

philippine studies

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

My Own Bout with Cancer, by Aprieto

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Philippine Studies vol. 45, no. 1 (1997): 145–146

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Fri June 27 13:30:20 2008

12 Philippine Women Writers. Edited by Amelia Lapeña-Bonifacio. Quezon City: University of the Philippines Press, 1994. 120 pages.

Frailty, thy name is woman!
Her voice was ever soft,
Gentle and low, an excellent thing in woman.

We owe many of our stereotypes about women to Western classical literature. Shakespeare's lines are memorable, but they have helped form our prejudices against women. University of the Philippines professor and playwright Amelia Lapeña-Bonifacio helps us dispel some of those prejudices with the stories she has compiled and edited. The stories in this collection provide insights into the unique worldview of Asian women.

In selecting the stories for this collection, Lapeña-Bonifacio had two considerations, as she tells us in the Preface. First, the stories must be told from a woman's point of view. Second, they must "fall into a skein of one continuing yarn—that of a woman's growth from childhood to old age."

The first criterion is fulfilled, not only because the protagonists in these stories are women, but also because they are written by some of the most illustrious Filipina fictionists of our time: Kerima Polotan, Gilda Cordero-Fernando, Edith Tiempo, and Ninotchka Rosca, to name just a few.

The second criterion is evident in the themes of the different stories. A mother rages after the molester of her little daughter. A teenager thinks she is dying because she has menstruated. A second wife fears that she is living in the shadow of the dead first wife. An old lady laments the reality of aging and death. These stories educate us about what goes on in the very heart of a woman. Lapeña-Bonifacio will not be frustrated in her hope that these stories make us "just a little less confused, if not a little more caring."

This is a book that will promote healthy feminism, which is the sensitivity to and understanding of women which our society so desperately needs.

Aristotle Dy, S.J.

My Own Bout with Cancer and Other Last Essays. By P. N. Aprieto. Edited by Andres Cristobal Cruz. Quezon City: Giraffe Books, 1995. 174 pages.

After reading *My Own Bout with Cancer*, one is filled with gratitude and respect for the author for sharing his encounter with the disease. It gives a valuable inside story into the experiences of those afflicted with the disease and encourages the rest of us to be more aware, not merely of the affliction but more importantly, the internal dispositions of a person who experiences it. This book is a collection of essays by P. N. Aprieto from his column "Signs

of the Times" that appeared weekly between 14 February 1993 and 6 February 1994, in *Starweek*, the Sunday magazine of *The Philippine Star*.

Three reasons make this book valuable. First is the spirit of gratitude, second are the insights of the author himself, and third is the gift of the person himself to us.

All of us have relatives, friends and acquaintances who are afflicted with cancer. We all hear their stories of struggles and pain. We owe it to P. N. Aprieto, who discussed thoroughly and openly with his readers his encounter with the big "C." It allows us, as readers, to enter into the depths of a person who is caught in this situation. Aprieto himself says in the book:

From Day One when Dr. A told me I had cancer, my nights became filled with silent shouts of remorse and feelings of depression. I would find out later that it is a process that all cancer patients go through upon learning of their condition. And like them, I would ask the same question again and again. It was especially agonizing lying alone in bed in the dark: "Why me?"

One of the friends of the author, Mr. Alfredo O. Flores, says in his tribute, "Written in a straightforward, smoothly flowing language, the vivid blow by blow narration of his encounter with the dreaded disease is a masterful literary presentation of a simple but valuable message to those similarly afflicted."

This book is also valuable because of its insights. These essays are written by someone who was already aware—and sensitively so—of his condition. The book is not meant to be read in one sitting. It should be taken like vitamins for everyday living. His essays share with us his thoughts about his family, work, and travels.

Lastly, the book relates a person's own bout with life (and death) itself. This is what makes his book most valuable. It relates the joys of a family man, the trials and challenges of a public servant, the gifts of his being a writer and journalist. (He was a member of a UP fraternity of writers, the Ravens, whose members include famous writers like Adrian Cristobal and Virginia Moreno.)

My Own Bout with Cancer is not only for cancer patients but also for all of us who are still struggling with our respective bouts in life. We thank P. N. Aprieto for sharing with us the tales of his journeys through the light and dark moments of life's journey itself.

Eric Z. Aragones, S.J.