

Outside of a few notable exceptions such as Estrella Alfon, who published one of the Philippines' first collection of stories; Godofredo Rosperos, who once lorded it over as literary editor of the Sunday Times Magazine; and Renato Madrid, who recently broke into the exclusive rank of Free Press prize-winning authors, Cebu writing is not known for its imagination, expertise, keen insight and all else associated with creative writing.

NEW WRITING: *up from the mud*

Henry L. Ormoc

Instead, most writing, if one dignifies it with such a word, is literally banged off the keys of typewriters by loquacious reporters with the deadline breathing down their necks. They write for the peso, not for art. It is no wonder then that these bored "writers" can only bore their readers.

In the face of such mediocrity, the only alternative is for some bold new genius to zoom out of the blue. In other words, only the departures from the tried and the sure have some semblance of creativity. Only the new can escape the old. In Cebu, new writing is mostly student writing.

Unfazed with life and not yet straight-jacketed by convention, these young men still have that fire of idealism and spirit of undauntedness which best symbolised creativity. With their imagination fertilized with freedom and minds pregnant with ideas, these fledgling writers bear watching.

Most of these new emergent writers are still immersed only in campus writing, although some, like Resil Mijares, Ricardo Patalinjug, Thelma Enage and Richard Paradies have crashlanded

on local and national magazines. The large number of campus writers is a propitious sign, but as Margaret Mead said, "We need quality; quantity takes care of itself."

As the queen of creativity poetry is a woman all would-be writers would woo sometimes with disastrous results. Like an elusive lover, the muse is a rare catch for self-styled prince charmings. Having put poetry on such a high pedestal, which is as it should be, since poetry demands "maximum of meaning in a minimum of words", would be poets are confronted with a long hard climb ahead. To ascend the steep mount, poetic sensibility, insight and control of language are basic equipments which unfortunately not many possess.

While ascending the mount is a major task in itself, an unnecessary stumbling block finds itself on these young poets' way. Many student editors, like the proverbial wolf who cried "sour graves" seem to adopt a patronizing attitude towards poetry. Although none have dared to go as far as to drop the poetry section altogether, they give poetry a "second class" status. This is

seen in the unequal treatment of essays and poems. Titles of poems seldom rate a space in the table of contents, but are grouped together in a single word, "poems". Poetry rarely has a page of its own, but is squeezed into whatever space is left by long winding essays.

Sad as it is to admit, student poetry does seem to deserve the "second class" status appropriated by their editors. Most student verse is characterized by what Critic Eric Torres typed as: obviousness, cuteness of language, tinkleness of rhyme, freak typography, bogus sentiments, pretentious image-clot, rhetorical sleights of hand, rambling associations and a knowledge of the more arcane words in Roget's Thesaurus... "Few, if any students" work hard at knowing the capabilities of language, much less contemplation, the discipline of solitude and silence."

From the look of things, student poetry seems to be divided into two major schools of thought. The first, stemming mainly from the sectarian schools, apparently subscribes literally to the motto, "restore all things in
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Christ". No matter what their subject, no matter what their theme, inevitably and as surely as the sun will rise in the East tomorrow, sooner or later, "God, Lord, Thee or Him" or some more indirect, less obvious but no less ambiguous words as "Truth, Goodness" creep in. Without denying the value of "God and all" as Holden Caulfield would, one senses that all these are but broken records. Where is the high spirit, the new idea youth is supposed to represent? What's new with this brew?

The opposite school of thought, for want of a better subject, is an unabashed celebration of a goddess called "love", or what Norman Mailer crudely termed as "the Bitch". While their unashamed incantations of love are in line with their numerical age and their biological status as puberty emergent, their songs are but repetitious tired old sayings, or worse, an evocation of an old hag wearing new clothes. Worse still, since most of these would-be lovers have yet to experience what love is, they cannot speak with the authority only experience can give. Inevitably the products of these "love poem" factories are fake sentiments, bogus emotions and cliché-ridden sweet nothings which any one more familiar with life can recognize at first sight as "phony".

Essayist are mostly frustrated poets. Since they realize their lack of poetic gift and experience and fancy, they have to aim for a more common bird. Like their contemporaries of the higher life, these essayists are engaged in a vain search for a subject. Not knowing what to do with their limited ability and unlimited energy, and knowing their own ambition to go into history as sages and prophets of the New Jerusalem, they are torned between Reason and Impulse. With the easy simplification of youth, they would assume an all-knowing attitude and issue manifestos of new philosophies which are in reality mere rehearses of Existentialism and proclaim new theories of criticism which are in reality old asides of F. R. Leavis. These smart-alecky self-appointed shrew birds in the know can produce only unrealized ideas and infectious disorder. After all, who can say he has all the answers to all the questions of life except God?

Without a subject to divide them into camps, essayists differ only in style. Those who seek originality often confuse it with subjectivity; they uncork their minds and pour their heads out, letting their words go rambling on and on without the least knowledge of what they are saying or where they are leading to. These adventurers into confusion just cannot expect anyone except their sweethearts to read them.

Those who do not seek originality often confuse it with conformity; they

package their papers and snip, clip their term papers and presto; an essay. More often than not, these stereo-type features do not rise above the level of most daily journalism, who are famous for their 5W and notorious for their wrong spellings and erroneous grammar. Of course, dull formula can only product dull writing, which is not much better than no writing at all.

The plight of the essayist are best seen in the editorial pages of most students' magazines. There the supposedly hard hitting editorials are written by timid souls with the most cautious hands. They seem afraid of offending anyone except man-eating barracudas which can be criticized without harming any sensitive souls. Otherwise, they are as timid as a new born baby.

The short story writers can best strike a happy balance between imagination and control. Their medium permits them a freedom bordering on the poet's which is a most difficult freedom and requires the control approximating the essayists' which is resultant indeed. Loquacity, a vice in essay, can be transform into "a stream of consciousness", a virtue in short story. Free ranging imagination, disastrous for essays, can help bolster the coat of symbolism all modern short stories would not be caught dead without.

Young short story writers, like their counterparts in other mediums, suffer from a want of experience. With their fondness for new adventures and exotic shores, it is not seldom that one with transported into the most distant shores. But once the reader's bearing is found, the whole thing creaks. Brooklyn mothers often speak with Texas accen's while New York Taxi drivers often talk as if they are fresh out of Harvard, all with the most impeccable grammar and restraint.

Youthfulness can also harm these portraits of life. Human nature is apt to suffer under the hands of these star-seeing writers. An often overheard comment is: "It doesn't happen like this." Characterization is apt to be thin and flat, and what should be living, breathing individuals emerge as dead and easily forgotten types.

Despite their shortcomings, the young writers are a talented lot. They are also a hard working and fast learning bunch. With more gray hairs in their head, and a few more years of careful "aging", they give promise of rising from the mud produced by today's "word merchants". Promises, of course, can always go unkept. But one can always hope they will not go to the dogs and like their elders produce again a lot of "sound and fury signifying nothing".

— END —

MINDORENOS have every reason to straighten their shoulders, jut out their chins and breathe deeply with a sense of pride. For standing in the front phalanx of Filipino writers in English, both with regard to quantity and quality of work produced, is one of Mindoro's sons, N. V. M. González. According to Roseburg, "he more than any other Filipino writer, has demonstrated the fact that a Filipino, though writing in English, can nevertheless convincingly convey the soul and sentiment of his people without losing any indigenous characteristic."¹ And the people González writes about are the Mindorenos; the place, Mindoro. Leonard Caspar predicts that N. V. M. González' works, together with those of Bienvenido Santos "with their complementary images of different countries of experience that can be called Filipino," will be read, studied and discussed for a long, long time in the future.²

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The early saga of González is most interesting especially in view of the lofty position of eminence he has risen to in Filipino letters. How easy it is to picture the young teen-age González tramping from the barrio to the post office where as Roseburg tells us: "he would type the manuscript before mailing it and then after a few weeks of impatient waiting walk the same distance again only to receive rejection slips."³ The initials of González stand for Néstor Vicente Madali, and he has stuck to using only the initials since the day his mother first recommended that he use them

THE MIND

by

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with a story and it subsequently happened that this story, *Awakening*, was accepted by the *Graphic* for publication, his very first. He was then 16 years old, having been born in 1915. His father had been a supervising teacher who had moved his family from Romblón, Romblón, to take up a pioneering way of life in Mindoro during González' early boyhood. The previous position of his father in Romblón explain why, in one of his stories, González presents a young lad who is the main narrator of the story and whose father was also formerly a supervisor.