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## **English Cross Section: The Literary Apprentice '55** **edited by Elmer A. Ordoñez and Ernesto V. Epistola**

Review Author: Antonio T. Leetai

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it as far as possible, and, as Professor Latourette observes, "beginning at least as early as the 1880's, various synods endeavored to discourage [Chinese] Christians from feeling that they enjoyed any special privileges" (*ibid.*, VI, 268).

In general it may be said that the objectivity of Mr. Panikkar's account of the impact of Christianity on Asia suffers from his preconceived notion that Christianity is a form of Western aggression—the running dog, if we may borrow an urbane communist phrase, of Western imperialism. Yet Mr. Panikkar's profound knowledge of the religious traditions of his own country should warn him against any such facile identification of politics and religion. Buddhism, for instance, originated in India, yet its diffusion beyond the borders of India was neither the consequence nor the cause of political domination. And certainly this "foreign" religion is today as much a part of the highly individualized cultures of China and Japan as Taoism and Shinto, which are of native growth.

Islam was conceived in the Near East, whence, incidentally, Christianity also sprang; yet who shall say that Islam is "foreign" to India or Indonesia, or that a Pan-Islamic movement is necessarily the prelude to the political domination of Asia by Egypt? This being the case, will not Mr. Panikkar concede at least the possibility that the religion founded by a Galilean Jew might, as Robert de Nobili and Matteo Ricci hoped, become as native to Asia as it is to Europe? In fact, this possibility is already, at least in part, a reality in one Asian country; and it is perhaps, a rough indication of the limitations of Mr. Panikkar's remarkable work that it has very little to say about the Philippines.

H. DE LA COSTA

## ENGLISH CROSS SECTION

THE LITERARY APPRENTICE '55. Edited by Elmer A. Ordoñez and Ernesto V. Epistola. Published for the U.P. Writers' Club by the College of Liberal Arts, University of the Philippines, Quezon City. 1955.

This collection of literary pieces in many genres will interest Filipino readers for various reasons. It furnishes a fair sampling of the work of modern Filipino writers showing very commend-

able competence in their handling of English; there are two symposia which set in discernible perspective the state of English belle-lettres and of the fine arts in the Philippines; the examples of fiction afford a hint on the thematic preferences of our young short story writers; the verse specimens coax speculation on the ability of our poets to translate exactly and artistically and with genuine feeling their experience into the accents of the current poetic idiom.

Mr. Manuel A. Viray's "The Burden of Illumination," one of the essays in the Symposium on Letters, appraises the literary situation and finds in it, besides the unachieved mastery of the techniques of the writing craft, a lack of a clearly defined intellectual and spiritual center among our writers. There is, in his words, no moral composure in their works. He makes a plea for "moral poise." There comes the feeling, as one reads on, that here is something good and fine for the cultivation of our writers, but one waits in vain for the unequivocal formulation of this moral poise. One wishes that Mr. Viray had elucidated more at length on the distinct outlines of this moral discipline.

Mr. Leonard Casper, speaking with the disinterested viewpoint of an outsider, points up the pertinent literary problems of the Filipino writer in English, and indicates possible fruitful directions not only for the writer but also for the reading public in general. For the writer he recommends: "The standards must come from achieved literature, visibly resplendent in its perfection, and not from nationalism nor from subjective imaginings or evasions of any person." And for all: "The vocation of all is a soul-satisfying culture. A competitive cooperation, therefore, seems called for, each man trying to outdo the others for the good of all." Apropos of these pronouncements one might profitably read in the same collection Mr. Casper's "Lively Liberator, the Avenging Arts" and Mr. Jose A. Lansang's "Nationalism and the Filipino Intellectual."

When we turn to the short stories in the collection, we cannot resist the temptation to quote a passage from Mr. Viray's essay mentioned above:

Some of the more palpable inadequacies of our contemporary literary life are: . . . literary *exercises* using the symbols of James Joyce, the rhythms of D. H. Lawrence, the verbal explosions of Truman Capote, and the crisp stylization of Ernest Hemingway;

weakness in characterization in Philippine fiction; use of inartistic strategies showing that the treatment of delicate subjects like sex, hypocrisy, and lust for power is no better than the tabloids'; and the absence of a dramatic center in prose and poetry.

One admires among the short-story writers in the collection a happy current of prose, self-conscious in places but in the main effortless and felicitous. One feels however a sense of want in other values that make significant fiction. Plot, narrative and dramatic action are for the most part neglected in favor of psychological exploration of the inner reaches of personality and character. One would not quarrel with this if the characters were worth the exploring. They do not seem so. In spite of lavish care at delineating them, they leave one unsatisfied. They are too much alike. Drawn mainly from the "Waste Land" of modern life, they strike identical poses: they are weary, frustrated, subdued, moving about in a twilight world of shattered hearts and minds and illusions.

Mr. Godofredo M. Roperos in "A Summer Catechism" attempts a flesh-and-bones character in the shape of a self-assertive boy defying the "tyranny" of his entire adult world to make him learn his catechism. The effort is unconvincing. It is not a boy; it is an adult masquerading in the limbs of a boy. At the end of the story, our hero is shown emerging from a forbidden swim in the sea in violation of his mother's orders. On the shore waiting for him is his mother, with a stick:

I went to the log and picked up my clothes. I did not put them on. She said: Put them on. I shook my head. Put them on, she said. No, I wont, I said. Put them on, she said. But I did not put them on. Then she whipped me again. She whipped me with the stick. It was very painful. It was like being bathed in pepper.

But I did not cry anymore.

There springs to mind the surly Achilles shaking his fist at the whole Greek host for the loss of his captive slave girl. And like Achilles our stripling rebel is uninteresting.

We encounter in several of the short stories instances of what Mr. Viray alludes to as "inartistic strategies." There is for example a distinct note of hostility towards religion. Is

this from conviction? Or is it just a literary pose? A reasoned and convinced opposition to religion one can respect. But when a writer will not even show the elementary courtesy of acquainting himself with the true nature of the thing he is attacking but is content to set up religious straw-men of his own conception, then one suspects that the disparagement of religion is only a convenient literary device to achieve, let us say, the appearance of "modernity." It is a weak avowal that one's literary feet are in the stream of correct progressive attitudes.

Again we come upon such inartistic strategy in the irresponsible and wholly unnecessary intrusion of sex into the stories. We cannot see that such intrusion adds any dimension to the stories. One suspects again a hard try on the part of the authors at making their writing look "mature" and in the true tradition of the fashionable best-sellers. The strategy is too transparent.

In the matter of sex, Mr. Morli Dharam's "Neya" deserves a severer censure. Here is no mere casual allusion to sex. Here one senses that the author's main interest is not in the narrative which on the surface presents a respectable story of an over-aged adolescent pulling himself painfully from the hold of an infatuation; rather one discovers in the numerous flashbacks a definite fascination for the sex elements in the episodes. There is a feebly concealed pattern of selection of sex-laden incidents, a palpable effort to squeeze them dry of their prurient qualities. If this story may not be classified as flatly pornographic it comes very close to being such.

The lone specimen of play-writing, Mr. Alejandrino G. Hufana's "Man in the Moon" is very hard to characterize. The author styles this play on Rizal's last hours at Fort Santiago a "comedy" in one act. What conception of comedy is being used? Does the presence of light or frivolous lines (v.g. the incident of Mr. Lapulapu and Magellan) in a basically serious-toned play make comedy? There are too many serious voices in this play which do not fuse congruously with the lighter tones. One is at a loss to establish the attitude of the author towards his material. The play is loosely structured, consisting mainly of seemingly unrelated episodes faded in and out by the mechanical device of trick lighting. Dramatic tension is at a minimum, climaxes are weak; hence no sense of progression or of completeness at the end of the play.

"The Artist's Viewpoint," a symposium by practicing artists contains several interesting discussions on miscellaneous aspects of the fine arts in the country. Written in simple, straightforward style unencumbered by technical terms, the essays leave the reader with a sense of grateful release from the complexities and intricate issues of literary criticism that perhaps may have vexed him in his reading of the other literary pieces.

And now the poetry. It is the easiest thing to be impatient with all modern verse, and impute to the poetry in this collection Mr. Viray's characterization of modern Filipino verse in English: "... recognizable derivations in poetry, the nuance and accent of our versifiers sounding like ridiculous mimics of Dylan Thomas, John Ciardi, Richard Wilbur, Anthony Hecht, T. S. Eliot." We shall resist the impulse.

Wide-ranging in theme, hard and crisp in accent, many-degreed in intensity, many-voiced in tone, most of the verses in this collection realize a genuine if partial success. Feeling and meaning fuse in the lines. With few exceptions however the poems are marred by the inevitable "difficulty" of modern verse. Careful and repeated reading, it is true, will often yield many satisfactions—the lines blossom out in virile cadences, sharply tensioned imagery, brilliant diction. But some of the lines refuse to surrender their total secret even to persistent effort.

The freedom of movement allowed by meterless and rhymeless verse tempts the poet to verbal fireworks and linguistic virtuosity which, while they draw the curiosity and even admiration of the reader, often fail to move him. He feels the poet is not communicating his thought and feeling but is showing off his craftsmanship in words. So some of these poems, truly admirable in many respects, remain only partial realizations. The poet remains hidden in his world of many-splendored but private symbolism. One could wish at times—reading, for example, Mr. Casper's "Constant G for Galileo" and Mr. Bonifacio's "Three Themes at the Hill-top"—that the poets had provided some kind of a key for a richer enjoyment of their poems. But footnotes to a poem would, I suppose, be anathema to modern poets who firmly believe that nothing explains the poem but itself.

A collection such as *The Literary Apprentice* deserves a genuine welcome. It fills many needs and serves many uses in the literary situation of Filipinos writing in English.

ANTONIO T. LEETA