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## Essay on Literature and Society in Southeast Asia

Review Author: Joseph A. Galdon, S.J.

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combines approaches used in literary history and social history. The result is a fascinating study of individual writers and their milieu. Lastly, by raising crucial issues related not only to purely aesthetic concerns but to the relationship between poetry and politics, Almarino has succeeded in problematizing a number of areas which ought to be discussed more rigorously in other forums.

*Balagtasismo Versus Modernismo* does not pass itself off as the definitive answer to the myriad questions plaguing literary history and criticism, especially in this period of crisis. The book remains the result of a critic's perception and understanding of a specific area of cultural life. That this critical project has chosen not merely to affirm taken-for-granted realities, but to question and subvert these presuppositions is a healthy sign that there still exist some areas for dissent and constructive criticism. It is to Almarino's credit that he has decided to write a book that confronts basic issues related to politics and history.

*Soledad S. Reyes*  
*Department of English*  
*Ateneo de Manila University*

ESSAYS ON LITERATURE AND SOCIETY IN SOUTHEAST ASIA: POLITICAL AND SOCIOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVES. Edited by Tham Seong Chee. Singapore: Singapore University Press, 1981. xii, 360 pages.

The focus of this volume is on literature as a sociological phenomenon in contemporary Southeast Asian societies, a sociological as well as a literary manifestation of the process of change and modernization. "It is not a literary study in the conventional sense where the intrinsic properties of plot, characterization, and literary style dominate. It is a critical account of literature as a societal phenomenon . . ." (p. vii). There are two articles each on Burma, Indonesia, the Philippines, Thailand, Malaysia and Vietnam. There is only one article, however, on Cambodia, one on Singapore, and one very interesting article by John Clammer on Straits Chinese literature. The editor says it was not possible to obtain a contribution on Laos. Each article includes a bibliography of the more important works on literature discussed.

There is no doubt that literature is a "social creation." But the deeper question which has occupied literary critics is whether literature is expressive of society, or determinative. Traditional criticism has pretty much accepted De Bonald's dictum that "literature is an expression of society" for literature does provide a rich source for the study of social history, customs, culture and the political milieu. But literature, on the other hand, can also be studied

as a determinant of society. Tham Seong Chee defines this approach as follows: "State supported literary development is . . . a device of political development, for the structuring of a common political culture . . . . Literature . . . has been used by the literary propagandist to actively promote a political viewpoint, motivated by the desire to either remove existing beliefs or to destroy them" (p. 217). Borrowing an insight from Michael Zeraffa, Chee says that literature is bound up with particular moments in the history of a society and that it is concerned with the nature of our situation in history, and the direction in which that situation is to move (*Roman et Societe*, pp. 11-34).

One of the chief virtues of this present volume is that its authors and its articles represent the broad sweep of sociological criticism from one extreme to the other—from literature as an instrument of change to literature as an expression of change. Anna Allot and John Badgley, for example, in their articles on "Government Policy and Popular Practice" and "Intellectuals and the National Vision" give an excellent survey of the Burmese Government's use of literature as an instrument of change. The Government position is that literature and writers should "function in line with socialist construction policies and activities in educating and organizing the masses . . . curb decadent writings and promote national culture . . . (and) contribute to national unity" (p. 30). At the other end of the spectrum are a number of articles which study national literatures as reflections of social conditions. Among them are Tham Seong Chee's "The Social and Intellectual Ideas of Indonesian Writers, 1920-1942," Koh Tai Ann's "Singapore Writing in English: The Literary Tradition and Cultural Identity," and Srisurang Poolthupya's "Social Change as Seen in Modern Thai Literature."

Three themes keep reappearing throughout the essays in this collection. They are colonialism, ethnic consciousness and language. Tham Seong Chee says: "With the advent of colonial domination much of what was native—language, culture and literature—did not develop further, sometimes as a result of benign neglect, or deliberate suppression or both" (p. 97). Much of the discussion in these essays centers therefore, around the attempts to remove the colonial domination and to retrieve the native cultural riches. The subsequent rebellion against colonial domination was occasioned by an increasing sense of "ethnic consciousness." "The literary works exemplify the unfolding of ethnic consciousness in a world undergoing rapid transformation . . ." (p. 347). And ethnic consciousness inevitably led to the sense of nationalism, which "involves the transformation of a nation's differing cultural identities by imposing on it a supra-national identity . . ." (p. 219). One way of achieving that national identity was by the imposition of a common political culture. Another was by imposing a single language and the literature linked to it. The language problem has been one of the most per-

plexing areas of contrast. For even after the independence of most of the Southeast Asian colonies a significant proportion of writers in these countries continue to write in the colonial language, while an ever-increasing number write in the national language and consider literature in any other language as unnational and even detrimental. On the other hand, Han Suyin says that language is really not that important and defines Malaysian literature, for example, as "those writings (drama, novel, short story, play and verse), which by emotion, identification, description, social context and involvement relate to Malaysia and Singapore, whether written in Malay, Chinese, Tamil or English" (p. 219).

Of particular interest to the readers of *Philippine Studies* are the two articles on Philippine literature. Father Miguel Bernad's article on "Philippine Literature in English: Some Sociological Considerations" discusses only Philippine writing in English and briefly traces the reasons for its growth. He then outlines some of the characteristics of that new literature in English. In Fr. Bernad's view, literature in English was a "young literature written by the young and for the young" (p. 149). It was largely a rural literature strongly influenced by American writers and American models, largely secular in tone, with a surprising absence of religious dimension, a minority literature. Fr. Bernad concludes: "Philippine literature [in English] will continue to flourish, at least for some time. There will still be writers, including some excellent ones, who will continue to write in English. But they will be writing for a reading public that will be decreasing in size and possibly also in importance. Philippine literature in English may end where it had begun; it had started as a venture of a small minority; it may be heading back in that same direction" (p. 155). B.S. Medina, Jr. traces the history of the more committed writers in the Philippines, largely in the native languages, and their commitment to Philippine independence in his article on "Pagbabago: the Conscious Commitment." "In the Philippines, the people's demand for change . . . is demonstrated as protest against all shapes of inhumanity. This protest has provided the Tagalog writer a specific commitment—to write for a cause, with effect" (pp. 142-43). The contrast between the writer in Tagalog and the writer in English in these two articles of Medina and Bernad is perhaps unfair. I would have been happier with one article which traced the sociological roots and the revolutionary commitment of both English and Tagalog as expressions of one sensibility.

The editor of this collection, Tham Seong Chee, sums up the main points of this volume in an excellent Introduction and an After-word (sic). "Social change," he says, "constitutes the single most important influence on literary development . . ." (p. 346). "Southeast Asian literatures exemplify one dominating fact, and that is the struggle to find meaning, purpose and identity in the many changes brought about since the advent of Western influence

on the region. This struggle continues to assume many forms ranging from responses of a highly personalized or subjective character to the ideological and uncompromisingly critical" (p. vii). This collection of essays, by some of the more perspective critics of Southeast Asia, is a significant contribution to understanding both the literature and the society of the region.

*Joseph A. Galdon, S.J.  
Department of English  
Ateneo de Manila University*

CRACKED MIRROR. By Edilberto K. Tiempo. Quezon City: New Day Publishers, 1984. 219 pages.

Using the motifs of possession, search, loss and eventual rejuvenation, in this novel Edilberto Tiempo peels off the characters' outer selves to reveal their psyches. The story evolves from an overpossessive mother who dominates her daughter's actions and thinking, to make up for a repressed and lonely childhood. A brother's attempt to help his sister is frustrated by the latter's death. In spite of his business success, the memory of his sister's harrowing experience haunts him in his relationships with women. He is, however, unshackled from the psychological burden by a gradual recognition of the tragic events of the past that constitute the pieces of the cracked mirror of his life. The conflict is resolved by love, which culminates the search for inner peace.

Delfin Olivar, agri-business graduate of UP Los Baños, with a master's degree (with honors) from the Asian Institute of Management, has inherited vast tracts of land from his father, and has "adopted his father's rule never to sell any piece of land, but to add to what was already owned . . ." (p. 2). The most lucrative of the Olivar family holdings are mango plantations in San Antonio, Cotabato. Sheer business acumen and his father's business contacts enable Delfin to live comfortably and move with ease in social circles. Toshiro Marayuma, his father's business associate, becomes his partner in a multinational corporation engaged in fruit production, canning and packaging, with branches in some Asian and US Pacific cities.

On a business trip to Manila, Delfin is "startled to see a girl who looked like Araceli" (p. 1), his half-sister who died in a fall from a stairway, and had been haunted by her mother Marcela's sudden apparitions. Marcela was a well-known actress whom an unfortunate love affair with a movie actor had driven to the nunnery, which, she came to realize after some years, was not a place for refuge. She found solace in the love of Don Diego, an elderly man with whom she lived in loveless union, but in gratitude for having rescued her from the "polluted house" (p. 8). Marcela's love for Celi was "a possessive love that left a little room for her husband . . . [and tried] to