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## **Sugat ng Salita, by Bautista**

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... pp. 39, 53, 156). Some individual chapters are not well integrated into the flow of the entire book; they seem to be reworked material that possibly had appeared previously in another form. Finally, the author stated that the second part of his work was to be a "utopian response" (p. xiii) to church realities; this reviewer found a disproportionately large amount of negative comment (pp. 151 ff.) with few creative possibilities given.

Some short comments on practical matters of the publication are apropos. Layout and printing are well done; non-glare paper is appreciated by readers; the paper edition has a sturdy binding. The format is generally fine (exception: the text referred to Tables 2a/2b, but they are not found). Although the translation used inclusive language (humankind, p. 68) and is generally well done, certain words are not universal English usage (horried, p. 31; paradisal, p. 71; structuration, p. 131; milliard [billion]). Neither did the translator provide the English equivalent of foreign language materials (e.g. p. 95: Karl Rahner's *Schriften zur Theologie* = *Theological Investigations*).

Other publication deficiencies are: inaccuracies in the sequence of endnote numbers between pages 159-64; duplication of lines in endnote 149; lack of library classification data which is usually found in books coming from Orbis at Maryknoll, New York.

What then is the balance-sheet for Walbert Bühlmann's *The Church of the Future*? Certainly, the book is, in popular jargon, "a good read." It reflects the author's critical love for the church and his desire to see the church's mission of evangelization realized more fully. He expresses the urgency of the task as the close of the second millenium of Christianity approaches. The openness and optimism generated by Vatican II are not to be lost. Bühlmann has given us another work of mission animation and it is certainly appreciated.

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SUGAT NG SALITA. By Cirilo F. Bautista. Manila: De La Salle Publications, 1986. 93 pages.

The language is immediately noticeable in Cirilo F. Bautista's first book of poems in Pilipino. It is not the language as it is spoken in Bulacan and the other Tagalog provinces that ring Metro Manila. Neither is it the colloquial, street-wise lingo that Jose F. Lacaba wields so well in his poetry. It is a vigorous and vibrant voice, of which critic and poet Rogelio Mangahas says: "Malaking ambag sa estetika at sensibilidad ng modernistang panulaan ang

kanyang rendisyon sa sariling wika. Mabulas at makabagong klasiko ang kanyang pananagalog" (back cover).

Such neoclassical language is employed in the poems dwelling on his *ars poetica*. One of the most moving—and complex—in that group is "Ang Kalapati sa Aking Silid." Bautista startles with his often original use of images. In these post-EDSA days when every dove symbolizes peace, Bautista's dove becomes both serene and surreal: "Ang kalapati sa aking silid / ay, asul ang bituka / at isang talampakan ang pilikmata." But this dove brings danger darker than death itself. Thus: "Kapag ibinuka / niya ang kanyang pakpak / sa saliw ng dilim, / agad babagsak / sa lakas ng hangin / ang tore ni David" (p. 18).

If this poem were a short story, the last four lines would have made for a fine denouement, with all the loose threads tied with skill and grace: "Ang kalapati sa aking silid / ay isang propeta— / Ang langit at impiyerno / nakauka sa kanyang mata" (p. 19). The poet's art is not a mirror, but a prism producing the spectrum of both heaven and hell.

The dove metamorphoses into a crow in "Kung Paano Ginawa ang Salita." Its first cry is not lyric, but utterly lonely: "Sa himaymay / ng puso na nagdurugo / sa kanyang pagtuka / dumadaloy / ang punebre / . . . hanggang tila konsiyertong / itim / at puno ng lagim / ang tunog at inog / sa aking daigdig" (p. 26).

This state of darkness is the point of departure for a meditation on the essence of life, its beginning and end. This, in biblical allusions that do not stick out of the poem like pilgrims trying hard to look pious. Listen: "Sa Simula, / ang Pako, / at namukadkad ang Dugo . . ." (p. 27).

The poet also turns biblical in "Upang Maging Diyos," in which he plays on the Christian paradox of life-in-death. Tonal richness resonates in this poem, with allusions flowing into each other in a seemingly effortless manner: "Bawat butong dinudurog bawat / nginunguyang bagong laman / ay nag-uusok na insensong / patungo sa pusod ni Adan . . ." (p. 11).

The word-play here is in *pusod* and *puso*. "Words are flesh," said one Zen master. In these poems, Bautista takes one frightening step further: he dares to wrestle with the thought buried in the word-flesh.

The metaphysical meanderings of the above poems find parallel in the physical journeys of the place poems. There is a long, delightful poem about Hong Kong, with the colony's omnipresent water as the central image. Loneliness drifts about the poems on Paris and Switzerland. But it is the pure and terrible beauty of Amalfi, Italy, that makes the persona die a little. The piece on Picasso gently strums with these lilting lines: "Bilog na dilaw / naging araw, / sulpot ang bahaghari sa bitukang litaw, / bisikletang ligaw / nang pukpuhin at hinugis hikaw / nagpausbong sa mundong tila sanlibong sitaw" (p. 43).

"Isang Kasalan" is a love poem recalling the tender, delicate poems of the Chinese. The Baudelairean black cat becomes a bitter image of a broken man in "Pusang Itim." One begins to understand how a father feels loss after reading "Isang Kadiliman." The intense longing for the children who visit the grandfather for only two days is sketched in painful, unsentimental lines.

For those who scream for social-realist blood, the poet more than satisfies with "Huling Enkuwentro," "Ang Salita ni Balweg," and the Leveriza-slums series. The first is the monologue of a hired assassin who was to do his greatest—and last—act before 5,000 people on the tarmac. "Balweg" is an ironic theological reflection rooted in the elemental images of the Cordilleras. "Mga Batang Iskuwater" goes beyond cold cataloguing: "Luma at marumi ang kanilang mga damit, . . . / naglalaro sila sa tabi ng malangaw / at mabahong estero gayong maaga pa / at di pa sila kumakain. Parang talangkang / gumagapang sa putik ang kanilang tawanan" (p. 71).

The title poem, "Sugat ng Salita," quotes Erich Fromm's *You Shall Be as Gods* for its epigraph—"Taglay ng bawat tao sa kanyang sarili ang buong sangkatauhan." It is a long, flowing poem whose epigrammatic lines work by both implication and indirection. It asks the persona, a sad fisherman, to take us across over there, where the land is dry. "Sunungin mo / ang bakal / naming puso / gaya nang / pagsunong mo / sa araw / pagaanin / itong tila / bulak at / itawid / doon sa / kabilang / ibayo / sa bundok / na luntian" (p. 90). But afterwards, the sad fisherman will be thrown into the ocean, there to drown amid the collective laughter of the people. It is a stark parable on the life of a poet, helping ferry people across the black ocean of the imagination, only to be abandoned in the end.

Cirilo F. Bautista has already published four books of poems in English (*The Cave and Other Poems*, *The Archipelago*, *Charts* and *Telex Moon*), all of them winners of the Palanca Memorial Awards for literature. With this first folio, he vaults into the front rank of our poets whose words wound us in the native tongue.

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