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Ama

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this, his second book of poetry, published twenty-five long years after his first, *The Wounded Stag*; stories of pain all, this time strictured through the confining structure of poetry, and through his usual sense of irony and control, in a cool (not cold), calm and collected craft.

Are Santos' poems dying of old age? I do not smell any reek of impending death. Perhaps a leanness, but never an enervation of subject. But what narrow scope he works in, he masters with his usual wary use of the language and sense of discipline. Again, ripeness may not be all . . . but surely in art, it is essential.

Poets, like old soldiers, never die. They just, perhaps, fade away, and only in a country where the tedium of listening to a poet's heart and private truths has reached its limit of endurance. And even when that inauspicious time comes—if it hasn't already—the poets, the likes of Santos, will refuse to die. They are simply banished from the earth, like a "great plague."

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AMA. By Lazaro Francisco. Quezon City: Manlapaz Publishing Co., 1982. 203 pages.

MAGANDA PA ANG DAIGDIG. By Lazaro Francisco. Quezon City; Ateneo de Manila University Press, 1982. viii, 296 pages.

Among the novelists who wrote in Pilipino, Lazaro Francisco easily stood out as one of the few who viewed the world from a definite moral perspective. Like most of his contemporaries, Francisco had his first works published serially in *Liwayway* in the 1920s. Like such popular writers as Fausto J. Galauran and Antonio Sempio, among others, Francisco wrote a number of novels which appealed to the taste of the ordinary reader, who by the 1930s had already become accustomed to conventionalized ways of exploring reality through the novels. Thus the materials and techniques of Francisco's *Sa Paanan ng Krus* (1937) and *Deo* (1925) had become familiar to the readers of *Liwayway*. The world they depicted was narrow, limited to the confines of familial relationships. It was in his other novels that Francisco widened the parameters of his discourse as he took on themes and structures which the more personal writings could not contain.

Two of Francisco's more social novels—*Ama* and *Maganda Pa ang Daigdig*—have recently been published, this time in book form, making accessible to the contemporary reader novels acclaimed for their realistic portrayal of agrarian society. A number of critics have shown how Francisco's choice of sub-

ject matter has set him apart from his contemporaries, who depended too heavily on formulas revolving around familial relationships with too little social or political context. This is not to say that the novelist turned his back on conventions resorted to by the writers of this period. Francisco hewed closely to traditional themes and techniques. Such themes as love between a man and woman and the individual pitted against society, shaped Francisco's works, as they determined a large number of novels. Moreover, Francisco's techniques betrayed his reliance on predictable modes of plot structure, character delineation and point of view, among others.

To argue that Francisco's relatively greater significance rests solely in his choice of social reality as subject matter, is to fall back on the old and unresolved matter-form dichotomy. Instead of taking an evaluative stance, it would perhaps be more useful to examine how matter and form have been welded by the novelist in order to construct a meaningful discourse.

Ama, first published in 1929, already displayed Francisco's moral concerns. The story revolves around Ingkong Tasyo, a tenant who becomes a victim of an oppressive system personified in Don Pamfilo Melendrez, the haughty and cruel landlord, and Don Alipio, the provincial governor. The narrative is an almost unbroken series of misfortunes that Ingkong Tasyo experiences because of his lowly position in the class structure. His alienation derives from the systematic attempt of the rich to drive the old man from his land.

The novel explores a number of solutions as possible answers to the evil caused by the tenancy system. One of these is objectified in the secret society composed of dispossessed former tenants. Its initiation rites resemble those of the Katipunan, and are thus indicators of the extent to which the members are willing to shed blood to bring about their emancipation. As the novel ends, however, this group is discredited. The other option is embodied in Delfin, Inkong Tasyo's son who is studying to be a lawyer. It is clear that Francisco sees in education a viable means to improve the condition of the illiterate masses.

As the novel opens, Putingtubig is compared to paradise as imaged in Genesis. This world belongs to a time past, when the farmers owned their lands and lived peacefully. Don Pamfilo has destroyed this idyllic world, for which reason fratricidal wars have taken place among the inhabitants of Putingtubig. Following the convention of the happy ending, Francisco falls back on a time-tested formula: the exploiters discover that Ingkong Tasyo is their long-lost brother. With this convenient recognition scene, the novelist can now impose order upon the chaotic world. The novelists' intervention in this solution reinforces rather than smooths out the tension between what is and what should be, between the real and ideal worlds.

What Francisco achieves in this early novel is to indicate the structures which are antagonistic to each other, and are rooted in the tenancy system. The central framework that structures the novel is religious—the notion of

paradise regained/transfigured world—its central theme being that a change in the hearts of men will necessarily lead to the happiness of the majority. Early in his career, Francisco understood how a fictive discourse could do only so much—pose certain questions and expose basic contradictions in an exploitative society. Because of certain factors, however, one of them Francisco's unflinching Christian perspective, the novelist seemed to have had no other choice than to append a conventional ending to an insistent probing into the nature of injustice.

Maganda Pa ang Daigdig, first published in 1955, also employs the structural opposition delineated in *Ama*, but whereas *Ama's* central image is paradise regained, this second work deliberately sets out to project a bleak world with little possibility of redemption. The romantic mode which shaped *Ama* has given way to a kind of realism that refuses to view characters and situations in terms of black and white. Patterns do exist, but in a much more complicated manner.

This complexity is most clearly seen in Lino, the novel's protagonist, a former guerilla fighter who comes out deeply traumatized by war as well as by his recent experiences as a job-seeker in war-torn Manila. He eventually comes home to Pinyahan and finds work as a gardener in a house owned by Miss Sanchez, a public school teacher. Unlike Ingkong Tasyo, who remains meek in the face of suffering, Lino pursues the business of survival grimly and cynically. He refuses to become a tenant, for after having witnessed the disastrous effects of this system on his father and grandfather, Lino has sworn never to work for any landlord. However, he is gradually led to have more faith in his fellowmen, even as he sees the willingness of some people to improve the lot of the poor. Padre Amando, the enlightened landlord in Pinyahan, is one of the few who are willing to give up their land to be parcelled out to the tenants.

As in *Ama*, an outlawed society—the Huk movement—surfaces to provide a counterpoint to what the enlightened landlords represent. The Huk members are represented as selfish, opportunistic thieves and murderers calling for the destabilization of society through violence. This movement is finally destroyed, and as the novel ends, Lino returns to society's fold, a willing ally of the faction that intends to effect changes within the structure. The possibilities for society's transformation are aptly expressed in the novel's forward-looking title.

Despite the different periods of initial publication, both *Ama* and *Maganda Pa ang Daigdig* explore the same issue: what men should do to change the situation within an exploitative socio-political order. In *Ama*, Francisco has created a narrative with much Biblical underpinning, constructed within the archetypal mode, as evidenced in the setting, characters, situations and themes that hark back to universal images and motifs with which the Bible is replete. The attempt to depict lived life is largely subsumed into a domi-

nant religious view that thrusts the narrative into a world where time almost stands still, as in a frieze.

Maganda Pa ang Daigdig, on the other hand, takes on more qualitative aspects of contemporary life—the pervasive social unrest, the emergence of the Huk movement, the proliferation of private armies, corruption in the government, and other social realities. Such characters as Lino, Padre Amando, Miss Sanchez and Don Tito are types, but the novelist succeeds in endowing them with individuating traits. The mode of representation is made to approximate the reader's notion of everyday reality, for which reason the characters and situations are rendered more believable. The final thrust is basically Utopian, but there is an awareness that the real liberation of the farmers needs more than just a change of heart. The individualistic outlook of *Ama* has given way to the socialistic view of *Maganda Pa ang Daigdig*.

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KEEPING THE FLAME ALIVE: ESSAYS IN THE HUMANITIES (A Diamond Jubilee Publication). Edited by Pacita Guevara-Fernandez. Quezon City: University of the Philippines Press, 1983. 225 pp.

A collection of essays by faculty members of the University of the Philippines' Division of Humanities and edited by its Associate Dean, this book is divided into five parts: The Poet and Poetry, Literature as Statement, Literature as Sensibility, The Other Sister Arts: Music and Painting, and Literature as Performance -- Live Literature.

The Poet and Poetry contains Gemino H. Abad's "A Poem's Making," which is worth purchasing the book for, even without considering the considerable virtues of other essays. This is a look at a poem in the making, and Abad, being both poet and critic in consummate doses, is probably the only one who could have done the job so well. Being teacher as well, he knows the importance of the complete honesty with which he details the evolution of the poem "Candles."

Starting with the intention to sit down and write a poem, he chronicles the moment of birth, the instant when the imagination names one of "those things that flit about and vanish," that might "free the mind of its weight and pain" (p. 14). From then on, the reader is taken on a high-flying ride through memory, imagination, association, creation, revision — a flight as exciting and cliff-hanging as that of a light plane doing barrel rolls — till at the end there is "Candles":