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House of Image

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HOUSE OF IMAGES. By Mig Alvarez Enriquez. Quezon City: New Day Publishers, 1983. 205 pages.

Like Enriquez's other novel, *The Devil Flower* (1959), *House of Images* is set in the author's native Zamboanga. Whereas the former was set in antebellum times, when preoccupations revolved around manners and mores, the latter opens just before the Japanese Occupation, and ends with the first American planes bombing the city, "ack-ack fire pursuing the split-tailed bombers [bursting] . . . in the air like fantastic blottoes of ink on unruled paper" (p. 202). The same microcosmic community of Zamboanga families, relatives, and retainers is thus set on a grid of survival, suspicion, and stress. None of the Gutierrez/Guevarra family, around whom the war and the emotions explode, remains unchanged by war's epiphanies.

The central sensibility is that of Leonardo, a boy of fifteen when rumors of war begin and are confirmed by Pearl Harbor; a man of eighteen shaped by loss and love, combat and labor, betrayal and awakening, at novel's end. *House of Images* is a Bildungsroman of urgency, brought about by the heightened pace of the war. Leonardo awakening to his body does not happen as a leisurely unravelling against a provincial pastoral backdrop, but in the uncertainty of occupation, evacuation, and hiding, when every moment seems stolen from danger, and the future is shrouded and unsure. While still full of basic questions, he weathers the Japanese interrogations and the guerilla raids; flights to the mountains and his sister's rape; his sweetheart's marriage, and the question of vengeance. Along with the physical maturing comes an awareness of the deceptions of family images, not only the images of saints — ivory-faced and diamond-teared, but with blocks of wood for bodies — but the images as well of ancestors, familial pride, appearances.

Through it all are visible the values and life-style of prewar Zamboanga, slowly changing in the crucible of transformation. The war pits not only Japanese against Filipinos, but fellow Filipinos against each other as well, and the arch-traitor is a Filipino, in the tradition of Aurelio Tolentino's Dahongpalay and Asal-hayop. It is not only saints' images that are found to have wooden bodies, but people, elders formerly revered, discovered to be only human after all:

. . . Leonardo saw the house as he had never seen it before, empty of meaning, like a frame without a picture. The image of the house, as it was, was never there, only a likeness which his mother had tried to fit into an ornate frame. The task of fitting it in had enslaved the family to its anachronistic requirements, which Nenita had heroically tried to adjust to the present. It held the family in bondage to its structure, its conventions. (p. 203)

Slightly disturbing to the foreign reader may be the author's problem with

translation, since he often leaves terms in the Spanish or the vernacular untranslated (*estampas*, *patadiongs*, *catapusan*, *pastillas de leche*) or mis-translated (as when he calls the Zamboanga pidgin, or *Chabacano*, "Spanish jargon"). It is his solution to the problem of how to represent the native speech in English. Footnotes and glossaries are awkward and can interrupt the narrative flow (although he does supply one footnote, to explain why he spells *maong*, *denim*, *mahong*) — and one cannot always explain the term within the sentence, as in "They belong to what they called the *quinta columna*, or fifth column, the unseen powerful army of spies . . ." (p. 18). He handles the problem by interjecting an occasional *aba*, or *hijo*, and keeping in the original Spanish or vernacular, the terms that carry too much of a cultural context to explain on the spot.

However, the too-lush style that marred *The Devil Flower* has here been controlled, and except for the ending, in which the author tries to pull together all the narrative threads by explaining — rather than rendering — the final epiphany, Enriquez's novel is absorbing, holding the reader in personal involvement with the family and the events of the war, while inviting reflection on the social significance of family pride and on the implications of war for everyone. Although it appears almost four decades after the end of the Pacific war, it joins Stevan Javellana's *Without Seeing the Dawn*, Edilberto Tiempo's *Watch in the Night*, Gilda C. Fernando's "People in the War," and other war fiction in preserving the Filipino images of war, while presenting the texture and feel of Filipino life at the individual, family, and community levels.

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REMEMBERING CARLOS BULOSAN. HIS HEART AFFAIR WITH AMERICA. By P.C. Morantte. Quezon City: New Day Publishers, 1984. 164 pages.

I was privileged to read this book many years ago when it was yet an unpublished manuscript and P.C. Morantte was, for me, another Old Timer who might throw light on the life and times of Carlos Bulosan. He did. We talked once in Lompoc for two days, and P.C. told me story after story about Carlos and the streets of Lompoc and Los Angeles, and what it was like to be a Filipino in California in the thirties, and to be a friend of Carlos Bulosan. His accounts were so personal, so vivid, so emotional, that I felt as if I had been there, and I went away with my vision of Carlos Bulosan permanently modified.

Morantte's book should have much the same effect on the reader. It is per-