

Written by

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The stories happened within days of each other. First, they bastardized the 115th year of Philippine independence with a lacklustre fashion show. As if that was not enough, three other groups devalued the hero Jose Rizal, offering him the usual perfunctory ritual and laying a wreath of artificial flowers in a ceremony so frivolous it became comical. Radiant in their customized barongs and gowns, the role players did not appear destitute to not have afforded the cost of fresh flowers. Rizal, anyway, was no ordinary mortal; he is the supreme icon of the Philippines. By appearances, they were honoring the man whose death triggered a revolution yet in reality, they were glorifying themselves and their vanity. The plastic flowers are the exact metaphors for them - phony, superficial, specious.

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**COMMENTARY      Perfunctory Honors for National Hero Jose Rizal**

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[{/xtypo\\_quote} Appearances are often deceiving. - Aesop {/xtypo\\_quote}](#)

TORONTO - They tried to do it with a flourish. There's ceremony. The participants' sober-looking faces lent a bit of gravitas. There's singing, speechifying, applause, recognition and wreath-laying.

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And when the culmination of the ritual came, my eyes could not believe what I was witnessing. Nor could I grasp the reasons for such commemoration - perfunctory, no doubt - by at least three groups that made a point of paying ostentatious respects to Jose Rizal.

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The man was no ordinary mortal. Dead at age 35 in 1896, he continues to live, his death before a firing squad sparking a revolution. He has since then been enshrined as the foremost national hero.

In Toronto and elsewhere, Rizal's birth and death form part of celebrations about the Philippines. Independence Day, June 12, which is close to his birthday on June 19, is part of those.

Year in and year out, a grateful nation and people mark his arrival and departure, which was exactly what Filipinos in Toronto did on Saturday, June 15 at his bust monument on Earl Bales Park.

Seeing faces frequently plastered in many Filipino newspapers and are now quite familiar to me, my suspicion had been aroused. I set it aside for the moment even as the event in the Filipino community of San Diego, California, flashed back. I was again reminded of the disingenuousness of some leaders who were there for the historic photo ops.

In 1998 when all the Rizal busts surfaced in North America and became profitable for a few people in and out of government who took advantage of the centennial celebration of Philippine independence, San Diego community leaders honored Rizal with all-weather plastic flowers.

And so before the last nonsense was spoken at Earl Bales Park on Saturday, I dashed to the foot of Rizal's bust and touched the flowers, lightly stroking each petal to see if they are real.

And lo and behold, in their seemingly elegant look from a distance, the wreath was made from a combination of plastic and cloth. Artificial flowers indeed.

"Plastic flowers!" I yelled. One of the ladies promptly approached me and suggested not to write about it. "Why didn't you bring fresh flowers?," I asked. "He deserves better than this recycled wreath." The plastic was already faded, indicating it had been used, kept and reused a number of times.

A wreath of artificial flowers on a once-a-year occasion with all the vain display for a national hero is distasteful. It cheapens the hero and devalues his stature as the prime icon of the Philippines.

I believe the symbolic meaning of the ceremony was completely lost. The plastic flowers thus became the metaphor for all this show - phony, superficial, specious.

Believers in Rizal, his ideas and writings variously call themselves. Some are referred to as knights, and therefore the honorific "sir" to address members of the Knights of Rizal. Their female counterparts are described as "Kababaihang Rizalista" of which Rose Cruz aka Lady Araceli "Rose" Cruz is, according to some, the perpetual president.

## Rizal Day Ceremony Becomes a Frivolous-and-Comical Event in Toronto - MabuhayRadio

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Dressed to the nines, Rizal's disciples in the two KR's were joined by officials of Philippine Independence Day Council (PIDC) in their homage to the hero with the usual fanfare (Video at: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VyfWQhZEIE>).

Looking at how garishly they dressed, coiffed, bejeweled and perfumed, it's probably safe to assume they have at least five dollars in their pockets. They are far from destitute.

Count the "sirs", their "ladies" and the "kababaihan" and easily there's 10 people. Pool their five dollars each and we have 50 dollars, which is enough to buy a dozen roses or a small basket of fresh cut flowers.

The amount will hardly dent their pockets. If it does, the KR's can always set aside money from their budgets and fund-raisings whenever they go to the yearly routine of commemorating Rizal.

Reader Romy Monteyro of Vista, California lightens the issue. He says: "Recycled plastic flowers are cheaper and can be stored for use again next year! Otherwise the Knights and Ladies are probably mostly from Ilokoslovakia! LOL!".

But Vilma Masadao-Crisologo, a reader from San Diego, California, was fulminating. "I'm appalled," she says.

"Those attendees, women and men alike, were 'shining in their glory' and to lay a wreath of plastic flowers? A disgusting way of honoring the memory of the 'Great Malayan'."

"They can afford to display pricey gowns/costumes/barongs but can't afford a dozen roses at \$9.99. Hypocrites in the highest degree," she adds. # # #

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