

philippine studies

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

DreamEden, by Ty-Casper

Review Author: Joseph A. Galdon, S.J.

Philippine Studies vol. 46, no. 3 (1998): 396–397

Copyright © Ateneo de Manila University

Philippine Studies is published by the Ateneo de Manila University. Contents may not be copied or sent via email or other means to multiple sites and posted to a listserv without the copyright holder's written permission. Users may download and print articles for individual, noncommercial use only. However, unless prior permission has been obtained, you may not download an entire issue of a journal, or download multiple copies of articles.

Please contact the publisher for any further use of this work at philstudies@admu.edu.ph.

<http://www.philippinestudies.net>
Fri June 27 13:30:20 2008

DreamEden. By Linda Ty-Casper. Quezon City. Ateneo de Manila University Press. 1996. 469 pages.

DreamEden was published in 1996 but, as a historical novel, it has particular value for the Philippine Centennial of 1998. Historical novels portray characters, events, historical movements, and cultural as well as the historical spirit of a past age. In historical novels, fictional characters are portrayed who participate in historical events and move among actual historical persons. These fictional characters give expression to the impact of history on people living through them, such that a picture of a past age is given personal, contemporary and future meanings. For this reason a good historical novel gives a truthful picture of the historical events that are described in the novel. Literary critics also describe a historical novel as a "novel of manners" in which the dominant forces are social customs, manners, conventions and the actions of a social class at a particular time or place. That is one of the great achievements of Linda Ty-Casper in *DreamEden*. It is an excellent example of a historical novel—good history, good fiction, and meaningful moral interpretations for both individuals and the nation.

Casper's article on "Literature" in *Philippine Studies* (28 [1989]: 59-73) reaffirms her own emphasis on historical novels. She wrote:

Literature is one way that history can animate life so that man is returned to the center of human existence. It is man, after all, not nations, who feels the hunger caused by economic recessions and market fluctuations, who suffers separations and dislocations from social upheavals. It is in man's flesh and bones that the events of history are etched (p. 64).

Conversely, history is also one way that literature can put a form on life, and upon itself. Literature is not the place to learn history, but to understand it. Literature and history interanimate each other, but do not take each other's places (p. 67).

Among many writers who have combined fiction and history, Linda Ty-Casper has been one of the most outstanding. She has written twelve novels and many short stories about Philippine history. In *DreamEden*, she has combined historical objectivity with convincing moral authority. She has a remarkable sense of people and places and events. Her fictional characters are very real and believable. *DreamEden* succeeds, not only as an accurate and compelling historical novel, but also as a universal and timeless human story.

Philippine Historical Events

The historical background of *DreamEden* is the historical events in the Philippines—the 1986 People Power Revolution, the ouster of President Marcos, the election of Corazon Aquino, and the coup of 1989. The novel

focuses on the story of the experience of the people in and beyond Gulod, a barrio on the outskirts of Manila. The story is told through the lives of lawyer Benhur, the politician Osong for whom he works, Osong's wife Sally, the retired Colonel Moscoso, and many other characters whose lives are affected in the revolutionary change in the Philippines. Part One of *DreamEden* is a series of chapters on Gulod and all these characters. Part Two relates the Edsa Revolution of 1986 through the fictional characters. Part Three tells the story of the Post Edsa events (1986-1987), the ouster of President Marcos and the election of Corazon Aquino. The Epilogue relates the Coup of 1989. The blurb on the back cover of *DreamEden* summarizes the historical novel:

DreamEden is a portrait of the Philippines just before the Peaceful Revolution of 1986 up to the last coup in 1989. It covers the Snap Election, the flight of Ferdinand Marcos, the installation of Corazon Aquino and the attempts to revive democracy. It is a historical novel written in its own time. With historical objectivity, the novel presents the public and private experience of EDSA—the event, how people felt about it and responded to it, and what they became because of/in spite of it. It is an image by which we can be recognized as a people no longer irrelevant to ourselves or to the world.

Francisco Arcellana's analysis of *DreamEden* is also a very good summary of Casper's historical novel. He says:

DreamEden is neither paradise lost nor paradise regained. It is Eden earned! It is not Utopia, though. Neither is it necessarily euphoric. Its subject is EDSA 1986 and the year after that (1987), the beginning of awakening and the earning of Eden. The past is history, the present is perilous, the future is prophecy. The time of this novel is the recent past, so recent it is almost contemporary, because it is not yet completely past and not entirely future. The time of the novel is also the future and therefore the novel is a prophecy. It is a dream prophecy, the earning of Eden. In historical fiction the true and main protagonist is history, public or private or personal. The greatness of the fiction is the magnitude and memorability of the event itself. EDSA is not just national. It is also international, even universal. It is the Filipino contribution to the modern world. This is the source of the novel's sweep and significance. It is, moreover, a great novel, perhaps the greatest in the series of novels that Linda Ty-Casper has been composing in the past three decades. It is the greatest in her novel-cycle.

History and Morality

DreamEden reviews in fiction the political, historical, social and cultural issues in the EDSA revolution. It has a large cast of characters from rural and urban barrios, both civilians and soldiers. The novel treats the response

of these people to their socio-economic and political problems. The dream of Eden (*DreamEden*) is "longing for paradise." It becomes possible with these people in Casper's novel. *DreamEden* affirms that nations are held together by individuals who are faithful to their country, not to leaders and not to political parties, and by people who have vision, moral sense and courage.

The literary critics have emphasized the fact that historical novels concentrate not just on the heroic figures in nations, but on the variety of common people who constitute the nation. That is the essence of Casper's *DreamEden*. It is a profound observation of ordinary people in the Philippines and their relationship with their government. The achievement of *DreamEden* manifests wonderfully the validity and value of the historical novel—a fictional story of people, places and events with moral commentary.

Linda Ty-Casper writes with discipline and vision. She has a very sharp eye for the historical details which are manifestations of the moral value in her novel. Moreover, she also has a compassionate touch, and sympathy with her characters. In historical fiction people are, as she says, "returned to the center of human events."

Joseph A. Galdon, S.J.
Interdisciplinary Studies Program
Ateneo de Manila University

The Fight for Freedom: Remembering Bataan and Corregidor. By Antonio A. Nieva. Quezon City: New Day Publishers, 1997. 229 pages.

Recognition is needed in affirming the Filipino's ability to adapt to certain crises in life. Living in a land that is visited by typhoons and other calamities, Filipinos accustom themselves to their surroundings in order to survive. Through the centuries, the Philippines has witnessed its people adjusting to varied crises—wars, calamities, and other predicaments.

A test of this virtue was experienced during the Japanese Occupation of the Philippines. Being a part of the infamous Axis powers of World War II, the Japanese annexed the Philippines in order to expand its Greater East Asia Co-prosperity Sphere. It presented a platform which boasted the phrase "Asia for Asians." Yet in the process of its expansion, many people suffered. Millions were killed by Japanese military aggression.

The people of the Philippines weathered this storm. This experience may be seen in Mr. Nieva's narration of how a specific group of people witnessed, held their ground, and suffered the consequences of war. He tells of the experiences of the Reserve Officers Training Corps (ROTC)—how they moved out of Manila to the battlefields of Bataan and Corregidor under the command of the United States Armed Forces in the Far East (USAFEF). He tells