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Exits and Entrances, edited by Mercado

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We live in an age of electronic media, and thus the production of this coffee table book, which was preceded by videos, might seem to be a step backward. But is it? A book has its own merits. It does not need electricity, of which we are sorely lacking these days, to make it work. Books capture images and freeze them for contemplation. And that is what our arts demand—a moment of quiet with this treasure trove of a book to savor Filipinos at their best and most beautiful.

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Exits and Entrances: Essays by Zeneida Amador. Edited by Monina Mercado. Quezon City: New Day Publishers, 1991. xvi, 356 pages.

Although the name of Zeneida Amador is inseparable from theater, beyond the stage of Repertory Philippines, she is best known as a *Manila Bulletin* columnist. It is her latter capacity that the book *Exits and Entrances* presents. The title from Act II, Scene 7 of "As You Like It": "All the world's a stage / And all the men and women merely players: / They have their exits and entrances" is a finely chosen title for a volume that portrays vignettes from the point of view of a journalist who is a theater person herself.

Culled from the *Manila Bulletin*, the 238 essays in this collection were among those published between 1983 and 1991. They are neatly categorized into thirteen dominant themes: Work, Daily Life, Real People, Art, Children, Parenting, Personal Responsibility, Social Concerns, Elan, Being Filipino, Travel, Generosity of the Spirit, and Those Who Have Gone Ahead, which reveal the wide range of topics covered. The logic of sequencing the categories does not seem apparent, but this does not hinder the enjoyment one gets from reading the essays.

The regular followers of Amador's newspaper column will need virtually no preliminaries. Those reading the essays for the first time, however, will be set in the right mood by Teodoro Benigno's introduction, "Sips from a Literary Wineglass," itself a well crafted piece. Likening the experience of reading to that of looking through the eyes of a diamond expert, it describes Amador's talent and stimulates enthusiasm for the adventure of discovering at which angle a particular human drama tilts. Amador explicates, in the first essay, her reason for writing and being in theater: "Towards that well-ordered life to which art strives" (p. xvi).

Reading the essays, one goes through a process of listening and responding to insights and challenges embedded in them. In the area of work, Amador's favorite rallying cry is discipline, because "talent is not enough" (p. 15). Spartan this type of discipline may be, but it is not isolated from

commitment and purpose: "when one is responsible for his choice, there's passion there" (p. 11). The work goal is a "dream with a deadline" (p. 21). A sub-theme corollary to work is leadership. From her experience of studying drama in the United States, Amador picked up one quality of a good leader: empathy, especially in times of crisis. Empathy enables the leader "to know what chords in the human heart he can touch in order to elicit the response necessary to get things moving and get them done" (p. 27). This positive attitude restores work to its proper place, not as drudge but as source of joy.

The essays on daily life are refreshing reminders of human concerns. Reading them can set one to introspection as good psycho-spiritual texts do. "Little Things" challenges one to find meaning in the tiny bits that come along instead of merely waiting for the big chunks, for "life can pass us by because we do not realize that our tomorrows are but the sums of all our nows" (p. 39). Amador focuses on inner disposition as a determinant of outlook. When one, for example, has inner peace, it shows in one's face ("Sweeping Cobwebs Away"). In addition, Amador talks about the importance of listening to one's body in order to know "the bone-marrow truth" ("Body Language" [p. 41]), a practice encouraged in modern psychological and spiritual interventions. She also reflects on fear of commitment and the challenge to overcome it, an insight derived from the few times this "devout and practicing coward" enjoyed flying (p. 43). Other insights include never saying yes when one really wants to say no; pride as a person's worst enemy; good deeds producing a chain of good results, and bad deeds resulting in bad consequences; before one loses valuable possessions such as health and life, one should start deserving them; the beauty of life is that it gives people a chance to make up for their mistakes, to cleanse themselves of negatives and live fuller lives.

For artists and art enthusiasts Amador has a wealth of experiences to share. Although a great deal of what she writes is about theater, her definition of artists includes craftsmen, even pastillas-wrapper makers. She believes that everyone has a creative imagination, and to use this capacity fully, one needs "to open up to the world, to new experiences and to their own dynamic processes" (p. 96). Alluding to a dialogue in *Babette's Feast*, she agrees that the artist has no other cry from the soul than to be given the chance to do his/her best (p. 111). Also illustrated in the essays is the interplay of life, love, and theater, a topic Amador enthuses about. In some essays she also shows her fascination with language—its power and beauty.

The fifth and sixth chapters of the book are good sources of inspiration especially for those engaged in parenting. Amador describes herself as one among "fence-sitters in passionate celibacy" but she has valuable insights to offer on aspects of family life. One is a reminder that children's need for time with their parents can never be fulfilled by baby-sitters or any material substitutes. She also talks about trusting children to develop their ca-

pacities. This attitude is closely tied in with the idea of maturity among parents, manifested among other ways in loving children as they are, watching them grow. That children can possibly be instruments of growth for adults is another interesting dimension of children that Amador highlights. She finds examples from her own experience. By actively accompanying the growth of her son, Etienne, or working with children in theater, she has learned lessons in letting go, candidness, simplicity, and other such virtues. Through all the essays, the reader also hears Amador hoping that adults will not lose the child in them.

In other sections of the book are reflective essays on personal responsibility and social concern, best considered as companion themes. Amador's challenge is for people to take hold of themselves by knowing their capacities that will help chart the path on which they decide to tread. She quotes the advice from the Wizard of Oz: "To take the right road you need three things: scoops of wisdom, cups and cups of love, and big dollops of courage." To this list she adds: "and a little pinch of humor here and there" (p. 193). In the process of molding one's personal responsibility, mistakes are inevitable; however, one's goal is to admit the dual possibilities of making mistakes and changing decisions as any great man would. Personal responsibility also demands that "We must never march to other people's drumbeats. We should learn to listen to our own" (p. 172). In writing about personal responsibility, Amador presupposes the concept of maturity, the ultimate recipient being society at large. She defines a civilized person as one who thinks of others before self. She comments on such social realities as Philippine politics, the widening gap between the rich and the poor, the worsening traffic situation, depressing news items, the EDSA experience, domestic help, and graft and corruption in government, problems still current.

An interesting category of essays revolves around the theme *elan*, a type of behavior that is both energetic and confident. At the outset, the writer calls on all Filipinos to preserve their generous and noble nature. The succeeding essays reflect on other values: the ability to adjust oneself to a situation; reading as a way of expanding one's horizons; the ability to handle crisis; the ability to maintain a youthful stance even in middle age; forgiving oneself; accepting setbacks; setting directions for the future; knowing how to rise after a fall; and being always interested in life. These values may not be new, but are presented with fresh examples from observed snatches of daily life among ordinary people or from experiences shared between friends.

While most of the essays in the collection deal with subjects that have universal application, some dwell only on experiences particularly Filipino. Amador takes the opportunity to admonish her countrypeople on some attitudes detrimental to nation building. For example, she picks on the Filipino's love for a show of force without having the ability to sustain it.

This attitude is similar to *ningas cogan*, but Amador calls it "typhoon mentality" and urges everyone to abandon it. Also part of the Filipino psyche is the *puede na* disposition which Amador considers settling for mediocrity and definitely discourages. She also recommends a reassessment of values like *utang na loob* so that they do not become weaknesses. On the other hand, Amador recognizes Filipino characteristics that deserve commendation. On top of the list is "Pinoy Service," generosity with a smile. Others are the Filipino sense of humor, family ties, and simple joys in the countryside. A few selections dwell on rustic settings and experiences of countryside hospitality. Among all the Filipino characteristics mentioned in the essays, the one that stands out is the peculiar *balato* mentality, the feeling of having the right to share in the good fortune of another. It has never really been paid attention to, much less brought to the level of serious reflection as Amador has done. By venturing into an explanation of this, she has opened an avenue for discussion of this one other facet of the Filipino psyche.

Nothing that has been said here as a broad introduction can approximate the satisfaction one gets from reading the essays. One can begin reading from any point with interest as the guiding factor. Amador's friendly disposition takes care of the rest. She invites her readers to hear her side, delights them with her wit and humor, and enriches them with her literary allusions. Her language is fluid, the turns of phrases subtle and precise, capturing an animated conversational style. *Exits and Entrances* is guaranteed to make reading both profitable and pleasurable.

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Japan Views the Philippines: 1900-1944. By Lydia N. Yu-Jose.
Quezon City: Ateneo de Manila University Press, 1992. 195 pages

This book is based on the author's Ph. D. dissertation submitted to the Sophia University in Tokyo in 1988. It attempts to explore how the Japanese, including both the government authorities and the civilians, viewed the Philippines, which was then under the colonial administration of the United States.

In her desire to give a comprehensive view, the author went through numerous documents—reports, travelogues, speeches, memoirs, and articles. These were written by government officials, civilians, researchers, scholars, students, immigrants, and businessmen who had either come for a short stay or lived in the Philippines.

After carefully going through them, she selected the important ones, and categorized them as government, semi-government, or civilian views. Then