

philippine studies

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

Symposium

A Symposium on the Writer and Society

Joseph A. Galdon, S.J.

Philippine Studies vol. 36, no. 2 (1988) 183–184

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

SYMPOSIUM

A Symposium on the Writer and Society

Over a year ago, *Philippine Studies* invited a number of critics and writers to contribute to a Symposium on the Writer and Society. In the wake of the EDSA Revolution of 1986, it seemed an appropriate time to take another look at the writer and society in the Philippines. Almost fifty years had elapsed since the first articulate formulation of the writer-society relationship had appeared in Salvador P. Lopez's *Literature and Society* (1940). That volume "quickly became a landmark declaration, a historic manifesto, on the role and purpose of Philippine literature."¹ Philippine society took a distinctively new direction in 1970-72 which intensified the commitment of the majority of Philippine writers to the Lopez thesis as they challenged both the political status quo and the writers who defended Martial Law. The New Society brought to birth a whole new generation of writers with definite ideas on the role of the writers in that Society. The EDSA Revolution of 1986 marked another radical shift in Philippine society. Or was it a return to another, earlier society? The Philippine historian would say that the 1987 elections completed the 1986 Revolution and we are now in a position to determine the tentative directions of that Revolution. We are, perhaps, also in a position to redefine once again the relationship of the writer and society in the Philippines in the recent past and to hazard a guess at the nature of that relationship in the near future.

1. Salvador P. Lopez, "Literature and Society—A Literary Past Revisited," in *Literature and Society: Cross-Cultural Perspectives*, edited by Roger Bresnahan, 1976, p. 7.

It is interesting that all four contributors to the Symposium have defined society in its political, rather than its "social" dimensions. The political involvement of the writer seems to be taken for granted, even though Bautista says that "The Writer-Historian is never a politician, though he is immersed in the waters of politics." All four writers express the intrinsic tension of the writer and ideology. The social/political involvement of the writer no longer seems to be in question and the Lopez- Villa controversy is no longer relevant. The involvement of the pre-Martial Law writers with social injustice has given way to a more pointed discussion of the writer and political society. That is not surprising, given the point at which the critics stand in Philippine history.

A second point of interest in the Symposium is that all of the contributors define the writer as essentially critical of society. For them, the writer is essentially at odds with society. Casper says that "Literature in the Philippines has a lengthy history of didacticism, descending from colonial powers," and Abad writes that "(the writer) stands against society. . . . The writer is fundamentally anti-ideological." Cruz is even more explicit: "A writer is necessarily disruptive. . . . Society hates the writer because the writer always tells the truth." Bautista adds that the writer is not only critic of society, but also prophet and prognosticator of Society's future. "(Literature) is the product of the writer's skill at anticipating future events."

But the common critical stances of these writers are only half the value of their contribution. It is the differences in their approach which are equally provocative. Each, in his own way, has fulfilled their commonly accepted definition of the writer as critic of society and relentless questioner of ideology.

Joseph A. Galdon, S.J.