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Filipinos Abroad: The Bamboo Dancers

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just a portion of it which may tend to give a distorted picture of the whole of reality.

Life, after all, is beautiful—not in a saccharine sense, but in the sense that granite is beautiful, or that fire is beautiful, or even pain, when suffered gladly, is beautiful. Life may be harsh, but it is worth living. Though truth may not always prevail, it is worth while to fight for it. And though goodness may often fail, it is better to be good and fail, than to be successful and evil. For success and failure are, in the last analysis, irrelevant accidents; but to be good or to be evil is of the essence of life and seals one's fate for all eternity. Eternity itself is part of the truth. And God is all-powerful, even in the slums.

MIGUEL A. BERNAD

FILIPINOS ABROAD

THE BAMBOO DANCERS. A novel by N.V.M. Gonzalez. Quezon City: The Diliman Review, 1959. 277p.

The "bamboo dancers" of the title is an allusion to the *tinikling*, that spectacular folk dance in which the dancers—with some risk to limb if not to life — hop in and out between two bamboo poles clapped together in rhythm. Of all Philippine folk dances this one is the best known abroad, its popularity enhanced by the recent tour in Europe and America of the Far Eastern University Dance Group and of the *Bayanihan* of the Philippine Women's University. Professor Gonzalez has given the term a symbolic connotation by applying it both to the actual *tinikling* dancers who hop in and out of the book, and to Filipinos abroad generally, especially those in the United States, who are the subject of the novel.

As portrayed in the book such Filipinos are not always admirable. The hero of the story is a sculptor who goes to the United States on a fellowship grant and there renews acquaintance with an old Manila friend, a young lady who is also in the United States on a writers' fellowship. Together they spend a week in New York, in the clandestine privacy of a borrowed apartment. The young lady, having suffered a moral lapse with the sculptor in question, agrees to marry him, only to change her mind later and to become engaged to a young American writer, Herb Lane, who is interested in the Far East and joins the USIS. On their way home to the Philippines where they are to get married, Lane dies in Taipeh, and she is brought to the hospital with an "obstetric difficulty" — apparently a blood clot. The sculptor's brother meanwhile is in California, a resident physician in a hospital. He has left his wife and child in Manila, and takes an extracurricular interest in an "American blonde,"

apparently a nurse. He eventually goes home to Manila, loaded with household goods (a car, a refrigerator, a TV set, a pile of linoleum tiles) but without "the affection that should attend it." Long absent from his wife, he finds he is no longer on speaking terms with her—or with the maid who has to keep her door locked at night.

In New York we are introduced to three other Filipinos: a young man named Johnny Kilala and his two girl friends with whom he is on "waist holding" terms and whom he kisses goodnight in public.

This, the book seems to say, is Filipino middle class life in America, away from home and its safeguards — a picture somewhat relieved by the penurious but brave couple (he asthmatic, she cross-eyed) who live with their two children, several years apart, in a one-room apartment in New York while he is working for his doctorate in education.

Put thus baldly, the book would seem to be unsavory. This is actually not the case, as Professor Gonzalez always writes with restraint. He suggests rather than describes. And if the situations portrayed in the book are not true in the case of many Filipinos abroad, it is perhaps only too true in the case of some, especially of those to whom, like the characters of the book, religion is merely a nominal adherence to the Church and not a governing force in their lives.

There are two highlights in the book. The first comes very early, in Section 1, when an American couple — the Rices who have taught in the Philippines and who have retained an interest in things Filipino—are entertaining the entire Filipino group in their apartment in New York. The party breaks up when Mrs. Rice is prevailed upon to recite the "Lament for Tammuz":

The wailing is for the plants; the first lament is 'they grow not.'

The wailing is for the barley; the ears grow not.

For the habitations and flocks it is: they produce not.

For the perishing wedded ones, for perishing children it is; the dark-headed people create not...

The Filipinos understand the lament as alluding to them and to their unproductivity; but the allusion is ambivalent, for the Rices are without children.

The other highlight is in Sections 2 and 3 in which the sculptor renews his acquaintance with his old friend, Helen Reyes, and lives with her, as mentioned above. These two sections and the one preceding are well written, and give promise of something great to come—a promise left unfulfilled, for the remaining three sections of the novel are of inferior composition.

The defect is one of structure. There is no organic unity that knits together the wealth of material that the book contains. The section describing a visit to Hiroshima and the effect of the atomic

bomb becomes thus a long digression, without organic connection with the rest of the narrative. Whatever connection there might be is merely fortuitous; the hero merely passes through Hiroshima on his way home.

The attempt to achieve organic unity by the symbolic use of the bamboo dancers is not entirely successful, because the force of the symbol is not quite clear. The symbol indeed has great potentialities. The risk that one runs in dancing between the clashing poles could symbolize the risks of a life abroad; or, again, as suggested in two places, the bamboo dance could symbolize the nature of the Philippine cultural heritage: a mixture of autochthonous elements (the bamboo) and of imported influences from the West (the Spanish element in the *tinikling* music). In this regard, Professor González has a wider view of Philippine culture than the narrow vision of those who claim that whatever is not Malayan is not Filipino.

But great as these potentialities are, they are not fully exploited. The total situation, whatever it is, is only obscurely hinted at and not clearly perceived or dramatized in terms of the symbol. The result resembles a travelogue: vivid, episodic, but not a dramatic whole.

This seems to be the main structural difficulty. There are others. Section 4 ("Mainlanders") alludes to the widespread anti-American feeling in the Orient. Herb Lane, whom the reader has previously met as an honorable, thoughtful gentleman in America, turns out, without adequate warning, to be a thoughtless American in Taipeh, who gets intoxicated, attacks his girl friend, locks himself up in her room, runs over a Chinese girl with his jeep, causes an anti-American demonstration, and gets shot in a most implausible manner—and all in an incredibly brief period. That there are such undesirable aliens in the Orient, or that widespread anti-American feeling exists, cannot be denied. But to bring these things suddenly into the picture savors of the *deus ex machina*. The involvement of Herb Lane is not sufficiently dramatized.

It must likewise be noted that neither the book nor the characters have a well-defined moral dimension. This is probably not a defect in characterization but a defect of the characters themselves. The fornication — to give it its ugly name — in New York is never really regretted on moral grounds. It is condemned by implication when the heroine goes to confession later on, in Tokyo. But there is no dramatized awareness of guilt.

Much less is there a theological dimension, although there is a hint of one in the introduction of the visiting Cardinal in Japan.

The language, otherwise excellent, is marred in places by certain mannerisms ("I guess," "it must be admitted," etc.), and by the introduction of certain Americanisms which sound incongruous when put in the mouth of Filipino characters. The artistic value of the

prologue, consisting of extracts from letters, is not clear; and I confess I do not understand the epilogue.

These, if N.V.M. Gonzalez will forgive me, are criticisms which might be made of his otherwise excellent book. To mention these defects is not to say that the book is uninteresting. The dialogue is natural and realistic. I myself have read the story twice. And no student of Philippine affairs could probably afford to omit it.

MIGUEL A. BERNAD

PHILIPPINE COMMUNITY STRUCTURE

SOCIAL CLASS IN A BIKOL TOWN. By Frank Lynch, S.J., assisted by Augusto V. Plopinio and Wilfredo F. Arce. Philippine Studies Program, Research Series, No. 1. Chicago: University of Chicago, 1959. ix, 175 p. multilithed.

It should be stated at the outset that the reviewer comes from the other side of what the author, a social anthropologist, calls the "low fence separating anthropology from sociology" (p. 2). Philippine sociologists will profit from Fr. Lynch's effort to be "neighborly", to combine the methods of the social anthropologist and the sociologist in the study of social stratification in a Bikol town.

Closely following the order in which the author presents his report, this review considers the research problem, the methodological procedure employed to pursue the problem, the findings, and the significance of the study as a whole.

The Problem. The town studied is Canaman, a población about five kilometers from Naga City, in the province of Camarines Sur. At the time of the investigation (1956-58) its population was a little over 2,000, distributed in four adjoining barrios. The author tells us that from a pre-fieldwork plan to investigate the relationship between religion and social structure he shifted to the study of the nature of social stratification in the town. This is a laudable attempt to put first things first. Especially in a community that has never before been systematically studied, one should start with more manageable concepts and indicators before proceeding to the more theoretical aspects of the community structure.

In the first chapter the author places the study in the context of social theory and previous research done elsewhere. The framework he utilizes is the system of social stratification, with its key concepts of *status* and *class*, and the functional theory of interdependence. The questions raised by Fr. Lynch are theoretically relevant. His hypotheses are explicit, although they are more strictly