

philippine studies

Ateneo de Manila University • Loyola Heights, Quezon City • 1108 Philippines

Doveglion: Collected Poems

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Philippine Studies vol. 56, no. 3 (2008): 370–373

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can citizens and the subordinated, colonized, and racialized Filipinos—and not as a fulfilment of the liberal promise of equal access and equal representation.

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JOSÉ GARCIA VILLA. JOHN EDWIN COWEN, ED.

Doveglion: Collected Poems

Introduction by Luis H. Francia
New York: Penguin Classics, 2008. 260 pages.

José Garcia Villa was undoubtedly one of the most significant poets in Philippine literary history. A rebel in his day, Villa paved the way for modern poetry in the Philippines. When his poems were published in the United States, they received praise from Edith Sitwell, Marianne Moore, and E. E. Cummings, among other writers. In 1973 he was named National Artist by the Philippine government.

Doveglion: Collected Poems, edited by Villa's longtime student and literary executor John Cowen, comes as a timely publication and a fitting homage on the centenary of his birth.

The book gathers together the best of Villa's poems. Reprinted in toto are the aptly titled *Have Come, Am Here* (his first collection of poems to be published in the United States and in hindsight his most significant work) and *Selected Poems and New* (which includes selections from *Volume Two*). Also included are selections from *Appassionata: Poems in Praise of Love* and, most important, previously unpublished material, namely, works exemplifying what Villa called Duo-Technique and the "Xocerisms," Villa's brand of aphorisms ("pithy, inventive, philosophical insights told with a dash of Tabasco" [241]).

In poem after poem, Villa's astounding way with words leaps out, and one is reminded of why he was ahead of (and misunderstood by) the pat moralists and sentimentalists of his day. His lyricism is evident even in the first lines of the first page:

It is what I never said
What I'll always sing—

A Villa poem, as the lines suggest, does not state but rather engages the reader's senses and the imagination; hence, the challenge that its persona poses: "Invite a tiger for a weekend" (22), "bring the watermelons pigeons" (21), and "Imagine God a peacock" (59). To enter Villa's poetic landscape is to encounter a "radio made of seawater" (28), a "bright,Centipede" come from "What,celestial,province!" (79), or "God,dancing,on,phosphorescent, toes, / Among,the,strawberries" (105), as naturally as one finds very old men with enormous wings crashing in backyards in Gabriel Garcia Marquez.

In what he called the "divine poems," Villa reveals, in oracular language, a mystical vision ("The,zeta,truth—the,swift,red,Christ" [137]) where God is humanized—sometimes as friend, sometimes as rival, sometimes as the poet's alter ego. The imagery startles and challenges received pieties, as, for example:

Today,the,spirituality,of,the,devil,
Challenges,the,deviltry,of,God. (93)

Or

Christ,upon,a,
Ball: Saltimbanque,perpetual,in,beauty. (89)

Such poetry as Villa's does not make for easy reading. Some poems are more accessible than others, but throughout his work is a vitality at once reined in and propelled by craft. As Luis H. Francia, Villa's student, notes in the introduction to the book, "In his hands [the cause of poetry] evolves into a mighty engine of flight, winged with an exacting spiritual and aesthetic vision and an abundant lyrical gift honed by a keen critical intelligence" (xxxi).

The book also foregrounds Villa's innovations. In *Have Come, Am Here*, he introduced reverse consonance, a rhyme scheme where the "last sounded consonants of the last syllable, or the last principal consonants of a word, are reversed for the corresponding rhyme" (74). In *Volume Two*, he placed a comma after almost every word (hence, the "comma poems"). And in *Selected Poems and New*, he introduced what he called Adaptations, "experiments in the conversion of prose, through technical manipulation, into poems with line movement, focus, and shape" (147). Whether these innovations will withstand intensive critical scrutiny in the future is open to debate, but undeniably admirable is the unflinching desire to find new ways of expression.

In this collection, readers are introduced to “Duo-Technique,” which Villa describes as “a poetic pas de deux” (229). Lines of verse are each cut into two and are set so that “an aisle, a vertical partition of the poem” (229) is created. The structure increases the tension in the poem. Some may be reminded of Old English alliterative versification. Duo-Technique, however, is more dynamic, visually and semantically richer, though it is also torture to a typesetter:

Let a man
 contain an angel!
 Yet let him
 not be Fully angel—
 Though he
 Contain! a Full Angel.

Writing in Duo-Technique, Villa is almost pure technician. Part pattern poem, part found poem (all but one of these verses are adapted from poems in *The New Yorker* or elsewhere), the Duo-Technique poems reveal, like his Adaptations in the 1950s, Villa as master rewriter. (The example quoted, in fact, is an adaptation of one of his Aphorisms.) From these apparent finger exercises poets can learn economy and acquire sensitivity to the properties of individual words.

The “Xocerisms” are similar to the sayings that were published sporadically in Philippine magazines. People may doubt the profundity of some of the Xocerisms, but they are certainly charming and witty, even satirical; and some readers may, in fact, find them the most interesting part of the book: “JUNQUE = junk made elegant” (260).

The publication of his collected poems by Penguin puts Villa back at the center of the literary world—a recognition long overdue. It was Villa’s wish to be remembered as an “international poet” and not only as a Filipino poet. Of course, by “international” he probably meant “American,” as the title of his first book of poems in the United States suggests. (In his introduction Francia even interprets Villa’s “God” as America.) His wish comes true eleven years after his death. He is one of only two Filipinos to be published in the venerable Penguin series, Rizal being the other. No reader would question the nationalism of Rizal’s internationalism as some would (and have) Villa’s. But no matter how one locates his politics, his poetry remains

among the most beautiful articulations of the mysteries of art and being. On his centennial, it is only apropos that he declare, through this handsome edition of his collected works, “Have come, am here again.”

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KATHERINE L. WIEGELE

Investing in Miracles: El Shaddai and the Transformation of Popular Catholicism in the Philippines

Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2005. 207 pages.

Katherine Wiegele provides an easily comprehensible introduction to El Shaddai, a charismatic Roman Catholic lay movement in the Philippines and, according to the author, probably the largest prosperity movement worldwide with a following of over 10 million people. Founded by Mike Velarde, who sees himself as a preacher of generosity, not prosperity, El Shaddai emphasizes healing, prosperity (“health and wealth”), and positive confession (“name it and claim it”). The book consists of seven chapters, a short epilogue, fifteen photographs, a bibliography of 189 items, and an index.

In chapter 1 Wiegele discusses her purposes: to study the rise, ethos, and practices of El Shaddai; and to understand how the movement grew so rapidly, and how it has exerted itself politically, economically, and religiously in the Philippines. She questions whether El Shaddai, as a distinctive mode of human creativity, can tell us anything about change in Filipino society. In sum, she asks, “Why now? Why El Shaddai? Why this segment of the population? What needs and desires does El Shaddai address that the other religious groups do not?” (14). The ethnographic field research that is the backbone of the monograph was undertaken primarily in Manila but also in Baguio, Batangas, Pangasinan, and Roxas City, between November 1995 and December 1996.

In chapter 2, Wiegele describes Velarde’s teaching on Romans 13:8 (“Owe no one anything”). Velarde stresses the value of staying out of debt and setting aside 10 percent of one’s income in savings. When the author