

philippine studies

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

"The Genesis of a Troubled Vision"

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

Philippine Studies vol. 26, no. 3 (1978) 331–333

Copyright © Ateneo de Manila University

Philippine Studies is published by the Ateneo de Manila University. Contents may not be copied or sent via email or other means to multiple sites and posted to a listserv without the copyright holder's written permission. Users may download and print articles for individual, noncommercial use only. However, unless prior permission has been obtained, you may not download an entire issue of a journal, or download multiple copies of articles.

Please contact the publisher for any further use of this work at philstudies@admu.edu.ph.

<http://www.philippinestudies.net>
Fri June 27 13:30:20 2008

he was helped by the already existing monograph by Ortiz de la Tabla, published in 1974, on the government of the Marqués de Ovando.

One cannot help noting also a certain unfamiliarity with general Philippine history and geography, which leads to the faulty transcription of proper names (Bocayi and Bocani for Bocaue, Subie for Subic, Bilivan for Biliran, etc.), to wrong dates, to the confusion between the Colegio de San José and the University of San Ignacio (Rodríguez García, pp. 223–225), to the incorrect identification of the pagan Tirones and Camucones as Muslims, and the apparent confusion with the Joloanos (García González, pp. 202–205). Here especially one sees the result of the unfamiliarity with the works of De la Costa and Majul. Nor is it correct to say that the *situado* came from the “cajas peninsulares” (García González, p. 68), when it always came from Mexico, as clearly indicated in Schurz and especially in Bauzon’s later study.

In spite of these limitations and inadequacies, both studies contain data on the administrative process of the Spanish bureaucracy and on the functioning of the galleon trade which will be found useful by historians. It is only to be regretted that publication was not delayed until the fruits of the authors’ research were put in a wider context, and received further editing. Thus the García González volume stops abruptly and has no conclusion at all. Nonetheless, one may hope that Filipino historians will not neglect this research being done in Spain, but also that Spanish historians may be more aware of the work done by Filipinos and other historians writing in English.

John N. Schumacher, S.J.

“The Genesis of a Troubled Vision,” Ricaredo Demetillo. *THE DILIMAN REVIEW*, vol. 24, nos. 1–2, January–April 1976. 198 pages.

Ricaredo Demetillo is the author of more than ten books, most of them volumes of poetry. The note at the end of this issue of *The Diliman Review* says that this is a “sizable part” of a long novel written by Demetillo which has, as yet, remained unpublished elsewhere. The section published here is a *bildungsroman*, in the tradition of Joyce’s *Portrait of the Artist As a Young Man*, and it has obvious affinities to that work. It is the story of a young man growing up, which is certainly autobiographical in spirit, if not in detail. (The reader will be tempted into trying to separate autobiographical fact from the literary imagination.) The hero’s name is Roberto Deloroso (RD – Ricaredo Demetillo?) and the family name sets the self-centered tone of the novel’s young-man-growing-up. He is *doloroso*. There is much of the self-conscious posing of the young adolescent in the hero, with long discussions of writing, Shakespeare, Keats, de Costa and the problems of the vernacular writer in the Philippines. There are word for word transcriptions of sermons delivered by the

young preacher, and lengthy discussions of the problems of the world. The last chapter, a banca journey down a river, for all its differences, reminds me of Stephan Daedalus's walk through Dublin in the final chapter of Joyce's *Portrait*. Add a coda in the spirit of Joyce's "old father, old artificer, stand me now and ever in good stead" and the parallel would be complete.

The book is a war novel. It begins: "Three days after the bombing of Pearl Harbor, I left the Central Visayan College where I was a graduating senior . . ." (p. 1). Although there are no direct influences of the war on the story, the conflict is standing in the wings. The anonymous author of the note at the end of the book says: "The part (of the novel) here included deals with the early months of the last war, when everyone was anxious about where to evacuate The image of the flotsam and jetsam in this book objectify [sic] the fact that the war tosses men and women willy-nilly" (p. 197). The author's intention of using the war as a symbol of the turmoil in the heart of a young man is clear but, unfortunately, he has not always succeeded in execution.

The war novels in the history of the Filipino novel in English mark a clear transition from the Romanticism of the prewar novels, strongly influenced by the vernacular tradition of Romanticism and Sentiment, to the existentialist Realism of the postwar novels, colored by disillusionment and alienation. As Bienvenido Santos has pointed out in an article in *Brown Heritage* (Ateneo de Manila University Press, Quezon City, 1976, p. 647), Galang's Maria Rosa, "child of sorrow," in 1921 marks the limit of the prewar romantic heroine, and Ercelia, Alvarez's "devil flower" in 1959, marks the outer limit of the postwar novel. The difference between the two is the difference between Philippine Romanticism and Philippine Realism.

Demetillo's volume brings the two extremes together in one novel. Jocelyn is still pretty much a Maria Clara figure, living in the idyllic context of an unspoiled Eden, but Consoling inhabits the same Eden and shocks Deloroso with her animal sexuality.

Why did Consoling act the way she did? I had not done anything to incite her. Maybe women were all alike in sexual matters I was somewhat puzzled by women. They were not unaggressive at all — at least not the two I had known. I was somewhat amused by their demonstrative actions, but was shocked, too, in the bargain. There was something animal in them (p. 81). The conflict between the romantic and the realistic is made clear when Deloroso breaks off his relationship with the Maria Clara Jocelyn, and enters into a relationship with Angelica that is far more earthy and realistic. The sexual scenes with Angelica are explicit and vivid, but echoes of the romantic heroine remain. Angelica is dying of TB and eventually commits suicide, but her portrayal by the author is light years away from that of Jocelyn. The mythic Maria Clara has been abandoned. Consoling has provided a bridge to the sexually explicit Angelica.

Weaving in and out of the conflict between the two concepts of woman is

the author's preoccupation with God and Faith. He quotes the hero's sermons at length, portrays his role as a minister and pastor to those in need, and recounts lengthy discussions about the meaning of God and Faith. This theme has not been integrated into the novel at all, but in a confused way presents another aspect of the transition from the prewar to the postwar novel in English in the Philippines. The prewar novel accepted the reality of the God and the Church at least, but the postwar novel questions the depth of that reality and in many instances completely ignores it. In many ways, perhaps, Demetillo is giving expression to the view that God and the Church were elements of Philippine romanticism, but no longer belong in the realism of the postwar Philippine world.

Demetillo's novel is frustrating in many ways. He had within his grasp the elements that could have made a novel of the first rank — the conflict of romanticism and realism, of rationalism and of Faith, a hero who could have been memorable, and a theme that could have reflected to an admirable degree the crisis in Philippine society. But he has failed to mold them into a coherent whole. He has been led astray by sexual realism, while still being caught in the trap of sentimental romanticism. I suspect that he was confused by the dilemma of trying to write a novel that was largely autobiographical. He should have accepted the constraints of his vision and abandoned the autobiographical more emphatically in favor of the demands of the novel. His style and skill as a novelist have, unfortunately, not been capable of carrying the burden of the novel that he had within his grasp. The intention of his vision borders on greatness, but his execution has faltered miserably.

Demetillo's *Genesis* is adolescent in many ways — in style, in thought, in its preoccupation with sex and love, in its tensions and contradictions within the heart of its hero, and in its final resolution of frustration and disillusionment with the dreams of youth. It is not a good novel, but it is interesting for the light it sheds on Demetillo himself (in so far as it is autobiographical in spirit and/or in fact) and for the indications it gives the literary historian of the transition period in Philippine writing in the novel — where the prewar romantic novel clashes with the postwar realist novel.

Joseph A. Galdon, S.J.