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## Princesa ng Kumintang, by Virtusio

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vidually owned, whereas in Paraguay all land was held in common. Unfortunately, the experiment came to an abrupt end in 1899, not because of internal problems but

... due to a war of other people's making, decided in Washington and Madrid, with which the people of Tamontaca had nothing to do except suffer its consequences. (p. 137)

Bernad's first intention is to provide a narrative, and he does it splendidly (although, on occasion, he falls into the trap of dividing his characters too neatly into the heroes and the villains). He also allows his subjects to speak (eloquently) for themselves, through generous but judicious quotation from their often fascinating journals and letters. When Bernad moves briefly to evaluation, however, he is less successful. On Ricci, for instance, he does little more than quote two virtually contradictory assessments of K.S. Latourette. Also, he calls the work of Ricci and de Nobili "inculturation" in too unnuanced a way (admittedly, a few footnotes hint at the complexity of the issue). The sensitivity and creativity of de Nobili and Ricci is now widely recognized, but limitations in their approach are also becoming apparent. It is seen still to labor under a European dichotomy between religion and culture, so that inculturation tends to mean the insertion of "the Christian religion minus European culture" into an "Asian culture minus non-Christian religion." But in Asia, especially perhaps in South Asia, such a dichotomy makes no sense. It would be unfair to expect Bernad to have addressed these issues in detail (his purpose is different), but some attention to them would have provided a more satisfying picture of both the missionary experiments and the cultural issues. Good history, after all, looks at the past from the perspective of contemporary questions. And the inculturation issue arouses some passionate interest today.

The book has been printed in a very readable format, and typographical errors are extremely rare. I noticed "advice" for "advise" on p. 54, and a footnote on p. 134 which has Bernad himself publishing a book in 1896 — even so prolific an author can hardly have begun so early!

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PRINSESA NG KUMINTANG AT IBA PANG KUWENTONG  
PILIPINO. By Romeo P. Virtusio. Manila: Cacho Publishing House, Inc.,  
1989. 150 pages.

*Prinse sa ng Kumintang*, Romeo Virtusio's collection of short fiction, treats the variousness of university intellectuals, public relations executives, the banqueting *principalia* of the old Commonwealth period, nightclub crooners, social climbing society columnists, sad bachelors, and ruminant nuns in the light of social significance and consciousness. His fiction probes deeply into

the lives of the bourgeoisie, into the compromises to which they are seduced, and their painful and private struggling to unbind themselves from all the confused entrapments. And always, action suggests a simmering discontent, the pulse and throb on the tap presaging a violent eruption already underway. His characters always reach the edge of privacy as they are challenged to cross the border leading to a social reawakening, sometimes gifted with the knowledge that marks them differently, as when in the title story, the beautiful and mythical princess favors the farmers' lawyer among her titled and rich suitors. The banquets of old Batangas are recalled with graceful elaboration. The whirl of voices in flippant conversation, witty retorts, and small talk that sparks attraction capture painstakingly the manners of the Tagalog as they feast on *lechon* and assorted *dulce*, and drink *lambanog*.

The love story takes place the year before the Commonwealth is inaugurated. History inflicts the protagonists with a strange fear which suggests that even love is blessed by the tides of history. Marriages ride the same turbulent historical waves that could just possibly crash ashore. These muted fears silence the humble lawyer from proposing; the woman passes her time in hopeful waiting as she convinces herself:

Ngunit ano ang maaaring idulot ng darating na komonwelt kundi ang bagong liwanag? At ang anak ng gobernador, busilak na baguntaong kakatawan sa mga pag-asang maluwalhating nagluluntian, hindi ba't siya'y dalawin nito sa Maynila? At ang abugadong ito? (p. 72)

The intimations of the unknown are ignored. History is relegated to the background as the more personal "stories" of the lovers gain the foreground. Comfort and security become the more traditional thesis of the story instead of the more revolutionary thesis that love can actually embolden individuals to face historical unknowns and grapple with them. By privileging individualism over integration with society, the story becomes something of an anti-historical narrative defeating its initial motion toward social consciousness.

Virtusio's fiction suffers in that its social vision and the program it constructs and proposes exist predominantly in the patriarchal world. It is ideologically slanted to relegate the women of his fiction to secondary and passive positions in the power structure, constantly ruled and subjugated by his male characters. His fiction represents women in the conventional and stereotypical molds—desperate prostitutes, light-minded journalists, passive and excitable *colegialas*, and meek and virginal nuns.

In "Ang Pasipista," an aging courtesan wakes up one day aching and strained with her endless hawking. Avelina, war-widow-turned-prostitute contemplates a quiet and comfortable retirement. In its range of discourses, this story extends even further to involve the problematic of motherhood. Avelina prostitutes herself only because she is left with a son to raise. She drags herself into this bodily perversion to provide Teddy the comfortable life, bourgeois breeding and education that she has been denied.

The morning stretches on as she schemes to persuade Henry, her Chinese businessman lover, to provide her ten thousand to send Teddy to either Ateneo or La Salle. But the outlawed negotiator momentarily disappoints her. Meanwhile, Teddy becomes a well-regarded leader in the student movement, and from the way he reasons, Avelina suspects him to be an activist. When one night Henry arrives half-drunk and hissing with insults for a group of local politicians protesting his business, Teddy assaults him unexpectedly. Teddy tramples him on the chest, over and over.

With this violent surprise, Teddy brings Avelina to her unexpected liberation. The familial matrix seemingly justifies the resolution, but when one considers the specificities of gender, the same resolution hardly endures.

Earlier on, Avelina muses:

... ngayon ko nga lamang naman naiisip, ang mga walanghiya, sabay pala kaming ginagahasa ... ng aking bayan, ang mga estrangherong mandarambong, ... mga Amerkano at Intsik, kailan, kailan pa kayo magbabayad ng inyong mga utang? (p.123)

Where the story initially proposes that prostitution and motherhood are keen experiences precipitating a consciousness of struggle, it ends by downplaying the very possibility. The will to revolt is reserved for the man in the family. The illumined journey to the dark rooms of "womanly" experiences does little compared to Teddy's formal political awakening in effecting the sort of individual subversion which the narrative foregrounds. Here, the old chivalric motifs recur.

In the reading process, this is symptomatic of the perpetuation of oppressive images and representations of woman in society that remain lodged and unchallenged in the consciousness of contemporary readers of literature. Helene Cixous, in "The Laugh of the Medusa" sees literature as

a locus where the repression of women has been perpetuated, over and over, more or less consciously, and in a manner that is frightening since it is often hidden or adorned with the mystifying charms of fiction. (p. 311)

In the light of political and pro-feminist readings, his fiction self-destructs in its very attempt to foreground radical discourses privileging social transformation.

In both acts of reading and writing, women can only be recognized as force in and part of social revisioning. Revisioning must take place in as concrete a field as gender, where the most basic and most ignored of oppressions take place. Good fiction necessarily tasks itself to liberate women, and all persons at that, from conventional and limiting representations constructed by society.

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