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A Literary Event: The Authentic Voice of Poetry

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founded and perhaps unjust. Likewise, he occasionally resorted to the cry of "religious persecution" in a manner not always consonant with the gravity of so sacred a theme. But he was acting under enormous strain, and emerged from it with an integrity and unbroken spirit deserving the utmost admiration.

"How to Block a Brainwash" does not come in "twelve easy lessons." The challenge admits of no easy approach. But anyone who would meet it with success will derive wisdom and inspiration if he reads and re-reads, and then reads again, the book under review.

CHARLES J. MCCARTHY

A LITERARY EVENT

THE AUTHENTIC VOICE OF POETRY. By Ricaredo Demetillo. Diliman, Q.C.: University of the Philippines, Office of Research Coordination (U.P. Development Project CP-6230-A), 1962, ix, 337 pp.

A reassuring voice amid the growing waywardness of our criticism reaches us in Professor Demetillo's first book of critical essays, *The Authentic Voice of Poetry*. The author is a disciple of such eminent New Critics as Richard Blackmur, Allen Tate, and Kenneth Burke, and his criticism is in the tradition of his mentors whose common stress is on poetry *qua* poetry. No arid formalist, in spite of his treatment of poems as art objects rather than biographical or historical documents, Professor Demetillo re-asserts the value of the disinterested study of literature.

The title essay analyzes the works of five poets represented in Leonard Casper's 1955 anthology, *Six Filipino Poets*, and demonstrates that poetry is a literary mode which involves "rich, original, condensed and memorably suggestive or allusive language" often infused with ironic wit. Professor Demetillo praises Carlos Angeles' sensitive handling of language and use of objective correlatives, and Dominador Ilio's awareness of "insights [that] may be sifted through the colloquial." He chastises Amador Daguio for the clichés and the sentimentality of his love poetry and Oscar de Zuñiga for the "*fin-de-siècle* melancholy which prevents him from being more affirmative or more widely aware of the social setting of his predicament." Edith Tiempo is commended for her power of psychological penetration although her style is found lacking in verve and excitement.

Three other Filipino poets—Bienvenido Santos, Alejandrino Hufana and Nick Joaquin—are studied in separate essays which, together with the title essay, present an exposition of Professor Demetillo's views on poetry. The failure of some of Santos' poems is attributed to simplification of emotion, looseness of structure, and lack of precision in the use of language. Hufana's failure to communicate is traced to the syntactical chaos of his lines. For "finished artistry," Professor Demetillo turns to Joaquin's poems which, according to him, are endowed with "the grace of form and the grace of mystical knowledge."

The single essay on the art of criticism itself, "Jose Garcia Villa vs. Salvador P. Lopez," puzzles one at first with the ferocity with which it attacks a theory of literature that has long become an anachronism in modern criticism. One realizes after a while that Professor Demetillo's target is not Lopez himself, but what Lopez' sponsorship of proletarian criticism in the thirties represents in the Philippines today—the home-grown Platos whose cry for national self-definition as a theme of Philippine writing is actually another attempt to make the writer justify his membership in the republic. One realizes also that Professor Demetillo's pitting of Villa against Lopez is his way of formulating his own critical thought. At this point, one must point out an ambiguity in the critic's position, an ambiguity inevitable in a position that tries to reconcile the two critical poles that Villa and Lopez represent. Professor Demetillo regrets, for instance, Villa's rejection of any moral or social significance in his poems since this marks Villa's poetry as "minor," and yet he ranks Villa next to Rizal as one of "the three writers of enduring merit" that we have. Joaquin, categorically named in another essay as "a great poet" for his grace of form and mystical knowledge, is now "the least in stature and moral influence of the three because he participates in the decadence he reveals, details the advanced decay, and rebels, without hope."

In many ways, *The Authentic Voice of Poetry* is a very ambitious work. It is not too often that one comes upon a book of criticism that undertakes the analysis of such a variety of poets and poetic styles as are represented here. That the work has more weak spots than one would find tolerable is a failing that may be blamed on Professor Demetillo's admirable disdain for specialization. No doubt it is imperative that a critic know "the best that is known and thought in the world," but even Matthew Arnold himself did not try to cover all the poetry that had been written before his time when he picked out his "touchstones." The critic in our time has a greater problem than Arnold. The vast amount of literature that has been written in the twentieth century burdens him with the works of authors with diverse styles, persuasions and languages. Pro-

essor Demetillo teaches comparative literature at the State University, and one is quickly made aware while reading *The Authentic Voice* that the critic has read widely in world literature. Comparative literature doubtless develops taste and perspective in the critic, but he can achieve competence only within a manageable literary area. Specialization, much as it is to be deplored as conducive to critical myopia, is a necessity for the contemporary critic who, if he is on a university staff (as he usually is), can indulge in intensive literary study only between academic duties.

Professor Demetillo draws on both Oriental and Western poetry in his discussions. In the essays on poets writing in languages other than English, translations are used except in the one on Latin-American poets. He thus necessarily writes only on the ideational content of such poetry, for the most part. "Tone and Attitude in Oriental Poetry," however, analyzes Chinese and Japanese poems for something that only the original poems can reveal. Tone communicates the poet's attitude through the complex of interactions of sound, image and idea. This presupposes that a literary work must be apprehended as a totality by the reader who wants to define its tone. Poetry is a highly specialized use of language. Such being the case, a poem exists only in the language in which it was originally written. It is a hazardous undertaking, therefore, to speak of the tone of a poem read only in translation, when even a discussion of the ideas in the poem is likely have its pitfalls.

When Professor Demetillo gives us exegeses of English and American poems, the results are always gratifying, though sometimes disturbing. For instance, in the study of Eliot's *Prufrock*, Professor Demetillo suggests that to all the personality aberrations which have been attributed to this pathetic character we must now add the taint of homosexuality. The reading is based on the ambiguity of the "you" in the poem and on the impotence implied by *Prufrock's* inability to ask the "overwhelming question." The suggestion seems to be original with Professor Demetillo and, if correct, is certainly encompassed by the spirit of the poem. But the evidence cited is inconclusive and until Professor Demetillo presents more convincing proofs, the reading must be regarded as overreading.

Eliot's epigraphs are the sign-posts that point to the mythical framework and, above all, the intention of the poems. This has to be borne in mind before one speaks of "indirection" and "innuendoes" hinting at perversion in *Prufrock*. The indirection may be there, but that is the inevitable result of a poetic method that depends for its effects on the use of objective correlatives.

The "you" in "The Love Song of J. Alfred *Prufrock*" is primarily an extension of Dante (the objective observer in Hell) in the epigraph, with *Prufrock* as a type of Guido da Montefeltro (the damned

who needs to unburden himself). The relationship between the two figures from the *Inferno* starts from a delusion on the part of Guido that he is speaking to somebody who is damned like him. His revelation is thus characterized by frankness. The role of the "you" is further clarified when one recalls that after the interview with Guido, Dante passes on to the ninth circle of Hell where two sinners ask him to warn certain men on earth about dangers threatening them. The "then" in the opening line seems to indicate this transition. The "you" (its sex is immaterial) becomes Prufrock's own messenger to the world of the living, the messenger who will warn the world about the torments of one who lingered too long in the chambers of the sea and drowned. Professor Demetillo cites "I have heard the mermaids singing each to each" as evidence of perversion. Again, this is an overreading occasioned by a failure to consider the double point of view operative in the poem. From Prufrock's point of view, the line is his ironic acknowledgment of the futility of his life which parodies the romantic past when heroic men answered the call of adventure as Odysseus and his men did. From the reader's point of view, the line metaphorizes Prufrock's physical and spiritual isolation, an isolation forced upon him by the barren society to which he belongs, a "sea" where the "mermaids" (a modulation of the image of the women that come and go, talking of Michelangelo), full of arty small talk, have forsaken their legendary task of luring men with song.

Professor Demetillo's analyses of verbal music evince a sensitivity and enthusiasm that often lead him to overstatement, as in the following from his study of Keats' "Ode to Autumn":

... the magic is a result of the alliterative nuances of soft *m*'s and *s*'s together with the gentle short *i*'s in *mist*, and the soft *e* in *mellow*, and the unusual sounds of *Season* somehow echoed and locked in the last syllable of *fruitfulness*. (p. 91)

The description is of the music of the first line of the ode. At the risk of being accused of being tone-deaf, I must confess failure to hear the same music that Professor Demetillo hears. In another essay, that on Rainer Maria Rilke's *Tenth Elegy*, a section of the poem is described thus:

The sentences are long and drawn out in a powerful sweep, like the rush of rivers so different from the crashing, bawling effects of the sentences delineating the vision of the City of Pain and the fair. The consonants are more harmonious; the vowels more fluid, limpid and musical. The rhythm is orchestral and controlled to the very end. (p. 119)

The translation (by J. B. Leishman and Stephen Spender) that Professor Demetillo quotes from may contain all the qualities noted. However the critic fails to establish that the original has the same qualities. As in his discussion of tone in Chinese and Japanese poems, Professor Demetillo here seems to ignore the very important fact that verse translation, since it involves recasting a poem in another language, necessarily changes the basic properties of a poem, such as tone and music. Any study of a translated poem must either es-

tablish the fidelity of the translation or clarify the differences between the original and the translation. Only by this reference to the original may the critic assert his authority to make statements about the poem.

Two more observations must be made before we move on to the value of Professor Demetillo's study. First, the writing, even when the insight is acceptable, is generally awkward, flat and, in some places, imprecise. One misses here the grace and urbanity of Manuel A. Viray's prose style. This is indeed unfortunate, for the critic, above all the essayist, has the responsibility of cultivating a precise prose capable of effectively communicating his findings. After all, the critic's writings are the closest that the student of literature can get to a scientific report of what a literary artist has accomplished in his experiment with language. The second observation is on something for which the publisher rather than the author is responsible. One would wish that such an important work as we have here had been proof-read with greater care. As it is, the book is simply littered with typographical errors.

Fortunately, no amount of quibbling can minimize the significance of Professor Demetillo's contribution to Philippine literature. The publication of *The Authentic Voice of Poetry* is a literary event, and its impact on criticism in this country cannot be anything but salutary. As a general rule, our literary commentators and teachers of literature are content-oriented when they are not merely impressionistic. Professor Demetillo keeps the formal values of literature ever before our eyes, and the necessity for our writers to prize those values is obvious in view of the slipshod works that even our so-called leading artists turn out from time to time. And certainly, Professor Demetillo cannot be accused of ignoring the human values in literature. His insistence that a poet have a "moral or philosophic center" is evidence enough of his awareness that literature is a human art.

Professor Demetillo's interest in the poems as poems does not make him any less interested in literary history. That he has a strong historical sense is shown by the fine essay on the vitalizing influence of the humanist tradition in Anglo-American literature, "The Rebellious Angel." This historical sense, combined with the impressive range of his reading, guarantees a dependable critical perspective. In turn, this perspective is what makes such surveys of an individual poet's body of works as "The High Game of Poetry in W.H. Auden," "The Greatness of Robert Frost," "T.S. Eliot and the Wrestle with Words," and "The Odes of John Keats" so just and convincing.

If the book fails in places, it is because depth is sometimes sacrificed to breadth. Perhaps it is enough that a critic should prod us to read with intelligence and sensitivity. This Professor Demetillo

does. However, one cannot help but wish that a critic also compel us to agree through the persuasive perfection of his practice. Perhaps the ideal critic should be like an oracle, a voice that commands because it too is the authentic voice. But then, for a mortal to become an oracle takes time, and maybe even divine election.

BIENVENIDO LUMBERA

THE JESUITS IN CHINA

GENERATION OF GIANTS. By George H. Dunne, S.J. Notre Dame (Indiana): University of Notre Dame Press, 1962. 389 pp.

This book tells the story of the Jesuits in China in the last decades of the Ming Dynasty, and tells it well. If there is any lesson it brings home, it is that missionaries in making converts to the Catholic faith should know and respect the culture, customs and traditions of their converts. The Church is universal and supernatural; she is not foreign to any people. Chinese, Japanese, Congolese can accept her creed, code and cult and still remain themselves.

In the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries, many missionaries in the New World and in Asia were imbued with what the author calls "Europeanism". This attitude of mind meant, in practice, that a convert was expected not only to be a Catholic, but to be European as well; to these missionaries, both were essential to conversion. At least for some time, the evangelization of Macao, the Philippines, Latin America and parts of India was conducted on these terms.

Toward the end of the sixteenth century Father Alessandro Valignano was sent by the General of the Society of Jesus to conduct a visitation of the Jesuit missions in the Far East. At Macao he was profoundly impressed by the ancient culture of the Chinese, and became convinced that this should be taken into consideration in the effort to convert them to Christianity. With his approval, Father Ruggieri devoted himself to a careful study of Chinese language and culture before doing mission work in China. He was followed by Father Matteo Ricci, who developed his ideas into a method and system. Later Jesuit missionaries obtained permission from the Holy See to permit the Chinese to continue performing certain rites connected with the veneration of ancestors, even after their conversion.

Ricci and his successors realized that the Chinese had a long history behind them, during which they had developed their own traditions and culture in splendid isolation from the rest of the world.