

philippine studies

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

Doktrinang AnakPawis

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Philippine Studies vol. 27, no. 4 (1979) 537–539

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Fri June 27 13:30:20 2008

Book Review

DOKTRINANG ANAKPAWIS. By Rio Alma, Manila: Aklat Peskador, 1979. 276 pages.

At first glance, Rio Alma's third volume of poetry, *Doktrinang Anakpawis*, sprawls. The work does not seem to possess the compactness of his earlier volumes — *Peregrinasyon* (1968) and *Makinasyon* (1970), both published under the influence of modernism. Indeed, modernism and its self-conscious utilization of techniques culled from the poetry of the Symbolists, the Imagists, and the likes of T.S. Eliot, held sway as the foremost influence in Alma's earlier poetry, making for literature that is objective, highly allusive, witty, fusing lyrical grace and supple intellectual vigor.

Some elements of modernism — its intellectualism, a meticulous exploration of the possibilities of language, its dazzling use of fresh metaphors, its bold shift of tones and moods — are still discernible in the latest volume, but with a difference. The basic difference spells the change in the poetry of Rio Alma. An intense preoccupation not only with technique, but with the poet's own psyche or the persona's excursions into the uncharted realms of his being, appears to have given way to a marked concern for the individual in society — his anguish, his hopes, his actual condition in the world. By taking on a more social role, the poet seeks to relate his craft to the service of his community. *Doktrinang Anakpawis* chronicles the journey from the narrow confines of the self to the broader world of social realities. This all encompassing view of the world creates the impression that the work is diffused.

Consisting of twelve books, the collection presents contemporary Philippine society. The poems range from the intensely personal to those that obviously belong to the tradition of protest, from self-directed caricatures to statements of commitment even as the poet, with unflinching single-mindedness, imbues his writings with a tone oftentimes ironic, occasionally soaring to lyrical heights but always carefully integrated into the total thematic pattern. Taken collectively, the present volume is Rio Alma's salute to the common man.

Vivid images of death, war, suffering, hunger and privation recur in most of the poems. The reader is at once given enough hints that the work's pur-

pose is to jolt him into realizing the pervasiveness of injustice. The first book — *Sa Pagitan ng Hininga't Kamatayan* — recounts the lives and deaths of people who figured in the news not because of power but because of poverty. The first poem addresses the traveler-reader who is hounded by “lamig na kay hirap talikdan/Maiitim na larawang gumigitaw nang taimtim at banayad.”

The motif of a journey is reinforced in the second book — *Lakbay-Nilay* — as the poet takes the reader by the hand to show the sights and impressions that constitute selected areas of the poet's past. The third and fourth books oscillate from the very personal “Sa Pangungulila” to the seething violence hidden by a deceptively charming evocation of bucolic scene in “Tumatabal ang Talahib sa Tag-lamig at Tag-init.”

Tumatabal ang talahib sa pilapil at bukirin
 Samantalang ang gagamba'y nagkukumot na ng dilim;
 May titig na mapupusok at aninong matatalim
 At sa lupa'y nagtatanim ng kamandag at patalim . . .
 Pagsulyap ng alitaptap sa mailap na bituin,
 May talulot ng pulburang gagambala sa pawirin.

Love in its various manifestations is the controlling concept in the fifth book — *Katesismo sa Puso*. Here the poet experiments with different poetic forms — the villanelle, the sonnet and the kinds of kundiman. The difference between Alma and the traditional poets who also explored the theme of love is nowhere more obvious than in this section. Gone are the predictable images and worn-out structures of earlier love poetry. What stares the reader in the face are startling variations on a hackneyed theme, often infused with some elements of social concern. Always the intellectualism of the poet asserts itself in close and lucid thinking concretized in terms of images that appeal primarily to the mind. Notice the freshness of the lines “Pagkat ako'y isinilang sa Konstelasyon ng dilim/ Pagkat ako'y isinilang sa rehas ng karahasan,” to describe the plight of the lover. And when the woman comes, she is likened to a “kalapating kulay hasmin/at naghasik ng talulot sa bukal ng kamatayan”; her whisper is both a visual and auditory image — “gumulantang na tamburin ng bituin.”

People — big and small — sympathetically sketched and delightfully parodied fill the pages of the following sections. The tone varies from the faintly ironic to the fiercely sardonic as Alma paints with deft strokes various character types — the different guises of Citizen Juan, the bored society girl, the American GI turned millionaire, the famous movie director; even Professor Almario does not escape the attention of the poet. In this section, Alma weaves in and out of modern and traditional poetic forms like the *oyayi*, the *ambahan* and the folk songs. In all of the poems, there is the same sure grasp of technique. Never is a false note sounded as Alma tries to expose what lies hidden beneath flaunted wealth and studied unconcern.

The ninth and tenth books which are composed of very short poems (*Pabula*, *parabula* and *tanaga*) are precisely that: vignettes of life that embody the poet's comments on the realities being examined. The dynamic perception of life as a flux is sustained as the poet never lets up on an almost frenzied delineation of society's mores and lifestyles.

However, it is in the eleventh book — *Ebanghelyo sa Pagsugba* — where Alma most clearly expounds his doctrine of the common man. His "Di Para sa Iyo ang Tula Ko" is a forceful articulation of his commitment to the masses. He addresses his poetry to

Sa kanilang manipis at maikli ang kumot,
Sa kanilang makitid ang lagusan ng sapatos.
Sa kanilang maliit ang bubong at bunga ng pagod.

Art then becomes of service to the people, not something for the poet's self-fulfillment:

Ibig kong gamitin nila ang tula
Tulad ng isang mabisa't gagap na sandata,
Kargahan ng pulbura at poot at dusa

In his "Una't Huling Pasyon ni Rio Alma," the poet discards the various masks he has assumed and proceeds to speak in his own voice. The ideas introduced and reechoed in the earlier books find their most complete fulfillment in this long poem that reverberates with emotions so powerful that the only ending possible is apocalyptic in intensity and violence. The insistence that the *anakupawis* be heard serves as a refrain that mesmerizes the reader until the final note is sounded.

The last book contains the manifesto of the *makatang anakupawis*, the committed poet. Stripped of their images, the ideas explored by the poet in the poems assume the dimension of a sacred and binding oath.

There is no doubt that *Doktrinang Anakupawis* is significant not only because of its sheer power or its encyclopedic grasp of forces at work in Philippine society articulated with passion and brilliance. More importantly, it reflects the changes characterizing modern poetry in Pilipino — the movement from the esoteric poetry-for-the-few to the kind of literature that attempts to make the ordinary Filipino make sense of his life in a given society. That a major poet, a true pioneer of modernism in Philippine literature has fashioned a whole volume which can show the way toward relevance makes Rio Alma's third collection doubly important. Thus, Rio Alma has proven that the poet may open himself up to Western techniques without abandoning the role assigned to him by history and tradition — that of a creator who is closely attuned to the needs of his people.

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