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A Frabjous Day and Other Stories by **Miriam Defensor Santiago**

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biographer and historian must try to cross, otherwise the past which determines our present remains unintelligible.

Biography is not yet a perfect art in the Philippines. What we have are either hagiographical—and therefore unhistorical—pieces, or propaganda. We still have to develop the art of scientifically analyzing a human person. This is also the basic weakness of this book. No single personality stands out in his human dimension and the characters are more or less wooden figures. Idealism never springs out in its full form and is always the result of hidden factors. These a biographer, or historian, must bring out—or he will not be writing good, full-bodied history.

There are other minor shortcomings, but they do not distract the reader. The style hobbles in places. In general, the book might perhaps be recast to make it less a chronicle and more of a biography, but having said all these, this book remains a good contribution to Philippine history.

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A Frabjous Day and Other Stories. By Miriam Defensor Santiago. Quezon City: New Day Publishers, 1997. 166 pages.

Frabjous and *Flippant*, or *Pompous* and *Priggish* are some of the words encountered in (and are even descriptive of) the anthology of short stories titled *A Frabjous Day* by Senator Miriam Defensor Santiago. These short stories have previously appeared in distinguished publications such as the *Philippines Free Press*, *Weekly Graphic*, and *Weekly Nation* between 1965 and 1971, when the author had barely passed her teens. Her distinctive eloquence in the English language and proficiency in Western Literature are quite evident in her stories. Reference to Hopkins and Hammar skjold are occasionally made, as well as to Montaigne and Marcus Aurelius, or even Epicurus. However, the profane and the vain are also introduced to balance the image of the persona, as forms of leisure literature like *Playboy* and *Esquire* are cited as the material read by some of the characters in her stories.

Of the 20 short stories listed in this anthology, the author selects five as "the better stories." The title of her first choice (the fourth listed from the twenty) "So Bright Wings," is probably derived from the last line of a popular poem by Hopkins ("God's Grandeur"), and aptly so, since the story tells about the experience of religious ecstasy. "The Silent One," referring to the unusual image of Christ found in the heart of an orbicular Chapel (probably the Delaney Chapel in U.P.) where the Lord is crucified on one side and resurrected on the other, takes an inadvertent approach to religious faith.

The seventh story, "A Frabjous Day" is a dreamy narration of a whimsical encounter with Death personified. "Esperanza" hardly harbors hope, as the loneliness and frustration of childhood end in sleep, which is a form of death. "All the Difference" is (almost) an epic about coming home from college to the old home, which necessarily involves the pain of maturity.

Most of the stories simulate the journal entries of a young woman who is discovering herself through significant human experiences. Themes of falling in love and emotional freedom are prevalent as the main persona is usually portrayed as vociferously vain (sometimes cunningly conceited), paradoxically pious, and intellectually advanced. The persona would sometimes express her anathema to life's realities and uphold her personal Palladium as she ruminatively formulates her own philosophy through meretricious introspection.

Although the author claims in her preface that the "jeune stories" at least serve the "quaint purpose of chronicling the environment at that time," the stories clearly do not accurately describe the culture of the Filipino youth's majority in the sixties and seventies. The stories do, however, serve the "quaint purpose" of improving the reader's vocabulary as at least one or two extraordinary English words are introduced in almost every story. The style of writing and characterization in the stories do not apply so much to the common people of the Philippines of that time (or even of today). The stories appeal more to an esoteric female culturati whose chief preoccupations are conceited romantic intellectualism and vain ennui, best epitomized by the first story entitled "I, Myself and Me—Plus, Perhaps, Socrates." The average male reader (or common man) would probably find this kind of literature rather insipid and even innocuous.

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