

philippine studies

Ateneo de Manila University • Loyola Heights, Quezon City • 1108 Philippines

Wishing Won't Make It So

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Philippine Studies vol. 7, no. 4 (1959): 488–492

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Fri June 30 13:30:20 2008

nificant that in the "Nationalist Manifesto" there is not a word of condemnation of Red imperialism and aggression in the countries behind the Iron Curtain: Hungary in Europe, Tibet in Asia. In the resolutions of the KMP it is proposed that we seek closer ties with our Asian brothers without a word of caution about Communist China, Communist Vietnam, Communist North Korea.

Some time last June the NYMP took an active lead in the case of See Tun, a Chinese merchant accused of burning to death a housemaid, Lolita Tosi. The KMB helped from the side-lines by sending in two lawyers to handle the case. The burning was an evil crime, whoever was the perpetrator. But why, of all the crimes filling the columns of our daily newspapers, was this one singled out by demonstrations, placards, a special funeral procession carefully routed through the Chinese district, flags and speeches, and afterwards by a systematic stoning of Chinese stores? The speed with which the demonstrations were organized in alarming. Other crimes—take the Crisóstomo murder—have not evoked such "spontaneous" reactions from an outraged citizenry. Are we to believe, then, that beneath the surface of traditional Filipino calm there are forces at work waiting to be set in motion by faceless men? One gets the eerie feeling that the machinery for the demonstrations and the speech-making was all the while humming expectantly. All it needed was an occasion to send it on its way. The murder itself was not important to the machine; what was important was that it furnished the excuse for the demonstrations.

The soil had not yet settled over the girl's unhappy grave before another incident hit the papers. A telephone call came to the NBI office, allegedly from the doctor who performed the autopsy on the dead girl. The telephone message said that the murdered girl had been pregnant. The report filled the headlines before the doctor who performed the autopsy could deny that the girl had been pregnant; could deny, in fact, that he had made any telephone call at all. Was this the busy machine, anxious that the feeling of outrage should not die too soon?

ENRIQUE L. VICTORIANO

Wishing Won't Make It So

Towards the end of the last century a convention about division of their material had become almost universal among newspapers, at least in English-speaking countries: facts were in the news columns, opinions about facts were on the editorial page. Thus if a story on page one reported that City Councillor A had struck City Councillor B in the eye during a normal council meeting, the paper had to hold off until the editorial page before it could say "Hooray!"

or "For shame!", depending on the paper's political affiliation. Signed articles by "columnists" were of course accepted as expressing the personal views of the writer, then as now; but even they were commonly placed on or close to the editorial page and thus visibly fenced off from the objective factual reporting. All this was very convenient for the simple-minded reader: depending on where he was in the newspaper he knew that what he was reading was fact or it was fancy, personal opinion, "one man's meat", hearsay evidence as far as a court of law was concerned.

As communications improved and events outside the ordinary reader's area of familiarity (his own neighborhood, his own town) began to be reported in increasing quantity, the need arose for more and more interpretation. This was the heyday of the critical review, the monthly periodical which undertook to summarize the chief events, especially those national and international, reported since its last issue and to tell the reader what they meant, what he should think and feel about them. The division between fact and opinion was still nicely clear, since most of these periodicals openly sub-titled themselves "A Journal of Opinion". The views expressed were mostly quite safe because the editors had to be cautious; national and world coverage was as yet by no means as complete as it is today and there were seldom enough facts for the trend of the evidence to emerge unmistakably. If the editors went too far out on a limb, they might be laughingstocks by the next issue. So they wrote quietly, quasi-objectively and with dignity; passion was frowned upon. These magazines were good in that they accustomed their readers to weigh the evidence, or at least think that they were doing so; very little riding off on white horses to the rescue of a princess who *may* be imprisoned in a tower which *may* lie in this direction. Even so, they were not as good as Mr. Dooley, Finley Peter Dunne's Irish-American bartender whose peak popularity had been a decade earlier. The journals suggested the thinking for their readers; Mr. Dooley's satirical discussions in an Irish brogue made the reader, when he had finished laughing, think for himself.

But by the nineteen twenties the steady betterment of communications all over the world had doomed the journals; even after they had become fortnightly instead of monthly they just were not current enough. To make up, "think pieces" had already begun to appear more and more in the news columns of the newspapers. The "think piece" is a signed article by a man thoroughly qualified in a field, giving the reader a "round-up" of what the current situation in that field is. The basis of the story is not so much individual facts, although there are many of these, as that whole array of personal familiarities which cannot be detailed explicitly but the accumulation of which makes a man expert in his area. The writer undertakes to convey that "sense" of a situation which anyone living closely within

the situation would have. Here speaks the political expert, the military expert, the science expert and the expert on this or that foreign country. His contribution is valuable but it is still opinion; and it appears in the news columns, encouraging the reader of that page of fact to swallow this down as fact also, as something which is, not something which is said or thought to be.

About this time, too, the "it is alleged" gambit became pervasive. This had always been in use since it is a tidy provision against libel suits, but with the expansion of bureaucracy more and more news began to be derived from documents or personal interviews and the once thin "it is alleged" grew fat and prominent. This device is where "Gertrude Goiter says that her aspidistra is the biggest aspidistra in the world" becomes "Goiter aspidistra is the biggest in the world, owner says"; further along, as other remarkable beauties are attributed to the aspidistra, even the quasi-anonymous "owner" vanishes and everything is alleged by some unknown named "It". The one ascertainable fact here, of course, is that Gertrude Goiter *said* this, which does not make it so; but the post-positive placing of the attribution, justifiable enough for purposes of interest in presentation, tends to be overlooked by the reader. Pretty soon the word goes around: "Did you know that we have the biggest aspidistra in the world here in our own little old town?" In the matter of aspidistras, notoriously unemotional, this wild statement may not be crucial; but in other, larger affairs which have to do with persons and nations the error induced may be, in seed, fatal.

The final blending of fact and opinion occurred in the early nineteen twenties with the inauguration of the weekly newsmagazines. *TIME* had no separate editorial columns reserved for opinion; the opinion was right in the news stories, in the "slant" achieved by the organization of the facts presented, in the color of the writing. This was a radical departure but a perfectly honest one. The editors did this deliberately and professedly, as a matter of policy; after all, an integration of the news and the interpretation of news was the direction in which all reporting had been moving. They simply did openly what others did in disguise. *NEWSWEEK*, beginning later, followed along the same lines, though with more restraint. The long feature articles in such magazines as *THE SATURDAY EVENING POST* do the same thing, but there, of course, the summary and concomitant opinions are one man's point of view and announced as such.

The newsmagazines, being national and even international in circulation, can afford to have larger staffs than anyone else. The on-the-spot reporter picks up the thread of actual current event, researchers provide an enormous array of background facts because a story, to move easily, always leans on a far greater mass of information than actually appears. Then the writers get to work. Their

job is to make a clear, compact and interesting, even colorful, story; and they certainly do that.

What's the objection, then? Well, the newsmagazines probably have more facts about a given situation than most private citizens and on the basis of these facts they do form an opinion, do take a stand. The stand, pro or con, thereafter appears in the writing; "we're against McCarthy, we're for Eisenhower"—and so the tone of the stories on those subjects thereafter is respectively unsympathetic or sympathetic. Anyone who knows anything at all about writing knows how deftly the snarl or the approving smile can be inserted. If someone you don't like eats and drinks richly, he is "sybaritic, luxury-loving"; if someone you do like does the same thing, this is "gracious living by people of distinction", as per the liquor and food advertisements.

Now the newsmagazines may have more facts and therefore a better founded opinion than the rest of us, but one of the inalienable rights of a private person is to make up his own mind after hearing all the facts, and without any outsider pushing him or twitching his sleeve or whispering in his ear. To the defense of this right of enlightened personal opinion, upon which the well-being of a democracy rests, the old-time newspaper's hard-and-fast distinction between fact and opinion was dedicated. The weakening of this distinction in newspapers, its near-obliteration in the newsmagazines, hits us all where we most intimately live.

Since a program for the structural reform of the press is stratospheric in hope and would have to be massive in execution, it is impossible; and it would be turning the clock back anyway. What we readers have to do is work harder at learning to protect ourselves in the clinches and at teaching those for whom we are responsible to do the same. In America it has been recognized for some years that one born today must be brought up to know not only how to enjoy the benefits of a modern society, but also how to protect his personal integrity against the propaganda pressures of the same society. In some respects we are once more in a jungle, but one where the struggle is for the survival, not of life, but of the individual human personality.

In America they have instituted courses in propaganda analysis and even direct portions of the general college courses in English towards the detection of tendentiousness in writing. I think that our teachers should take it upon themselves to do the same, at every level; and that parents, the first educators, can do even more, inculcating—by a word here, an indication there—a narrow-eyed awareness that saying a thing doesn't make it so and that saying it in bright and winning words doesn't make it so either. In place of the old and lost sifting of fact from fancy at the source,

in the newspapers and newsmagazines, we shall have erected a far better and more trustworthy screen at the terminus, which is ourselves: an alert sensitivity to what is truth and what only masquerades as truth.

The coming elections is a good time to think and act on this.

H. B. FURAY

Menander's "The Fretful One"

Menander of Athens (342/1-291/0 B. C.) was the "star" of the Greek New Comedy even as Aristophanes (c. 450—c. 385 B.C.) had been of the Greek Old Comedy. The subject-matter of Old Comedy was personal invective directed against politicians and individuals of note, like poets and philosophers. We recall how Aristophanes ridiculed the philosopher Socrates as a treader on air, representing him as borne around the stage in a suspended basket, uttering nonsense (Plato's *Apology*) and also how he execrated Euripides in the trial in Hades in *The Frogs*.

Invective and bitter sarcasm, then, were typical of Old Comedy. But the New Comedy of Menander, while still employing personal ridicule, used it only as comic relief in plots which had become increasingly serious. Euripides (485-406? B. C.), the most tragic of the Greek tragedians, greatly influenced Menander in the dramatic treatment of contemporary problems, the lavish use of moral maxims, the employment of the monologue and the recognition-scene. And the themes of New Comedy were nearer the lives of ordinary men and women of Greece, during the period of her history when the wall-bounded city-state was breaking up and opening out upon the horizons of the world-empire of Alexander the Great. The relations of husbands and wives, of parents and children, of masters and slaves; the adventures and misfortunes of private individuals in times of war, piracy, exile or shipwreck, the exposure of children, the separation of relatives and their eventual reunion—all this formed the raw material for New Comedy. And it was no doubt partly these themes of more general human interest which have earned for Menander his universal appeal and his reputation for large-hearted sympathy with the human condition.

And yet the plays of Menander (over 100 of them) have been lost and have come down to us for a long time in fragments preserved by authors like John Stobaeus, Plutarch and Clement of Alexandria. To Alfred Koerte we are indebted for the definitive edition of the remains of the plays of Menander in his two-volume work, posthumously published in Leipzig by Teubner in 1953 under the title *Menandri Quae Supersunt* after undergoing some revision by A. Thierfelder. The