

philippine studies

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

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Isagani R. Cruz

Philippine Studies vol. 36, no. 2 (1988) 191–194

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A Deconstructive Meditation on the Writer and Society

ISAGANI R. CRUZ

Who, or what, is a writer?

A writer is a problematic individual, says genetic structuralist Lucien Goldmann, who ought to know, since he is himself indisputably problematic as a structuralist and clearly too individual to be a Marxist. As an individual who does not belong, the writer may be the real-world equivalent of Albert Camus' stranger or Jose Rizal's Crisostomo Ibarra, being neither *in* society nor *of* it. Mao Zedong, or his local clone Jose Maria Sison, may never emerge from the logical hole that the writer has dug for him. The writer is not a peasant who works with the land, nor a worker who works with his hands, nor a soldier who carries arms to fight the fascist forces of the state, nor a petty bourgeois ally who earns honest or dishonest money (since the writer does not earn money at all), clearly not a capitalist, and certainly not an imperialist from some foreign country.

In short, the writer has no place in civilized society.

The writer, however, insists on leading society if not by the hand, then by the nose. Who have written the history of societies, if not writers? Who have changed the face of societies, if not writers with many faces? Andres Bonifacio wrote poetry, and the man who helped him launch the first Philippine revolution by opposing it, Jose Rizal, wrote much more than poetry. Mao, of course, was a poet, and so is, in a manner, Sison. Ferdinand Marcos styled himself a poet, and Thomas Jefferson did not realize that he was a poet, though he knew that he was a writer. Karl Marx was a writer in both his ambitions and his career, and so was Frederick Engels. Only Jesus among the great prophets did not write a single word, but that was because He did not have to, since He was Himself the Word.

In short, history is full of examples of writers changing the world.

How does a writer change the world? By disbelieving in it. The writer's role is to cast doubt, to cast aspersions, to cast a net of disbelief and cynicism and nihilism. In a democratic society, the writer must veer to the left. In a communist society, the writer must veer to the right. In a feudal society, the writer is a union leader. In a classless society, the writer is an aristocrat. In heaven, the writer blasphemes against the Holy Spirit. In hell, the writer sings psalms. In short, the writer's role is to lay bare the hypocrisy at the root of all sincere persons, the goodness at the root all evil persons, the secret conversations saints hold with demons, the sanctity of sinners.

That is why the Filipino writer raved against the Spaniards when Spain was the colonial power, against the Americans when America replaced Spain, against the Japanese when the Japanese defeated the Americans, against the Americans again when the Americans returned, against Marcos when Marcos was King. That is why the Filipino writer raves and will rave against Cory Aquino now that Cory Aquino is Queen.

A society should ban writers and writing, as Plato immediately realizes as he creates his mythical Republic, because a writer is necessarily disruptive. But Plato himself admits that a society must always have writers to create its myths. The writer is not only a destroyer of myths, but also a creator of myths, not necessarily of different myths, but often of the same myths. If a nation, as political historians now tell us, is merely an imagined community, then it is the writer who first imagines a nation, who creates a nation out of his imagination, who creates the myth that becomes the nation in the imagination of those who live within the society. Nations do not deserve writers; it is writers who deserve nations.

Michel Foucault calls the writer a creation of text. That is only half correct. The reader is also a creation of texts. In fact, the text is a creation of the writer and the reader and the text, but of these three, the writer is first among equals. Without the writer, the text would not mean nor be. The text would not even come into being. It is the writer's being that creates the text that creates the reader that creates the writer. It is a full circle, but a circle that is viciously broken by the writer, who is the perfect circle. Perhaps, it is more accurate to describe the writer as a null set, an empty circle, a sphere that contains nothing, a *nada* at the heart of a world of *nada*.

Jacques Derrida is closer to the truth: writing precedes everything, including speech. But Derrida should go further: writing precedes everything, including language. Or more accurately, the writer precedes everything else, including human beings. From Derrida, we know that a writer is the most advanced form of evolving humanity, because the writer is the perfect Freudian magic slate, with conscious and unconscious always in touch. Just as writing is the intersection of the psychological worlds of the ego, the writer is the intersection of the collective consciousness and the collective unconsciousness. The writer is the gap that writing fills. If "to write" is neither a transitive nor an intransitive verb, as Roland Barthes wants to prove, then "the writer" is neither a common nor a proper noun, as Foucault should want to prove. If space is not a void between masses of matter, but the solid mass between spheres of emptiness, then the writer occupies the space between worlds.

It is a writer's world. Writers have known that since they created the world. Society, however, trying to forget that it is merely a creation of the writer, keeps trying to forget the writer. The writer and society, trapped in a classic love-hate relationship, keep trying to forget each other. The writer writes in isolation, preferring the solitude of the pen or the typewriter or the word processor to the bustle of the marketplace or the political podium or the family. Society, indulging itself in a fantasy of economic, political, and social activity, ignores the writer by marginalizing writers' organizations, by depressing writers' fees, by discriminating against writers' manners. Who will win in the end? Only the writer can tell, because it is the writer who has created the game.

Society hates the writer because the writer always tells the truth, and if the truth cannot be told, then the writer creates the truth. Never compromising, never fantasizing, never politicking, except in real life, the writer strikes fear in the hearts of those who can only write, but are not writers. On the other hand, the writer hates society because society always censors writing, always demands a full day's work, always wants to read only what it wants to read. Never should the twain meet, except that they are joined through their head, like Siamese twins. Indeed, the writer and society are much more than twins. The writer and society are one flesh, one blood, one being.

Writers have written dozens of apologetics for their very lives, but such apologetics have simply been anthologized, never really read. No apology, however, is necessary, because no affront has been committed. If

anything has been committed, it is the writer, who is committed to nothing else but commitment itself. Society does not demand, nor does it deserve, an apology or an *apologia* or an *Apo* (as in Ilocano) or *logos* (as in Greek). Society deserves only what it does not deserve—the writer's continuing commitment to it and continuing life in it.

Who, then, is the writer? What, then, is society? Only the writer knows, and the writer is not telling.