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Bibliolepsy by **Gina Apostol**

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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.

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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."

Thus a biblioslept is a person who sleeps not only with men, but also with books. The main character is Prima. Her father is Prospero, who drew *Anibal the Ibis*, *A Patriotic Cartoon*, and her mother is Prima Mercader Watts, a taxidermist. The couple meets in a decrepit boat bound for Leyte. He reads a book and ignores the heiress slumming it in third-class. But when she could no longer take the pitching of the boat, she vomits. "Not for my music, my good looks or my big silly eyes did he go near me," my mother said. "But for my vomit he came."

The novel is full of set-pieces like this, like puzzles that fit in and replicate meanings in the minds of the reader. The writer knows her narrative theories, and she plays with them and turns them on their heads. Her major gift is her language. The voice is fluent and lyrical, sophisticated and blunt. She describes the dolphins trailing in her parents' boat as "like flashing glass domes, quick and thickly crystalline." She avoids melodrama and the usual curve of narrative in realistic Philippine fiction.

Moreover, she juggles allusions with the dexterity of a skilled performer: "But all this [the parents' romance] is predictable, a common provincial chronicle. What interests me, of course, is the book. I keep wondering what Prospero was reading on that first boat journey. I imagine my father, shadowed and tubercular, profile deepened against water, reading the last poem Shelley had written before he died in Spoleto. Or maybe it was the passage in Melville, in which our archipelago is unnamed but recalled by the beckoning of a black vast sea, between the description of ropes and the listing of harpoons. Or perhaps it had been the tale of his namesake Prospero, a betrayed man on a boat, laden only with books and a child."

The narrator and her sister Anna are pampered by their wealthy and eccentric grandmother, who looks down on the girls' father. She buys them the strangest things: readers from Indonesia, in a language close to Waray; *Abraham Lincoln's World*; and yes, the *Kama Sutra*, which the grandmother calls "a book of fairy tales from India. The most expensive book among the smuggler's goods."

It is a fast and dizzying read afterward: the parents die, Prima discovers the books in the public library donated by her grandmother, where she spends many days of gladness and in grief. After high school, she goes to UP Diliman, and from here, the novel flies.

Part I is good, if a bit clunky. Part II is excellent.

Finally, Primi admits she wants to write with the body, the way the French feminist critics (Luce Irigaray, Helene Cixous) did. "What had led me on my ghost-cruise around the lips and loins of words was basically this: the substance of recollection in my thighs, sharp response of flesh. Not dead fathers in the vague unconscious but lives in the cunt, where pasts resurrect and spring surprises." Not just to write, but also to love the men coming and going in her life like so many arrivals and departures. The lit-

erary life is skewered, the EDSA rebellion satirized ("The chain of protests, like the minute catenae of clitoral pleasure, swelled into the wave of this climax").

Other people write tomes that would be better off as doorstops. In 160 pages, Gina Apostol serves up Manila in the Eighties: swift, Swiftian, sexy, and sad.

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Returning the Empties: Selected Poems 1960s –1990s. By Lakshmi Gill.
 Toronto: Tsar Publications. xi+170 pages. \$15.95.

In this profound collection of poems, Lakshmi Gill gathers together her poetry which was written over 30 years in Canada. Lakshmi Gill was born in the Philippines. Her parents were Indian, Spanish, and Filipino. She arrived in Vancouver in 1964 for her MA after her studies in the U.S. The literary critics affirm that she is a unique new figure in Canadian poetry because she is Asian. Buddha, Christ and Asian culture are unique in her poetry which is written in Canadian geography and culture. In her poems Lakshmi Gill affirms her Asian culture in her western reality. She is a young Asian. One critic says that she is "a woman with something good to say and not just a sob." She is a poet never content with present arrangements in life. She questions everything in both her Asian and her Canadian culture. She is young but intelligent. Her poems show a grasp of the complex and metaphysical ability of an Asian. She often casts a wicked eye on the Western attempts at being civilized. There is nothing unreal about her passions for they have spiritual grace. Her poetry as an Asian in Canada is actually very good because it combines what is good in both Asian and Canadian culture.

Lakshmi Gill herself says these poems were written in Canada because of "the climate (culture) of Canada." She also says these poems emphasize the influence of Canada on her, and often defeated her own Asian nature. But in the end, the climate of Canada and her personal Asian climate became one and the same! The title of this collection, "Returning the Empties," is really a metaphor from Canadian culture. It means that after we have drunk a case of beer in Canada we gather the empty bottles and return them to the store for the return of the bottle deposit. In that metaphor, Gill says that we must also drink these poems together—both Asians and Canadians—so that we will return from the emptiness of the contrast between Asian and Western cultures and have mutual unity in both our cul-