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**M. Evelina Galang (ed.),
Screaming Monkeys**

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M. Evelina Galang (ed.), **Screaming Monkeys: Critiques of Asian American Images**. Minneapolis: Coffee House Press, 2004. 517 pages.

A winner of the Myers Outstanding Book Award for promoting human rights and the Book of the Year award in the category of anthologies by *Foreword Magazine*, *Screaming Monkeys: Critiques of Asian American Images* is an interesting anthology for many reasons. The first is the premise. The editors put together a collection which, in its totality, is designed to scream. One often thinks of anthologies as being a rather sedate genre. The second is the sheer variety of material included and juxtaposed in the book: fiction, poetry, essays, visual art, and what the editors refer to as “found images.” The third is the bias toward the experience and expression of Filipino-Americans, an unusual bias in Asian-American texts.

The anthology was born out of what the editor, M. Evelina Galang, refers to as a faux pas, one grounded in the deeply embedded stereotypes of Asians that are so easily found in mainstream American culture. In this case, the offending piece is a restaurant review from the April 1998 issue of *Milwaukee Magazine*. The author of the review has visited a Filipino deli, Mango Wango Tango, and describes that she “is looking away from the coconut and stuffed monkey (decorative touches) and tuning out the rambunctious little monkey (Varona’s [the proprietor’s] young son) flicking light switches on and off” (3). The article was quickly copied on a number of listservs which provoked an avalanche of protest letters to the surprised editor of the magazine (who obviously missed the racial slur the first time and, in spite of different stepped-up versions of apology, never seems to have quite gotten what the faux pas was and why it was so offensive to so many).

This anthology was inspired by the anger that swept through the Asian-American and, in particular, the Filipino-American community—thus “the scream.” Ms. Galang and the poetry editor, Eileen Tabios, “concluded that the reason things like this happen is because our history books—and I mean our American history books—do not cover this, our Asian-American history—the atrocities, the accomplishments, the contributions, the acknowledgement that we are a part of this America, not visitors, not ghosts, not foreigners, not monkeys” (5). This invisibil-

ity in textbooks leads to a visibility that is too often steeped in misunderstanding and exploitation. The purpose of this anthology is to redress both the invisibility problem by providing several historical pieces, albeit in a somewhat fragmented fashion, and the visibility problem by showing through visual art the reproduction of “found images,” and literary grappling with these kinds of images, the ways in which these stereotypes misrepresent and continue to damage such a diverse community.

The book is divided into seven sections: Savage, History, Women, Culture, Men, War, and Transcendence. Each section has something provocative and interesting to offer the reader, though I sometimes found that the juxtaposition of certain pieces felt arbitrary and that the movement from piece to piece can be jarring. In the first section “Savage,” for example, one moves from an excerpt from Carlos Bulosan’s *America is in the Heart* to a provocative reproduction “Pluto on a Plate” by Dindo Llana to a Gish Jen story, “Chin.” Ideally the placement would suggest a conversation among the works, but this, at times, is lacking. There is much to absorb in the text, and the rich variety can, at times, overwhelm. But perhaps when the perennial issue has been a dearth of offerings, this problem is worth the reader’s trouble.

Filipino writers have complained in the past not just about an underrepresentation in mainstream cultural offerings but also about a lack of adequate presence in Asian-American collections. This anthology, though it includes material from a variety of Asian perspectives, is committed especially to elucidating and exploring the unique history that America has had with the Philippines as a former colonizer. Some of this material will be new to many readers. For example, few know about the American teachers who first ventured to the Philippines to set up an “American” public school system, known collectively as the “Thomasites.” Those who know of them often have not read from their personal letters and journals. They are often valorized as educational heroes, but it is, in fact, not that difficult to find statements like those of Harry Newton Cole who wrote, “I find this monotonous work, trying to teach these monkeys to talk. The more I see of this lazy, dirty, indolent people, the more I come to despise them” (67).

Tracing the historical lineage of this kind of stereotyping is one of the most ambitious and exciting aspects of this unusual anthology.

Whether or not those who can benefit from reading the material offered in this anthology (like that editor from *Milwaukee Magazine*) will be an open question Leslie Bow, who offers a “companion” to the text at the end, perhaps as a way of addressing some of the concerns suggested earlier about the confusion one feels when trying to grapple with the text as a whole, writes that anthologies like this one “make it possible to have access to diversity at any Barnes & Noble” (493). But who is buying this book at Barnes & Noble? I fear that, though its contributors and editors are “screaming,” they may be heard mainly by those who are also screaming and not by those who are being screamed at.

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