

philippine studies

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

The Cry of Balintawak: A Contrived Controversy by Soledad Borromeo-Buehler

Review Author: Jose S. Arcilla, S.J.

Philippine Studies vol. 47, no. 4 (1999): 566–568

Copyright © Ateneo de Manila University

Philippine Studies is published by the Ateneo de Manila University. Contents may not be copied or sent via email or other means to multiple sites and posted to a listserv without the copyright holder's written permission. Users may download and print articles for individual, noncommercial use only. However, unless prior permission has been obtained, you may not download an entire issue of a journal, or download multiple copies of articles.

Please contact the publisher for any further use of this work at philstudies@admu.edu.ph.

<http://www.philippinestudies.net>

assembly (*lupon*). Where he cannot be exact, Francia weaves his own verbal magic specific to his medium. Thus in the example cited above, he substitutes alliteration for pun. When all else fails, Francia exploits his presumed readership's knowledge of both English and Filipino, as in the following lines from the previously unpublished "Farfelu":

it can be a bee too or
2
or it can be just you or
U.

(Villa)

maari rin itong maging isang bubuyog o
two
o basta maging you o
U.

(Francia)

If nothing else, these translations are a source of endless fascination for the bilingual reader, creative writer, and scholar and theorist.

An added, and perhaps the most attractive, feature of the book is Villa's line drawings, generously interspersed between pages of poetry. These illustrations, which Cowen compares to Joan Miro's, are a perfect complement to the poems—art mirroring art—and reveal yet another aspect of Villa's many-sided personality.

Villa once remarked, "Children, unlike Old Poets, see language in their innocence and bloom." *The Parlement of Giraffes* is an invitation to see language anew and to remember Villa, not as another dead and unread poet, but as a child "laughing, arm in arm [with God] / strolling upside down."

Jonathan Chua
Program for Interdisciplinary Studies
Ateneo de Manila University

The Cry of Balintawak: A Contrived Controversy. A Textual Analysis With Appended Documents. By Soledad Borromeo-Buehler. Quezon City: Ateneo de Manila University Press, 1998. xv + 221 pages.

In 1968, a monument to commemorate the start of the Philippine revolution against Spain a little over a century earlier disappeared from its place in Caloocan City. It reappeared in the University of the Philippines in Diliman,

Quezon City. Not only that, its original inscription and the date of the event being honored—the reason for the monument—were changed. Today, visitors will read, "Cry of Pugad Lawin" and not "Homenaje del Pueblo Filipino a los Heroes del '69, 26 Agosto 1896."

The author claims in her brief book that this is a historical distortion. She proves that the initial skirmish of the revolution of 1896 occurred in Balintawak, not elsewhere, and it happened on 26 August 1896, neither before nor after. But for one reason or another, the facts were changed. And now, three points have become the subject of controversy: when the revolution began, whether that initial incident can be rightly called the "Cry of Pugad Lawin," and what "Cry" means.

Apparently, the main culprit seemed to be Teodoro A. Agoncillo. His "use of a deeply flawed methodology" (p. 7) and reliance on limited, if not unreliable, sources led to wrong conclusions that were perpetrated in his tententious and erroneous biography of Andres Bonifacio, *The Revolt of the Masses: The Story of Bonifacio and the Katipunan* (1956). Unfortunately, the same view has been spread through *A Brief History of the Philippines*, which for many years has been one of the standard class manuals in many schools.

After analyzing the sources, Dr. Borromeo-Buehler accepts the story of Guillermo Masangkay, who claimed to be a member of the Secret Chamber of the Katipunan and was "one of those named by Bonifacio to kill" a certain Tomas Remigio if the latter betrayed the secret association (p. 15). On the nights of 24 and 25 August 1896, possibly without the Katipunan's authorization, a group of *malhechores* raided Chinese dry-goods stores in Balintawak, drawing fire from the Civil Guard. But these incidents preceded the encounter the following day, 26 August, when the Civil Guard clashed with the Katipuneros (p. 25). This, according to Dr. Borromeo-Buehler, started the Philippine revolution of 1896.

A book of this kind demands fidelity to documentary sources. Unfortunately, in more than one instance, the English translation—for those who do not read Spanish—takes away the important nuances of the original text. Just to cite one example, on page 94, we read: "el K. K. K. se constituyero, se dio a comenzo [sic] a tener existencia como asociaicion secreta en el 6 de Julio de 1892, solamente; y las afiliaciones no empezaron sino desde el mes de Agosto del mismo ano." A more faithful English version would have been "the K.K.K. was established, began to exist only on 6 July [not June, p. 95]; admission did not begin until the month of August that year." Besides less felicitous translations, Spanish accents should have been checked carefully.

Surprisingly, the author admits the story that Bonifacio and his group tried to rescue Rizal "at the Muelle de la Industria" off Binondo, Manila, on 21 August (p. 30). But Rizal's last diary of his voyage to Barcelona and back to Manila in 1896 did not mention the incident. Before sailing for Spain on 3 September, he had been transferred to a boat idling in Canacao Bay (Cavite), and was held *incomunicado* ("detenido pero no preso") from 6 August to 2

September. On the latter date, Rizal wrote: "God grant that there be no more disturbances tonight. They say that Imus was attacked." Thus, the Katipuneros could not have contacted him in Manila.

The author hopes that her conclusions would help clarify the story of the revolution, although she seems to be swimming against the tide. Her study, which is important in itself, is also a good commentary on the status of Philippine historical scholarship. There are now indications that Philippine historiography is becoming a more scientific and academic discipline, instead of being a mere convenient tool of propaganda for certain vested interests. And this is the problem. Relatively few scholars have the resources, or are willing to consult the documents in the archives and patiently, painfully analyze the *past wie es eigentlich gewesen ist*, as Rake put it. But this must be done. Otherwise, Philippine historiography will continue to be a mixed bag of fiction and fact.

Dr. Borromeo-Buehler has taken an important step in the right direction.

Jose S. Arcilla, S.J.
Department of History
Ateneo de Manila University

Bibliolepsy. By Gina Apostol. Quezon City: University of the Philippines Press, 1997.

Gina Apostol was educated at University of the Philippines and at the Johns Hopkins University, where she studied under John Barth (*Giles Goat-Boy*, *The Sot-Weed Factor*). She took fellowships from Johns Hopkins, Hawthornden Castle in Scotland, and Phillips Exeter Academy.

This catalogue matters, for it shows the roots of Apostol's postmodern novel. The word "postmodern" has been bandied about so often it runs the risk of being a cliché. "It's po-mo," my friend who studied in New York described a film, and I did a double-take and asked, "*Ano?*" Postmodern *pala*, which in the novel can describe a text which is fragmented and episodic, allusive and knowingly self-conscious, playing with language and its many prisms, full of pastiches and ironies.

Bibliolepsy, which is composed of 27 short chapters, has all these. But first, what is bibliolepsy? It is "a mawkishness derived from habitual aloneness and congenital desire. Manifestations: a quickening between the thighs and in the points of the breast, a broad aching V, when addressed by writers, books, bibliographies, dictionaries, Xerox machines, a sympathy for typists of manuscripts. Etymologically related to Humbert Humbert's gross tenderness, though rarely possessing its callous tragedy; occasionally accompanied by a liking for rock and roll."