

Introduction

The Creative Writers Group is composed of young people who are interested in art and literature, especially the writing of prose and poetry. Arthur Morimitsu, who was interested in short story writing, and Jobo Nakamura, who had plans underway for a magazine, were instrumental in starting the organization. The first organizational meeting was held on July 8, 1942, and it was decided that members would write pieces for outside magazines and also for the Colony magazine. In the July 8 issue of the Tulean Dispatch the following announcement appeared:

WRITERS TO FORM LITERARY GROUP

Sketch artists, short story writers, poets, feature writers, and other literary-minded persons interested in creative writing are encouraged to contribute to "The Tempo," a monthly magazine now under organization within the Adult Education department. Those interested may contact G. Nakamura in No. 1808.

Meetings

After the club was started, meetings were held one night a week, usually on Tuesday. Attendance varied from half a dozen to a dozen and a half. There was a small nucleus of relatively more capable writers who usually showed up at every meeting and turned out literary pieces regularly. There were others who were not so capable or so industrious who attended meetings irregularly. At various times, more immature writers attended meetings, but most of them came only once. Several of the immature group especially at the very first meeting, submitted compositions for criticism, but most of them seemed afraid to do so.

Arthur Morimitsu usually chaired the meetings, and the members gathered informally around a table. "Did anyone bring anything?" was usually the first question asked. As a rule, two or three pieces were handed in. The chairman either passed one on to

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someone to read aloud, or let the writer of the piece read it himself. After the reading, general criticisms were called for. If it were a poem, few comments were made, the writer being asked merely to explain what he was trying to bring out. Most of the pieces were short stories or sketches and these usually stimulated a number of comments. The theme was usually discussed thoroughly, as well as the technique in making the story dramatic in making it "move" faster, in keeping one point of view, etc. The discussion and criticism were probably too complicated for the immature members and may have been one reason for their dropping out.

Membership Characteristics

The most active members of the writers group are Hiroshi Sugawara (Riley O'Suga), Art Morimitsu, George Nakamura (Jobo), Ken Hayashi, Eugene Okada, Shuji Kimura, Ruby, George and James Sakoda, Kiki Tomita, Miyoko Takagi, Yoshimi Kawaguchi, William Osuga, Frances Okamoto. Most of the members are between the ages of 20 and 30, with the average probably around 25. Art is over 30, while there are probably none below 20. Most of the members have gone to college, and several are college graduates, making this group a relatively educated Nisei group. While they do not seem to have a common occupational background, they all have interest in literature, in writing or in such related fields as photography. Members come from different sections of the Coast, and seem to be attracted primarily through common interest, rather than through casual acquaintance. The group has been meeting regularly every week, even though the number gathering together at any one time has never been very large.

Because of their wide range of reading, for one thing, the conversation of the members tend to take on an intellectual tinge. On the other hand, there is a conspicuous lack of interest in and

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talk of dates and dances which occupy so much of the attention of Niseis in general. The girls are not particularly attractive, and are accepted by the boys, who are in the majority, without particular regard for sex. Part of this is due to the fact, no doubt, that this group is older and have outgrown the extreme emphasis on the opposite sex maintained by adolescents. Part of this lack of interest can be traced to the fact that they have not been popular with the opposite sex, because they are not attractive (in case of girls) or because of quirks in their personality. Their intellectual interests have tended to alienate them from other Niseis who lack those interests. Of the group only about half of the boys go to a dance occasionally.

One definite characteristic of the creative Writers is their individualism. There has been no attempt to enforce any definite group ways on the group as a whole. The chairmanship has been made revolving, a different person taking care of a meeting each time. There are no other officers. The meeting place, too, is being rotated and held at the home of the members in turn. About three attempts were made to change the name of the group, but in spite of the large number of suggestions made, very few of the members agreed with the choice of another member. The names Scribblers and Coffee and Ink have been used as substitute names. Jobo has dubbed the group as Queers, without particular protest from the members.

The Magazine

A short review of the progress of the magazine is appropriate at this point. Jobo had called the prospective magazine "The Tempo." It was to be published under the auspices of the Adult Education Department, which was directed by Dr. Francis, a mature and

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dogmatic woman who was used to having things done just as she thought they ought to be. When the first manuscripts were sent to her to be looked over, she disapproved of many of them because, she said, they were not of high literary quality. Jobo thereupon resigned his job with the Adult Education Department, and took the manuscripts to Mr. Cook, head of the Information Division.

Mr. Cook, who had written radio plays himself, welcomed the magazine and offered to have it published free of charge under his department. As he was entrusted with the task of censoring publications within the Colony, this arrangement would obviate the necessity of sending the manuscripts to San Francisco to be approved. Also the magazine could be distributed free of charge as a supplement to the newspaper.

Mr. Cook and the Creative Writers

When it was learned that Mr. Cook had been a writer, the members were enthusiastic about having him come to the meetings to criticize the works of the members. One meeting was held in the newspaper office to hear the comments he had to make on the pieces already written. The better ones were severely criticized, and the others were put aside as unworthy of publication. The members considered this a reasonable procedure, but they were amused by his dogmatism. Morimitsu had written The Mirror^{1/} without any thought of mother love as a theme but Mr. Cook advised him to rewrite the end to make it a mother love story. It had to be a mother love story, he said, and proceeded to point out passages which made it so. And he insisted that the drunkard in Frank Higikoto's story should be killed by the wife, who, in Frank's

^{1/} See Dispatch, Magazine Section, August, 1942.

mind, was supposed to stand for all of the goodness in the world. Not only could Mr. Cook not see the point of view of the individual writers, but he did not seem to be able to realize that Japanese have a different way of looking at things.

Because Mr. Cook could not come to the meetings on Tuesday night, they were changed to Thursday night to suit his convenience. He came to about three meetings in succession. At first the meetings proceeded amicably. Mr. Cook took the lead in the discussions and did most of the commenting, and although he was still dogmatic, no one seemed to mind. Then someone asked him to bring some of the radio plays that he had written to read to the group. For the next two meetings the members were occupied largely in listening to Mr. Cook read his own works. The plays were considered well-written and to have a definite plot. Mr. Cook said that the stories of the members did not have enough plot, and that they should strive for that for a change, instead of harping on the soul-seeking sort of things that they were turning out. A few of the more critical members thought that Mr. Cook's stories were too commercial and had nothing substantial to them, so they continued to write what they wanted to. Then Mr. Cook suggested that each member write an "exercise" describing a room after a stag party.

In the meantime, the more sensitive members began to resent the idea of having Mr. Cook come to the meetings. One member said that Mr. Cook was bringing his things to read even when the group was not interested in them. This member suggested Mr. Cook brought up the Russian drama during the discussion because he thought the members didn't know anything about it. Also, it was hinted that he was trying to change the club into an advanced English class where the members would learn how to write the

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way he did. This particular member didn't think that Cook's commercial stuff was very good. In his opinion, the group wanted to write something with social significance. He ended up by saying that if Mr. Cook continued to come to the meetings, he himself wouldn't come any more. A few members discussed ways and means of getting rid of him.

At the next meeting there were six members and Mr. Cook present, and only two of them had written anything. Both of them were capable members, and had disregarded Mr. Cook's suggestion to write a description of a room after a stag party. When he called for "exercises," no one responded. Then Morimitsu was asked to read his piece, and it turned out to be a sketch beginning with the description of a room, but ending up with the impressions of a Nisei student prior to leaving his college town. Mr. Cook commented, among other things, that it should have been kept an impression of a room. Then when Sugawara read his story, Mr. Cook commented that it was the best story written so far. Then Mr. Cook said that for the next meeting everyone should write an impression of a room after a stag party. One member asked if they should write it even if they had no interest in the subject. Mr. Cook did not take the hint, and said that it would be good practice. Another asked whether they shouldn't be writing compositions rather than exercises to keep the magazine furnished with material, but again Mr. Cook said that exercises would be more helpful.

Toward the end of the meeting Mr. Cook suddenly asked whether he wasn't "butting" into the meeting. A few members hastened to erase that impression, and wanted to know where he had got that idea. At the close of the meeting, after Mr. Cook had gone home

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the members gathered to discuss his presence at the meetings. There was an agreement that he was being dogmatic and was stifling initiative. Also members did not like the fact that Mr. Cook was making changes in the stories as they went to press, without consulting the writers. Morimitsu and Sakoda's stories had been changed at the end without their knowledge, while Hayashi's story was altered in a way he disapproved of. Fear was expressed that if this continued the small membership would dwindle still further. Methods of stopping him from coming to the meetings were discussed, and it was thought that it would be best to shift the night of the meeting back to Tuesday, when he would have to be at the Council meeting. As an excuse it could be said that most of the other members could not come on Thursday.

Caucasian-Japanese Relationship

This incident throws light on the Caucasian-Japanese relationship existing in the Colony. While Cook's dogmatic nature may also assert itself in a Caucasian group, his assumption of his own status as superior to the Japanese is unmistakable. The fact that he felt free to change the stories written by members before they were printed in the magazine without even consulting the writers, that he did not ask the opinion of those at the meetings in regard to the policy concerning the way in which the meeting should be conducted, that he felt that his opinion was final all point to that fact. He does not seem to have suspected that his conduct and his writings were under criticism by the members and that some of them felt that they were possibly better writers than he was. The members at first welcomed his criticisms, but they could not accept without some protest his dogmatic ways and his superior attitude.

Leadership Roles

The activity of the Creative Writers can be viewed in terms of leadership. The interest of the members in the group seems to be primarily that of having their own compositions read and discussed before the group. Even if they are not the leaders in the group in a strict sense, they are able to gain the spotlight momentarily when their pieces are being read and criticized. This explanation is more plausible when it is considered that those who write the best and most regularly are the ones that attend the meetings most frequently. This can also explain why the less capable writers do not come to the meetings more than once or twice.

Part of the resentment toward Mr. Cook probably arose from the fact that he was trying to take most of the leadership roles himself. He not only led the discussion, he also brought his own works and occupied a large part of the meetings reading them. Not only would he not give others ample opportunity to express their opinions even about their own compositions, but he attempted to have them write "exercises," where he would be the focus of attention, even if others did the writing.