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## Literature and Politics, by Lim

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Finally, the book also conveys the message that knowledge is important, and that as much as possible, we should not be ignorant of the world in which we live. Although science is indeed important, knowledge demands that we also see the world using the other perspectives of art, history, the transcendental, etc.

Perhaps Queena Lee's book needs a more scientific revision. There are no page numbers in the table of contents; the typographical errors are many and noticeable, and there were a couple of times when the text said "refer to diagram," but there was no diagram to refer to.

Gabriel Lamug-Nañawa, S.J.

**Literature and Politics: The Colonial Experience in Nine Philippine Novels.** By Jaime An Lim. Quezon City: New Day Publishers, 1993. 183 pages.

The Philippines had been under colonial rule for almost four hundred years: over three hundred years under the Spanish regime, forty years with the Americans, and about four years under the Japanese occupation. Throughout the four hundred years of foreign bondage, various forms of reactions and protests emerged and one of the most powerful medium used by the colonized people was literature. In the introduction of his study, Jaime An Lim states that "The confluence of literature and politics is nothing new in the Philippine literary scene." The author examines the reactions of nine selected Filipino novelists to the colonial experience during these three periods of colonization.

Obviously, Lim's intent is not to present a comprehensive study, but "simply to offer a manageable sampling that, at the same time, could define the general contours of the bigger picture." For each colonial period, the author analyzes three novels and draws out their sociopolitical themes. The readers may find it quite puzzling that in the same colonial period, for example, the Spanish regime, the novels are almost a century apart. Rizal's *Noli Me Tangere* is ninety-six years from F. Sionil Jose's *Po-on*. The two novels are reactions to the same Spanish rule. Lim points out that "In spirit, however, they could not have been more contemporaneous."

The book is divided according to the chronological divisions of the colonial periods. The first part deals with the longest foreign domination of the Philippines, the Spanish regime, the second part touches on the American period, and the third part dwells on the briefest, the Japanese occupation.

In the first part, the author examines the reactions to the Spanish colonization in Jose Rizal's *Noli Me Tangere*, Linda Ty-Casper's *The Three-Cornered Sun*, and F. Sionil Jose's *Po-on*, Rizal's novel exposed the ills afflicting the

Filipino people so that cures might be found. *Noli* focused on one dominant source of evil, the friars who abused their powers and betrayed their religious purpose. Here, Rizal's political strategy was reform. In Ty-Casper's novel, uprising and armed struggle were proposed to redress the grievances of the people. Jose's *Po-on* straddles the Spanish and the American period. The novel developed the theme of the growing sense of nationhood and the transcendence of individualism and regionalism to achieve a united front in the building of the Filipino nation.

Lim analyzes the reactions to the American colonization, in the second part of the book, through Maximo M. Kalaw's *The Filipino Rebel*, Juan C. Laya's *His Native Soil*, and Bienvenido N. Santos' *The Man Who (Thought He) Looked Like Robert Taylor*. The Philippine revolution began as an extreme reaction to the oppressive Spanish rule and it transpired simultaneously with the war Spain was waging against the Americans. Kalaw's novel revolved probes this milieu. America was, at first, considered an ally against Spain. No sooner had the Spanish left than the Americans became the next colonizer, the enemy. *The Filipino Rebel* traces the fortune of the Filipino people from the twilight of Spanish rule to the 1930s, the duration of American regime. Jaime C. Laya's *His Native Soil* (the de-Americanization of Martin Romero) is a more subtle image of American colonization as embodied by Martin Romero, the protagonist. This novel is a departure from the bloody uprising as a reaction to American rule. The colonization transpires quietly and peacefully through the cultural subversion of Martin who studies in the U.S.A. and comes back to his native soil bringing with him a newly acquired American identity. Two cultures, Philippine and American, are pitted against another. The third novel, Bienvenido N. Santos' *The Man Who (Thought He) Looked Like Robert Taylor*, tells the story of Filipino expats who dreamt of finer lives in their dreamland, the U.S.A. Once there, Solomon King, a Filipino migrant, realizes that the America of his dreams did not exist. Life is harder and he feels the force of being uprooted from his native land.

The third part of Lim's study touches on the Japanese occupation as seen in Steven Javellana's *Without Seeing the Dawn*, Edilberto K. Tiempo's *More than Conquerors*, and Wilfrido D. Nollado's *But For The Lovers*. Javellana's novel portrays the idyllic life in the country or the rural areas before the coming of the Japanese forces. The first part shows the easy life in the rural town where life seems easy and the fruits of nature, abundant. The second part describes the destruction of that idyllic life and transformation of people in the face of the cruelty of the Japanese and the destruction of war. *More Than Conquerors*, on the other hand, shows the brutality of the Japanese soldiers and their policies as depicted in the tortures brought upon the Bantayan brothers. It also manifests the triumph of the human spirit over such a horrendous evil. Nollado's *But For The Lovers* is set in Manila during the last months of the Japanese occupation. *But For The Lovers* shows the

lights and the shadows of the characters pursuing the love of Alma, who stands for the Philippines. The lovers are a Spaniard, an American, and a Japanese—the colonial masters who attempted to make Philippines their own.

Jaime An Lim's study is not purely social and political analyses. He also examines the literary devices used by the authors to "discover the strategies of persuasion embedded in the structure used to constitute their rhetoric." The readers, therefore, are asked to expect technical discussions of the texts. A question arises which the author himself answers. "Why not use the novels in the vernacular?" The reason is more practical than ideological—"the difficulty of access to and retrieval of the scattered body of materials. Using Fr. Galdon's argument, the author justifies his selection: "apart from language ..., there are no major differences between the Philippine novel in English and the Philippine novel in the vernacular."

In the book, the author is able to maintain the unity of the themes by linking the novels as he proceeds to analyze them one after another. Perhaps the unique contribution of Jaime An Lim is the attempt at studying the Philippine novels in the colonial context of our history. In the final lines of his book he wrote: "This book is offered in defense of our collective memory against the forces that would induce a selective amnesia, lest we forget and, in forgetting, become a people without history."

*Conrado E. Olazo, S.J.*