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The Lavas: A Filipino Family by Jose Y. Dalisay, Jr.

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The Lavas: A Filipino Family. By Jose Y. Dalisay, Jr. Pasig City: Anvil Publishing Co., 1999. xi + 122 pages.

Five years after the end of the Pacific War, the Huks—not to be confused with the wartime anti-Japanese military organization—conducted several raids against government institutions. Success buoyed their hopes and Jose Lava, one of the ideologues of the outlawed leftist movement, was optimistic about a “geometric increase” in members, from 10,800 to 172,000 in the mid-1950s. Conditions were right for a coup and plans were set for a third major raid to coincide with the anniversary of the Russian Revolution and the founding of the Communist Party of the Philippines.

The raid, however, never took place. Government troops swooped down on high-ranking members of the Politburo in Manila and captured documents, funds, and printing paraphernalia that served as unassailable evidence against the underground communist activities to subvert the government. In due time, these leaders were convicted and jailed.

The leftist movement in the country never recovered from this blow. Necessarily, new strategies had to be planned and the Lava brothers—Vicente, Jose, and Jesus especially—became key thinkers who tried to continue its campaign. Until then, their plans had failed but their influence has not diminished. Today’s leftist leaders compose the Filipino idealistic youth their dream had captivated.

Jose Y. Dalisay’s book summarizes briefly the leftist activities of the Lava brothers. They were not a poor family and they were successful in their studies—one of the them with a doctorate in Chemistry. Their intellectual orientation could not have been a personal reaction to adverse conditions in which the majority of the Filipinos lived. Rather, they were free-thinkers and anti-elite.

The leftist movement in the Philippines is not totally unknown, but one wishes for a more detailed analysis of its key personalities than the book offers. Unfortunately, this is not the strongest point of the book, since a good number of Dalisay’s statements are based on secondary sources—Sauro, Kerkvliet, etc.—and only occasionally on primary sources.

Jesus Lava, for example, wrote two letters to President Macapagal (p. 142), but Dalisay offers a mere summary instead of a detailed analysis that could have shown the mind and the attitudes of the letter-writer. There must have been other letters, both from Jesus and his brothers, but they are hardly used as sources. Jesus also wrote three manuscripts (p. 140) which publishers refused to touch. Apparently they are now lost.

These and similar primary sources could have enhanced the present book. One admits that the Lavas lived as they had always thought, that they were the expression of their values and ideals. However, the reader wants to know just why or how they became what they were. For between a person’s writings or works and his personality there always lies an abyss which the

biographer and historian must try to cross, otherwise the past which determines our present remains unintelligible.

Biography is not yet a perfect art in the Philippines. What we have are either hagiographical—and therefore unhistorical—pieces, or propaganda. We still have to develop the art of scientifically analyzing a human person. This is also the basic weakness of this book. No single personality stands out in his human dimension and the characters are more or less wooden figures. Idealism never springs out in its full form and is always the result of hidden factors. These a biographer, or historian, must bring out—or he will not be writing good, full-bodied history.

There are other minor shortcomings, but they do not distract the reader. The style hobbles in places. In general, the book might perhaps be recast to make it less a chronicle and more of a biography, but having said all these, this book remains a good contribution to Philippine history.

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A Frabjous Day and Other Stories. By Miriam Defensor Santiago. Quezon City: New Day Publishers, 1997. 166 pages.

Frabjous and *Flippant*, or *Pompous* and *Priggish* are some of the words encountered in (and are even descriptive of) the anthology of short stories titled *A Frabjous Day* by Senator Miriam Defensor Santiago. These short stories have previously appeared in distinguished publications such as the *Philippines Free Press*, *Weekly Graphic*, and *Weekly Nation* between 1965 and 1971, when the author had barely passed her teens. Her distinctive eloquence in the English language and proficiency in Western Literature are quite evident in her stories. Reference to Hopkins and Hammar skjold are occasionally made, as well as to Montaigne and Marcus Aurelius, or even Epicurus. However, the profane and the vain are also introduced to balance the image of the persona, as forms of leisure literature like *Playboy* and *Esquire* are cited as the material read by some of the characters in her stories.

Of the 20 short stories listed in this anthology, the author selects five as "the better stories." The title of her first choice (the fourth listed from the twenty) "So Bright Wings," is probably derived from the last line of a popular poem by Hopkins ("God's Grandeur"), and aptly so, since the story tells about the experience of religious ecstasy. "The Silent One," referring to the unusual image of Christ found in the heart of an orbicular Chapel (probably the Delaney Chapel in U.P.) where the Lord is crucified on one side and resurrected on the other, takes an inadvertent approach to religious faith.