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Ninoy Aquino, The Man, The Legend

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NINYO AQUINO, THE MAN, THE LEGEND. Edited by Asuncion David Maramba. Manila: Cacho Hermanos, Inc., 1984.

"What was Ninoy Aquino *really* like?" The back cover of this collection of works about, for and by Ninoy Aquino asks this in big red letters. The Preface, in turn, declares:

Even as the inevitable apotheosis is now taking place—as Ninoy to all of us now becomes "Aquino Jr." in the history books and on a pedestal—we have thought of putting out this Aquino anthology. We have sought to catch Ninoy "alive," to capture the flesh-and-blood Ninoy whom we all once knew. (pp. 21-22)

And through articles, poems, letters, and even prayers by some forty writers, journalists, and contemporaries of Aquino (Nick Joaquin, Gregorio Brillantes, Gilda Cordero Fernando, Jaime Cardinal Sin, Alfred Yuson, Cory Aquino, Butz Aquino, Luis Beltran, Horacio Paredes and Ramon Tulfo being some among them), the reader is given glimpses of the late Senator's life, and people's perceptions of him.

The first part of the book contains articles about Ninoy, some of which are delightful (particularly Nick Joaquin's record of Ninoy's life, excerpted from *The Aquinos of Tarlac*), touching (Cory Aquino's "Ninoy Turned to God;" Ken Kashiwahara's "Aquino's Final Journey"), and inspiring (Jose Mari Velez's "73 Days with Ninoy in Bonifacio," Fr. Francisco Araneta's "Ninoy and the Rosary"). The second part is a collection of poems, prayers, and articles about Ninoy's death, most of which are as emotionally charged as the articles of the first section. The last section has letters, poems, interviews, statements and speeches by Ninoy himself which are meant to shed light on his ultimate decision to risk his life by coming home. All in all the book supports what Maramba states in her Preface:

Ninoy's martyrdom may well be one of the most significant events of the last quarter of this century for the Filipino people, especially as its effects are now unfolding before us. His eminence now seems secure and history will most probably confirm him as one of the great heroes of this generation. Even the most skeptical and the most stoical must grant him this accolade. (p. 21)

But after reading the book, the reader gets a feeling that something was kept from him. Where, for instance, was the Ninoy that some people did not like? Where was the Ninoy that some people accused of being either a Communist or a C.I.A. agent? Where was the Ninoy of the fiery speeches in Plaza Miranda and the professorial lectures in America? Where was the Ninoy when Ninoy was alive?

In trying to "catch Ninoy 'alive,'" Maramba seems to have forgotten what she herself says in the introduction to the section "For Ninoy:" ". . . nothing

can match the spontaneity and the moving power of the eyewitness, writing at the very moment of happening" (p. 134). Except for some of the chapters from *The Aquinos of Tarlac*, all the articles in the first two sections were written after Ninoy's death. Undeniably, any article written after this would be colored by the assassination. And evidently, almost all the writers in this collection see Ninoy as a martyr. In fact, most of them don't hide the fact that they love Ninoy. And as Cory Aquino, upon seeing her husband's corpse, says in Neni Sta. Romana Cruz' essay, "Life with Ninoy," "He looked much better than I expected. I guess when you love someone, you only see the beautiful" (p. 60).

Furthermore, the book derives its articles from a very limited source—mainly from Joaquin's *The Aquinos of Tarlac, Malaya, Mr. and Ms. Justice and National Reconciliation Series*, and *Veritas*. In Section 2, three of the five prayers come from Cardinal Sin (the other two being from Cory and Paul Aquino); all three poems come from a single collection (*In Memoriam: A Poetic Tribute by Five Filipino Poets*). While Maramba, in her preface claims:

The selections For Ninoy will show the effect and impact of his life and especially of his death upon others, particularly the meaning that his death is assuming for his countrymen. For one thing, the identity between him and the youth has been swift and unsolicited. (p. 22)

there is not a single article from a vernacular newspaper or magazine (after all, the majority of Filipinos obviously do not think in English) nor from any student publication (the U.P.'s *Philippine Collegian* and the Ateneo's *Guidon*, for instance, have devoted much space to Ninoy's life and death).

One therefore gets the feeling that Maramba came out with a collection as limited as this either because she wants to ensure Ninoy's place among the Philippine's greatest heroes as early as possible, or because it would have been too much trouble to read through old copies of *The Philippines Free Press*, the *Weekly Graphic*, *Asia-Philippines Leader*, *Lidayway*, and all the other publications that captured Ninoy alive when Ninoy was alive. Either way, it is not doing Ninoy Aquino the justice his life and death deserve.

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JOSE RIZAL AND THE UNIVERSITY OF SANTO TOMAS. By Fidel Villaroel, O.P. Manila: University of Santo Tomás, 1984. xx, 314 pages.

It is about time that this book was written. For too long Filipinos have been misreading the works of Rizal and perhaps even honoring him for the wrong reason. Mistaking his propaganda writings for history, they have naively