed during our previous visits. Professor Arcellana rushes us through a strange country where he allows us to view only certain landmarks that interest him personally, thus leaving us puzzled, irritated and delighted by turns.

Although he differs radically in literary orientation from the Thomasites, Dr. Casper works within the tradition of those early American teachers in the Philippines. As a literary critic, he has devoted himself to the education of the Filipino sensibility, both of the reader and of the writer. With his anthology of stories, he rounds up his task which started during his first visit to the country in 1953. Between then and now he has published an anthology of Philippine poems (*Six Filipino Poets*, 1955) and a collection of his essays on Philippine writing in English (*The Wayward Horizon*, 1961). A propagandist for Philippine literature among his own people, Dr. Casper has also edited the Philippine number of *The Literary Review* and written a number of articles

for distinguished American periodicals. *Modern Philippine Short Stories* is his handsomest tribute to the country he has come to understand and love. The tribute is not paid in vain. For three very good reasons, the collection is bound to be the standard anthology of Philippine short stories for a long, long time.

The first reason has something to do with Dr. Casper's understanding of the sociological conditions in the Philippines. Intended primarily for an American audience, the anthology has been so designed as to give a cross-section of Philippine society. That Dr. Casper understands the country is evident from his choice of stories that represent the different segments of Philippine society and the peculiarities of our culture. The non-Christian Filipinos are represented in two stories set in the Mountain Province, Amador Daguió's "Wedding Dance" and "The Dead." Nick Joaquin's "The Summer Solstice" and "Three Generations" remind the reader that our Hispanic past is a fusion of the pagan and the Christian. In the stories about middle-class characters, such as N.V.M. Gonzalez's "Where's My Baby Now?," Francisco Arcellana's "Divide by Two," and Edith Tiempo's "Chambers of the Sea," one is confronted with the present which has assimilated its American influences. The Philippines of the tourist folders—the rural areas and their geography and culture—appears without the clutter of stereotype trimmings in Gonzalez's "Lupo and the River," Manuel E. Arguilla's "How My Brother Leon Brought Home a Wife," and "Epilogue to Revolt," and in Hermel Nuyda's "Pulse of the Land." The remaining stories introduce the reader to the Filipino expatriate in the United States, the slum-dweller, the laborer and the coastal people. The sociological scope covered by the stories is impressive. Dr. Casper has been able to piece together an image of the country and its people as no textbook in sociology or economics or history can.

As an academic tool *Modern Philippine Short Stories* is the most usable among the anthologies that have been published so far. It is as comprehensive enough of the figures and forces in Philippine writing to serve as a textbook in the short story for a class in Philippine literature in English. The three major contemporary fictionists, Bienvenido Santos, Nick Joaquin and N.V.M. Gonzalez, are competently represented. The best of the Commonwealth writers, Manuel E. Arguilla, has two stories in the collection. The achievement of each one of these writers is implicitly judged in the editor's choice of stories that represent the writer. For instance, "The Summer Solstice" and "Three Generations" reveal to the reader the two salient characteristics of Nick Joaquin's fiction. The first story gives us a glimpse of the Christianized paganism of Joaquin's old world and provides us with a sampling of the orgiastic prose for which the writer has been unduly celebrated. "Three Generations" presents the more substantial side of Joaquin's reputation; it is

a story in which the characters are defined by the moral problems they have to grapple with, the kind of story often attempted but seldom written by other Filipino short story writers.

In Bienvenido Santos' "Scent of Apples" and "The Common Theme," we find where the power and the weakness of Santos' art lie. When he is able to find the symbols and images that allow him to render meaning, Santos can be most poetically moving, as in "Scent of Apples." Once the symbols and images fail to articulate the theme, as in "The Common Theme," the structure breaks down and Santos becomes melodramatic and sentimental. A similar strategy is employed by Dr. Casper in judging the art of Arguilla. "How My Brother Leon Brought Home a Wife" demonstrates the author's success as a bucolic artist. In this story Arguilla's strength as a realist shows exuberantly in the form of vivid scene-painting and accurate rendering of ethnic gesture and speech. An example of Arguilla's sociological stories, "Epilogue to Revolt" reveals the writer's weakness at the complex characterization which alone distinguishes the genre from the journalistic vignette or historical illustration.

The Gonzalez stories that Dr. Casper has chosen make clear why their author is the best, but the most unpopular writer among those writing today. Gonzalez is a "difficult" writer for two reasons: first, he writes in the tradition of Henry James and Anton Chekhov, a tradition associated with the technique of ambiguity; second, the language of his bucolic stories is a sophisticated modulation of Filipino dialectal speech. Perhaps a third reason is Gonzalez's fondness for inarticulate and unassuming characters for whom only the spare rhetoric of common speech is appropriate. In "Lupo and the River" and "A Warm Hand" the jungle farmers and the seafarers in and around Mindoro, characters that receive more extensive treatment in *Season of Grace*, live out their unspectacular lives. The middle-class characters from the urban areas, who re-appear in *The Bamboo Dancers*, are found in "Where's My Baby Now?" Of the three, "Lupo and the River" is the best. This is Gonzalez's short story masterpiece. In its account of a country boy's initiation into manhood, the reader has a fine example of Gonzalez's art in which richness of details carefully and lovingly transcribed is integral to the structure. In no other story has the Filipino experience been more artfully rendered. If Gonzalez had not written his novels, his place in Philippine literature would have been secured by this memorable story.

Younger writing in the anthology is exemplified by two stories of Rony Diaz and one of Hermel Nuyda. The choice of "Pulse of the Land" seems to have been motivated by the sociological design of the book. There can be no doubt however as to the wisdom of choosing Diaz as the best of the young writers. As shown by "Death in a Saw-

mill" and "Two Brothers," Diaz is a conscientious craftsman whose affinity to realism is marvelously wedded to a style whose resonance and flexibility of tone are secured through a calculated manipulation of the metaphor.

Finally, and primarily, Dr. Casper's anthology will be hard to replace because its literary merits are unassailable. The short stories in the collection are proof that the Filipino writer can be an English writer, that he need not be a foreign writer using a borrowed medium. In those stories which are successful, and most of them are, human experience has been objectified in language that involves and illuminates. In all of them, an unwaveringly ironic attitude toward the experience to be objectified leads the writers away from the temptations of sentimentality and sensationalism, temptations that are very real in the local literary scene.

Turning from *Modern Philippine Short Stories* to *The Philippine PEN Anthology of Short Stories 1962*, one realizes how true indeed is Professor Arcellana's observation that "the laws of temper and personality" have a lot to do with the character of an anthology. "The stories are personal choices," declares the editor in his brief introduction. The statement immediately disarms the reader of the initial hostility aroused by the absence of pieces and names that he expects to find in an anthology of Philippine stories. Thus disarmed, the reader surrenders to the editor's eccentricities and finds himself exhilarated by a sense of discovery as he moves from one story to another.

The unexpected is only to be expected from such an unpredictable editor as Professor Arcellana. Among the prewar writers who are still active in the literary scene, he is unique in his consistent sympathy for avantgarde writing, a sympathy that his own short stories reflect. Each of the four stories in his *Selected Stories* (Peso Book, 1962) is in a class by itself, evidence of his refusal to conform to a formula or stick by a precedent that only threatens to stunt growth. His taste as a critic is by no means unerring (he has written a laudatory preface for a mediocre book of poems), but his judgment is always made with poise.

The reader only needs to look at the stories representing the major fictionists in order to see how studiously Professor Arcellana avoids the cut-and-dried. Arguilla is represented by "The Long Vacation," an unexpected choice indeed since this anecdote with a rather macabre twist hardly gives an indication of the author's position in Philippine literature. The editor's explanation for the choice: "The Arguilla story is our own favorite of Arguilla's fiction." Joaquin makes his appearance as the author of "The Difficulties of a Diplomat," a contemporary resetting of the Pilate story from the Bible, a happy choice this time since it reminds us of the satirical Joaquin of "It Was Later Than We

Thought." Gonzalez's "The Calendar Christ" is an odd choice. One suspects that the story is a tongue-in-check exercise in the symbolic mode, perhaps even an elaborate literary joke by which Gonzalez spoofs his own practice as a fictionist. Santos is best served by Professor Arcellana. "The Day the Dancers Came" is perhaps the best story that Santos has written about the Filipino exiles in the U.S. since "Scent of Apples."

Seven young writers are included in the anthology, four of them very recent. Wilfrido D. Nollado, Gregorio Brillantes, and Gilda Cordero-Fernando are represented, but Rony Diaz who belongs to the same generation has been omitted. Mrs. Fernando contributes "People in the War," which may not necessarily be "the finest Filipino short story to come out of the war," as the editor claims, but is certainly one of the best things in the anthology. The material of "People in the War" could have very easily defeated a less technically resourceful writer, consisting as it does of the experiences of a group of people of varying ages, occupations and sensibilities. Mrs. Fernando's art is able to telescope the brutalizing impact of war on people through the judicious use of a youthfully garrulous central intelligence who grows into an awareness of the dehumanizing consequences of a desperate will to survive. In "Journey to the Edge of the Sea," Gregorio Brillantes, who has better stories in *Distance to Andromeda*, tries to re-vitalize the middle-class cliché about the busy businessman who discovers that his bored wife has taken a lover. He succeeds however only in documenting the man's progress to knowledge and commitment to action without arriving at a fresh insight into the stock predicament. TOYM winner Wilfrido D. Nollado pursues in "Rice Wine" an allegorical impulse characteristic of his temperament. Nollado's essentially poetic approach to the language of fiction has made him a pervasive influence on the new generation of writers. Such an approach puts the burden of articulating meaning on the manipulation of language, thus giving the story the rich verbal texture for which the writer is noted. The power of "Rice Wine" however does not lie in its verbal texture but in the surging social consciousness which unfortunately remains largely undramatized.

Of the four recent writers, Erwin Castillo and Leopoldo Cacnio are clearly the most promising. "Tomorrow Is a Downhill Place" shows that Castillo is still serving his apprenticeship to Hemingway and Nollado, but his narrative verve is indication enough that he will be a writer to watch once he finds his voice and method. An understanding of character, surprisingly penetrating in one so young, marks Cacnio as the most mature of his group. "To Her Alone" announces to Mrs. Fernando that she will soon have male competition in chronicling the torments and anxieties of the upper middle-class.

Two stories should serve as a final illustration of the poles of reactions to which the reader is shunted by Professor Arcellana's unpredictability. "Tanabata's Wife," Sinai C. Hamada's prewar story which seems to be a favorite among his contemporaries, is found side by side with Juan C. Tuvera's "High into Morning." Hamada's story exemplifies the failure of many early Filipino stories to rise above the stature of an anecdote while Tuvera's is, as Professor Arcellana himself says, "one of the finest Filipino short stories ever written." Applied to such a story as "High into Morning," the editor's encomium is nothing more than a recognition of fine craftsmanship. The story of a Filipino scriptwriter for the USIS in Saigon, "High into Morning" takes up the current theme of alienation and tells of an illusionist's poignant attempt to connect with life. But Luis the protagonist reaches out too late. The woman for whom he reaches out is another illusionist (she is a photographer) and she refuses to commit herself to life, thus leaving Luis with a memory that is "a burden and a joy through the cold and shapeless days." With "High into Morning," Tuvera proves those critics right who saw him when he first appeared in the literary scene as one of the most significant postwar writers. Coming from a writer who once spat out some pretty hard words at critics whom he called "professional 'wordlords,'" the story reveals that the author's antipathy for critics is not a shield for a vulnerable literary practice, but rather a self-confident disdain for those who would presume to teach him a craft he has already mastered.

*Modern Philippine Short Stories* and *The Philippine PEN Anthology of Short Stories 1962* represent two widely differing concepts of the anthologist's art. In Dr. Casper we have an excellent guide during an educational tour while in Professor Arcellana we have an urbane companion during a pleasure trip. One does not have to choose between the two. He avails himself of the services of either according to his needs. The teacher, who puts instruction above pleasure, will undoubtedly take Dr. Casper. The general reader, for whom pleasure comes before the history of Philippine writing or the sociology of anthologizing, will delight in Professor Arcellana's company.

BIENVENIDO LUMBERA

## HUMAN SELF-KNOWLEDGE AND INFINITE LOVE

NO ABSENT GOD, THE RELATIONS BETWEEN GOD AND THE SELF. By Martin C. D'Arcy. New York: Harper and Row, 1962. 157 pp.