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Sophisticated Anthology: Six Filipino Poets edited by Leonard Casper

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SOPHISTICATED ANTHOLOGY

SIX FILIPINO POETS. Edited by Leonard Casper. The Benipayo Press, Publishers. Manila. 1954. Pp. xviii-75. Paperbound ₱1.50. Clothbound ₱2.00.

Mr. Casper's competence to edit a volume of poetry is obvious. He holds a doctorate from the University of Wisconsin, has held a fellowship in creative writing at Stanford, followed by a year of teaching at Cornell. It was apparently at Stanford that he first became acquainted with Filipino writers. He has come to the Philippines to be of service to our literary compatriots, chiefly at the University of the Philippines, but this summer also at the Ateneo de Manila.

The six poets whom he has chosen for inclusion in this anthology are: Amador Daguio, Oscar de Zuñiga, Edith L. Tiempo, Dominador Ilio, Carlos Angeles, and Ricaredo Demetillo. This is a neat little volume, handsomely printed and with an attractive bookjacket — a credit to the Benipayo Press. This little volume is part of the "Benipayo Series on Philippine Contemporary Writing." There is an introduction by Mr. Casper, and a charming preface by N. V. M. Gonzalez. And there are introductory notices and biographical notes.

This is not the place to attempt an evaluation of each of the poets—much less of each of the poems—included in the anthology. But if one might venture a superficial comment, based on a cursory reading of the forty or so poems in the collection, one might perhaps say that the book leaves one with a double impression, the one favorable, the other less so. One is favorably impressed by the ease of utterance, a certain naturalness of phrasing and idiom. These are not six Filipino poets writing in an alien tongue: they are six Filipino poets writing in a language all their own, as much their own as if they had been born in England or America. Which seems to lend support to an observation we have made more than once (*PHILIPPINE STUDIES* I:14-15; 79) that English, though not autochthonous, has become acclimatized in the Philippines. It is a language no longer foreign to us Filipinos; it has become part of our many-faceted culture, part of our rich heritage.

The other impression is somewhat less favorable. One feels in these poems an absence of form, and this at two levels.

On the surface level of prosody, one regrets a certain lack of discipline. Whatever might be said against the use of rhyme or meter, this much could be said in their favor that they do impose a discipline on language which, if handled well, could achieve the

paradoxical effect of liberating thought. If rhyme and meter are set aside, one must find some other structural material that could achieve the same result. These poems, some without meter and most without rhyme, do not always find a substitute formula of control. And this is what we mean by a lack of form on the surface level of prosody.

But there seems to be a lack of form at an even profounder level, the level of organization of thought and of symbols. Most of these pieces are poems of statement — fragmentary, private little statements, charming at best, but never profoundly moving because never profound. Only one or two seem to approach that unity-in-complexity which seems essential to all good poetry, even of the lighter sort.

In an age when sophisticated writers pride themselves on their sophistication, it might seem paradoxical to say that the trouble with many of them is precisely that they are not sophisticated enough: for sophistication is form.

MIGUEL A. BERNAD

CONCRETE UNIVERSAL

THE VERBAL ICON. *Studies in the Meaning of Poetry.* By W. K. Wimsatt, Jr. University of Kentucky Press. 1954. Pp. xviii-299. \$4.00.

Professor Wimsatt of Yale is a man of stature — in more senses than one. Physically, he is almost exactly seven feet tall, and his giant figure, as he walks or bicycles his way from building to building in the university, is a familiar sight in New Haven. Intellectually, he is a titan, as this book will amply prove.

It is a profound book: for Professor Wimsatt has the advantage of having been brought up in the classical and the scholastic tradition (at Georgetown University), and at the same time of being at home in the non-scholastic philosophical systems. It may well be that his best contribution to critical knowledge is his attempting (and to a degree achieving) a synthesis of scholastic and non-scholastic poetics.

Or more accurately, his best contribution to poetics is his approach to it, for he approaches it with an open mind, but with a thoroughly trained mind, a mind with a sense of both logic and history.

The first two essays in the book were written in collaboration with Professor M. C. Beardsley, at one time a member of the philosophy department at Yale. They refute the "intentional fallacy" on the one hand, and the "affective fallacy" on the other.