

Introduction

Three main themes run through the various essays collected for this issue, namely, (1) language and culture; 2) feminism or the representation of women in literature; and 3) culture and ideology.

The theme on language and culture occurs in Realubit, Bumatay-Cruz, Moya-Torrecampo and Yanilla-Aquino; that on feminism, in Yu and Martinez; and that on culture and ideology, in Mendoza and Bagulaya. We have also included two papers read in university forums, particularly, Linda Ty-Casper and San Juan, for what they further present about life and realities in the Philippines and in the Third World.

Realubit attempts to apply “semiotics,” in her reading of some specific works of two Bicol writers, Merlinda Bobis and Albin Yapan, by pinpointing images (signs) of cultural representation in the former’s English stories and play (actually a poetry performance piece) and the latter’s Tagalog novel (based on the Bicol folk narrative, *Ibalon*). At times, she appears to describe narrative structuration (e.g., binary oppositions, motifs, etc.) to illustrate how native Bicol or Filipino culture are represented in the literary texts but Realubit’s study is significant mainly for what it demonstrates about native culture and consciousness.

Bumatay-Cruz draws from western theories to analyze what she terms as “schoolroom grammar” and “layroom grammar” in reference to the Filipinos’ use and appropriation of the English language. As she points out, “schoolroom grammar” is in accordance with formally prescribed rules, while “layroom grammar” evolves from actual practice and usage, specially, in the Philippine context. After giving a sample list of deviations from the norms of American English, she reviews some contemporary trends and theories on language usage and practice, particularly, in relation to “ecology,” a term coined, as she reports, by Ernst Haeckel in 1866 and which the

latter defines as “the science of the relations between the organism and the environmental outer world” or... “of the interrelations between organisms and their environment.”

Yanilla Aquino presents a simple formal, stylistic analysis of the language of a children’s poem and a story to support her point about the need for a more involved appreciation of children’s literature, especially in the light of its usual exclusion from the canon.

Moya-Torecampo presents an interesting case of her work on a “reverse translation”—i.e., a re-translation into Tagalog of an English translation of an original Tagalog historical narrative. She discusses the various insights that she has gained, particularly, in trying to figure out the language of the original from what she had perceived as mistranslations or inaccuracies in the English text, particularly with regard to idioms laden with cultural signifiers. Her essay—lucid, elegant, and suffused with details—presents a good case study on the problems and difficulties of translation.

The discourses on the issue of the representation of women (“woman of virtue” in Lina Espina Moore’s novels in Yu’s essay; women and the erotic in fiction by women writers in Martinez’s) follow the traditional formalist line of approach in Yu, but is more cognizant of current feminist theories in Martinez. As Yu points out, the notion of virtue in Moore is christian where the women appear “submissive” in the mold of Rizal’s Maria Clara. Martinez plumbs the paradoxes and details of women representation in contemporary fiction, particularly, by young, emerging Filipino women writers. He points out the basic paradox of having to assume a posture of “cultural duality” for female characters in fiction by women writers resulting “from women’s participation in a dominant male culture and female sub-culture at the same time.” Martinez asserts that the “paradoxical situation enables women to be both ‘docile’ and ‘rebellious,’ to attempt to subvert the patriarchy even while working within it. He concludes that the “female characters” as represented (in the context of Philippine culture) “are capable of seizing enough power to create alternative worlds” and that “they are resisting.”

The two essays—Mendoza’s “Writing the Creole Identity” and Bagulaya’s “The Politics of the French Film Festival”—that engage issues of politics/ideology and cultural representation in literature and cinema,

respectively, take contrary positions on certain points. Mendoza quotes the assertion put forth by Martinican writer Chamoiseau “and his cronies” that “the world is evolving into a state of Creoleness,” and refers to the “Martinican political and linguistic *Creolite* movement” as the defining mode in locating the “‘authentic’ Caribbean identity,” particularly, within the framework of “globalization.” She thus analyzes and describes Patrick Chamoiseau’s 1992 novel, *Texaco*, as a historic articulation of such a phenomenon—i.e., locating “‘authentic’ Caribbean identity” precisely in the reality of a hybridized culture rather than in some native African mooring, such as promoted by the project of an earlier movement led by the poet Aimé Césaire and known as *Négritude*. Bagulaya’s Marxist critique of the French Film Festival emphasizes the notion of art and film shows as ideological instruments of domination employed by the hegemonic culture of the First world, in this case, the French.

We close with the two addresses on culture and history presented on two separate occasions by a well-recognized Filipino fictionist, Linda Ty-Casper and the internationally renowned poet, fictionist, and critic, Dr. E. San Juan Jr.. Linda Ty-Casper, who now resides in the United States, recollects Philippine history and essays on the representation of Filipino culture and identity in literature and history, particularly, in the context of the experiences of Filipino immigrants abroad. San Juan’s paper was read at last year’s centennial anniversary celebration of Pablo Neruda held at UP Diliman. He traces and discusses Neruda’s significance to and influences on Philippine writing, especially as the latter represents in his poetry the common experiences of colonialism and struggle between Latin America and the Philippines and the Third World. He emphasizes, in particular, “Neruda’s historicizing and futurist imagination (that) does not contradict the Marxist stance of moral realism (but) in fact, reinforces it.” It is to “Neruda’s communism” which “is identical to his fidelity to the vision of freedom and social liberation from natural and man-made historical necessity,” that San Juan traces the Chilean poet’s utmost importance and relevance to the works of contemporary Filipino revolutionaries and writers, particularly those committed to the anti-imperialist struggle.

It is well that we end with San Juan’s “intervention” on the great poet Neruda as, in a way, he articulates one of the most enduring concerns of writers and historians, especially, in the Third World, which is about making sense of the “present” or the “center” that, true enough, be it in the Derridean

or Marxist sense—and given the gamut of crises and material conflicts that we face—is continually mediated and displaced. We are reminded of what Ernst Bloch wrote about a “shadow due to lack of distance,” “for without distance, right within, you cannot even experience something; not to speak of representing it, to present it in a right way—which simultaneously has to provide a general view.”¹ He further asserts:

But this darkness of the moment, in its unique directness, is not true for an already more mediated right-now, which is of a different kind and which is a specific experience called “present,” be it at home, in public, in the political arena, and so on.... We are talking about *portraying*, ... not about recalling and for the moment not even about the analysis of the situation and the action determined by the need of the moment, directed and made possible by this analysis.... We are talking about an actual *formed portion of time* (*Zeitstück geformter Art*)....²

Needless to say, it is debilitating for writers to be caught up in an “actual *formed portion of time*”, especially the “formed portion” defined by real contradictions and crisis situations of all sorts. There are two choices a writer may consider in writing about the “present” which again Bloch renders in one line: “Writing in keeping with the times (which) is not the same as writing according to life.”³ If always we had a choice, always we would write “according to life.”

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¹ Ernst Bloch, *The Utopian Function of Art and Literature*. Tr. by Jack Zipes and Frank Mecklenburg (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1996), 207.

² *Ibid.*, 208.

³ *Ibid.*, 209.