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The Ravens: A Selection of Philippine Writing

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

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scholars which the country abounds in, he admits.

In effect, then, *Beyond Futility*, the precious little book, has given us precious much by way of an optimistic view, regarding this field of study. Still and all, local literary critics can thrive only in the rich soil and climate of a truly flourishing local literature. There can be no vigorous Philippine Literary Criticism where there is no vigorous Philippine literature.

Finally, whatever the literary theory, Filipino-oriented or not, the best critic is one who utilizes a critical apparatus that has the greater scope and flexibility.

We of course await Cruz's promised next volume, the braver, bigger book, hopefully this time entitled, *Beyond Cavil*, The Filipino as Critic. It is only Cruz with his perceptiveness, his stamina and genuine sympathy for the arts in the country, who could come up with the criticism of local criticism, to which *Beyond Futility* may be said to be just an eye-opener or some kind of prolegomena.

Ophelia Alcantara-Dimalanta
College of Arts and Letters
University of Santo Tomas

THE RAVENS: A SELECTION OF PHILIPPINE WRITING. Edited by Andres Cristobal Cruz. Manila: Philippine Education Co., Inc., 1980. xx, 211 pages.

The Ravens is an old book (1980) and was little reviewed when it first appeared, perhaps because of both its purpose and its contents. (The cover blurb describes it as "an unprecedented variety in Philippine literary publishing.") It is a "selection" of Philippine writing, narrower in scope than an anthology, and therefore suffers from the problem of subjective choice even more than the usual anthology. (The authors made the selections of their works themselves.) The contents are limited to the work of a small and pre-defined group of writers and therefore the book suffers in quality as well. But the volume has traded range and quality in exchange for a rather interesting portrait of a period and a group of writers. That is its chief merit.

The Ravens is a collection (the editor calls it a "veritable concordance") of "prize selections" spanning three decades by an "unusual writers' group." The Ravens are fifteen young writers who came together one way or another in the early fifties when "the wounds of war in (Manila) were yet to heal" (p. x). Among them the better known are Adrian Cristobal, Andres Cristobal Cruz, Elmer Ordoñez, Pacifico Aprieto, Rony Diaz, Hilario Francia, Alejandro Hufana, and Raul Ingles. Their muse was Virgie Moreno and their writings were a significant contribution to postwar Philippine writing in English.

Among the short stories in this collection are Aprieto's "The Case Against

Marcelo Dungo, Watchman" and Diaz's "A Voyage By Raft to Easter Island." There is also Cristobal's "I, Suliman" which I re-read with even greater appreciation than when I first came across it years ago, for the years have been good to it, and in the midst of contemporary politics it has taken on an added patina of relevance. Maro Santaromana's "Refrigerated Rose" still reads well, but Godofredo Roperos's "Myself At The Age of Seven" and Cruz's "The Other Brotherhood" are less competent. "The Other Brotherhood," particularly, is dated by its basic theme which, even at best, was a somewhat forced metaphor.

The Raven poets include Armando Bonifacio, Cruz, Francia, Hufana, Ingles, Bernardo de Leon, and Nick Nicolas. Bonifacio is too much of a philosopher to be a good poet, just as Cruz is too much of a politician. A graduate student or a cocktail party raconteur would have a field day tracing the allusions in Cruz's "Seven Poems." Who is "our leader Claudius" (p. 146), "most beleaguered, never outfought" (p. 144) who is now in the Palace? And who is Adrianicus, the intellectual, who has joined him there? "This is the first/Time I hear of an intellectual being in a palace" (p. 145). Who are the foreigners from the west, "handsome foreigners and very rich foreigners," "shrewd foreigners"? Who are the New Barbarians? And is the "New Republik" really what it seems to be? Francia and Hufana have bilingual poems and translations. But, all in all, the poems of the Ravens in this collection, with the notable exception of that masterpiece by Virgie Moreno, "Batik Maker," are not impressive. Even less impressive is the one play in the collection, "Tierra Firma" by Alejandrino Hufana which was intended to suggest "the theatre of the gothic and the absurd."

The essays are more difficult to evaluate. Armando Bonifacio's "Moral Values and the Culture of Scientism," which was a paper presented at the 1980 Seminar of the Philosophical Association of the Philippines, and Danny Villanueva's "Towards a Filipino Architecture" do not seem to fit in the framework of the anthology. All the other selections are literary (imaginative) pieces or criticisms (comments) of literary pieces. But these two essays, it seems to me, are not.

Many of the selections in *The Ravens* are concerned with the creative process. In this book, the cover blurb says, the Ravens "confirm what they could with creative process." The theme of creativity is stated by Moreno's "Batik Maker" which stands as a frontispiece to the anthology, and by her essay "If the Eyes Can Hear" which is the Foreword. Ingles's essay "How the Word Was Made Flesh" is a writer's account of what goes on in the mind of the artist. "How does an idea germinate and gain substance, form and being through the mantle of words that are spontaneously woven in his imagination" (p. 34)? In "Myself At the Age of Seven" Godofredo Roperos has some good perception of the way a child's mind works as it struggles towards creativity, and De Leon's poem, "Notes On Contemporary Literature," is a

critical comment really on the creative process as revealed in the modern novel.

The book was obviously intended to be significant in format as well as in content. The editor says it is "done in venturesome design." And it is. The book design in glossy black is by Hilario Francia. Bodoni and Aldine Roman were used for the text and the edition was "limited to 2000 copies." But the text is unfortunately marred by numerous misprints. A glaring misspelling spoils "Batik Maker" (p. vii) and Professor Moore (to whom Philippine literature in English owes so much) is listed as "T. Inglish Moore" (p. 2). (There is more than irony in that mistake!) It is unfortunate that such a "venturesome" project, a "testament" to the Ravens, is spoiled by the proofreader's carelessness and/or ignorance of English.

But it is as a piece of Philippine literary history that *The Ravens* makes its greatest contribution. Cristobal Cruz gives us a quick introduction to the Ravens in the editor's note, "A Raven Tale." (There is a brief biography of each of the fifteen of them in the Appendix.) Adrian Cristobal's "Preface To An Imaginary Anthology" summarizes the contents and the directions of the selections included in the collection. Elmer Ordoñez's essay, "Remembered by the Clowns," chronicles the birth and tribulations of the U.P. Writer's Club and the *Literary Apprentice* from 1927 to 1957. It was a turbulent period and Ordoñez's essay deserves to be expanded into a lengthier history. In addition to the historical essays, there is the history of the Ravens themselves and the critical and literary history that is implicit in each of the selections. They dramatize rather well what Adrian Cristobal calls "the painful odyssey of the Filipino imagination in modern times" (p. 1).

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

THE PRAYING MAN. By Bienvenido N. Santos. Quezon City: New Day Publishers, 1982. 171 pages.

In "Good Readers and Good Writers," Vladimir Nabokov says: "Literature is invention. Fiction is fiction. To call a story a true story is an insult to both art and truth." Although indisputable, one can almost forget this after reading *The Praying Man*, for much is familiar in this book. In his review (*Observer*, 7 November 1982), Isagani Cruz comments: "Santos insists, quite rightly, that the events in his novel are pure fiction. . . . But certain fictive events are clearly inspired by actual happenings."

The plot reads like many a newspaper account of corruption in high places, of heads rolling after an exposé, of spy-thriller escapes staged by