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## **Ritmo ng Lingkaw: Mga Bagong Tulang Premyado At Iba Pa**

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This Filipino, for one, would be much happier if he would follow instead the anthropologist's practice of calling people what they call themselves — Ilocanos, Cebuanos, Bicolanos, or whatever.

The book belongs in any library with Philippine, Latin American, or Southeast Asian interests. The book is a good one, and because of it we are in Dr. Hart's debt (peso-earners who want personal copies of the book are likely to be in his publisher's debt as well).

Frank Lynch, S.J.

RITMO NG LINGKAW: MGA BAGONG TULANG PREMYADO AT IBA PA. By Federico Licsi Espino, Jr. Manila: Solidaridad Publishing House, 1978. 106 pages.

Outstanding among current trends in Philippine literature and literary scholarship are (1) a deepening need for rediscovering what Renato Constantino has called a "reusable past"; (2) an intensifying of the effort toward producing literature in the language of the common Filipino; (3) an emphasis on those aspects of the Filipino personality which are believed to be distinctive and therefore self-defining; and (4) a broadening as well as a deepening of the social awareness content of literature. The trends have oscillated nervously between the extremes of nativism and chauvinism. But the message is clear: a genuine effort toward nationalism. The Filipino self-defining and self-asserting act has been most strongly articulated in the arts in literature in particular. Espino's *Ritmo ng Lingkaw* exemplifies all these.

The book is divided into three parts: "Lawrel at Lipay," "Sanga-sangang Ilog," and "Gintong Ani." It is the last part that is referred to by "Mga Tulang Premyado" in the title of the book. It is made up of "Maktan: Sa Bisperas ng Digmaan," which won the Palanca Award for Tagalog poetry in 1975-76, and "Indak at Indayog" which won in the poetry division of the Cultural Center of the Philippines literary contest in 1969-1974. It is also probably this part that is alluded to by "lingkaw" (sickle) in the title: it is the "Gintong Ani" (golden harvest).

"Maktan: Sa Bisperas ng Digmaan" is an interpretation of the historical events that began in Cebu and Maktan in 1521, and of the people who have been associated with those places and events: Magalhaes (Magellan), Lapu-lapu, and a symbolic character with a sonorous name, Hamabar, alias Carlos. These places and names are devices for poetic fabric unfolding the historical "soulcape" of the Philippines through the centuries, and seen by hindsight. This is how our poet presents "a past revisited" (apologies to Prof. R. Constantino again). The device is exquisitely handled, in view of his poetic objective: the creation of a living mural of the politico-moral conflict of Lapu-lapu and Hamabar/Carlos, with emphasis not so much on what the foreign

conqueror does but on what the native does to what the foreigner had to offer. He is offered, for example, the name "Carlos" in exchange for "Hamar," the young "Santo Niño" of Cebu in exchange for the old gods Laon, Sidapa, and their kind. By his choice, the native creates his destiny. The mosaic Espino creates, with the near-magical verbal dexterity he is known for, is close to what may be sweetness and a lot of light. Suffice it to say that he has succeeded in saying so well what many have often thought and said but have never said so well. The frequent and sudden appearance of proverbs, sometimes with a delightful twist, is one of the pleasures of his poetry (an effort to put new wine in an old wine skin).

"Indak at Indayog" is a meditation on native dances toward what he calls "Metapisika ng Sayaw" (p. 106). This is a resourceful use of what generally may appear least philosophical among the elements of Filipino folk culture. How Espino has ascended from the vision of anatomical movements and the rhythm of musical tempo to the vision of a national history and character is to be commended.

Now to the poems referred to as "iba pa" on the cover. Not least of his distinctions has been his ability to write with equal ease in English, Spanish, Pilipino, and one or other Filipino vernacular — and win high distinctions in them. One has a glimpse of this literary polyglotism in this book. I do not think, however, that Espino intended the volume to be a mere exhibition of this talent.

In Part One: "Lawrel," one reads four poems — all about the destitute and the urchins of the city. Under "Lipay," are five poems about the oppressive, "plastic" society of the corrupt elite and empty colonials. Espino pokes much fun (with a dose of cynicism) at their religion, their readings, their funerals, and all. Definitely, this is the poet's contribution to the current literature of social awareness. Neither new nor original, but certainly *in* with some powerful literary circles of the country today.

Part Two: "Sanga-sangang Ilog" is in four languages: Tagalog, Ilokano, Ilonggo, and Kapampangan. The poems written in the last two vernaculars are translations (the Ilonggo from Tagalog by Guillermo Gomez Rivera and Gilbert Luis Centina III; and the Kapampangan from Spanish by Celestino Manaloto Vega). The title of this part seems to be Espino's commentary on the multilingualism that plagues the nation, a plague that is probably more superficial than essential. But there appear tonal differences among the regionalized Filipinos: the Tagalogs in the poems are obsessed with social and economic ills, and show forth intimations of violence (even the moon is "sundang na pilak") (p. 28); stalled traffic is "dugong namuo" and a scar in a boy's face conjures up visions of knives and bloodshed (p. 30). The refrain of the Ilokano poems, on the other hand, seems to be "Agkararagka" (pray) (pp. 33, 35, 36). And so on. It is the tonal differences (suggestive of the cultural pluralism in the nation) that intimate deeper trouble. It is this

intuition into trouble that puts Espino in the good company of those who sing sweet songs, the songs about "saddest thought." Indeed, there is much sad thought in *Ritmo ng Lingkaw* – Rhythm of the Sickie. (Does it allude to an ideology, too?) But the dexterity of Espino's power with words plus a good amount of humor, often playful, sometimes biting, and cynical, always suggestive, makes his poetry very readable, even if at times it appears to be straining toward aphorism (a concession to the nativism represented by the proverb?).

The poems in the first two parts of the book do not make a book sublime nor a vision transcendent. They are a whimper in the twilight, a groan in a night illumined only by the silver sickle of a moon. They cry in the hope for a "banaag at sikat." *Ritmo ng Lingkaw* is a difficult rhythm: it is for bare nimble feet and calloused hands. It is good reading for everyone, too, though one needs to have read as widely as Espino to be able to savor fully his poetry.

Florentino H. Hornedo

THE COMEDIA (MORO-MORO) REDISCOVERED. By Dr. Felicidad Mendoza. Privately published, 1976. 310 pages.

The title of Part 2 of this book, "Notes and Memories of a Comedia Enthusiast," could well serve as subtitle for the book. Dr. Mendoza, a dentist, has long been associated with the *komedya*. She is from Parañaque, one of the few towns in Metro Manila where the *komedya* is still a living tradition. She has not only been a devotee of this theater form since childhood, but has directed presentations, written the much-performed *Prinsesa Perlita* as well as *komedyas* for children, and founded Kudyapi, Philippines, a *komedya* theater group. Her book is a compendium of her readings, experiences, thoughts, and findings on the *komedya* and some related forms.

Dr. Mendoza begins by gathering together various historical notes and conjecturing on the origin of the form. She starts with the 1637 play, *Gran comedia de la toma del Pueblo de Corralat y conquista del Cerro*, written by Jeronimo Perez, S.J. (and not by the Jesuit Provincial Juan de Salazar, as Dr. Mendoza and various other sources erroneously have it) to celebrate the victory of General Sebastian Hurtado de Corcuera over Cachil Corralat (Kudarat). This play is called by Retana the first *comedia* written in the country "con asunto filipino." Since, in Spanish drama, any three-act play in verse is called a *comedia*, one cannot conclude that this play, or the *comedias* mentioned by Morga and others, evolved directly into the Philippine *komedya*. The Perez play was about Filipino Moros and Spanish Christians; the *komedyas* are always about non-Filipino Moros and *Cristianos* in conflicts taking place in the European settings (real or imagined) of metrical romances.