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Mahal na Passion, by Javellana

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the very nature of his poems offers the reader the freedom to weave his own tunic that will dress what he perceives as the reality the poet wishes to convey. *Baka Sakali* is a title that captures the essence of the quality of Rofel G. Brion's poems: captivating yet freeing!

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Mahal na Passion ni Jesucristong Panginoon natin na Tola ni Gaspar Aquino de Belen. By Rene B. Javellana, S.J. Quezon City: Ateneo de Manila University Press, 1990. 209 pages.

Why publish the 1760 edition of a book in 1990? The publisher believes that Gaspar Aquino de Belen's *Mahal na Passion* is one of the most important Filipino literary works that a serious scholar of Philippine literature and culture ought to read (p. vi). Javellana echoes the same belief in his preface:

Kung hindi sana sinasalamín ng pasyong katha ni Aquino de Belen ang mga damdamin at kamalayang patuloy na humuhubog sa mga Pilipino, ang akdang ito'y dapat na sanang ibaon sa limot. Ngunit mamamangha ang babasa ng pasyon sapagkat makikilala niya ang sarili sa kuwento't tauhang inilalarawan ng makata. (p. ix-x)

The *Mahal na Passion* is an important Filipino literary work because it mirrors the emotions and consciousness that continue to fashion Filipinos. Javellana contends that reading it is recognizing one's self through the story told and characters portrayed by Aquino de Belen. This recognition of self when it involves a Filipino reader enables him to recover an authentic sense of his being Filipino. In turn, this "recovery of culture" links him with his fellow Filipinos, especially the masses who still intone the *Mahal na Passion* in its enchanted version—the *Casaysayan ng Pasiong Mahal*—during Holy Week. This dynamic spells out the cultural and literary value of the *Mahal na Passion*.

This 1990 edition is more than a modern rendition of the 1760 fifth edition. In this present edition, Aquino de Belen's masterpiece is scrutinized by the critical eyes of socio-historical and literary analysis used by Javellana, who divides his work into three main parts.

Javellana begins with the history and an analysis of the *Mahal na Passion*. This he does, first by giving a brief biography of Aquino de Belen. He then analyzes from a socio-historical perspective the milieu in which Aquino de Belen wrote his *pasyon*: the markedly Christian Philippine society under

Spanish colonial rule. This analysis includes the role of the *principalia* class, the literature prevalent in that era, and the eagle-eyed Church censorship. After that, he describes Aquino de Belen's work as it originally appeared, by tracing its textual history and outlining its contents. Finally, he attempts a literary analysis of the *pasyon* by pinpointing Aquino de Belen's probable primary source, if not inspiration, in Juan de Padilla's *Retablo de la Vida de Cristo*. He explains Aquino de Belen's debt to Padilla by a comprehensive comparative study of the *Mahal na Pasyon* and the *Retablo* in the words and expository tools common to both texts. He identifies the probable secondary sources as the liturgical and devotional life of the Church, and the Apocryphal texts from which the stories of Veronica and Longinus are derived. At this stage of his analysis, Javellana points out that the *Mahal na Passion* is a 980-stanza poetic allegory of a meaningful and happy death. He supports this claim by focusing on how the Last Supper as an establishment of friendship and some key characters of the *Passion*—Judas, Peter, Mary, Veronica, Simon of Cyrene, and Longinus—revolve around its central didactic theme: fidelity to Jesus unto death. He ends this first part by explaining the specific value of the fifteen *Aral* interspersing the passion narrative in the light of the aforementioned theme.

The second part is the text of Aquino de Belen's *Mahal na Passion* in its 1760 edition. Javellana explains in his preface the practical emendations he thought fit to perform on the text. The *Mahal na Passion* version of the passion account begins with the Messianic prophecies of the Old Testament prophets and ends with the death of the centurion Longinus. Finally, Javellana provides an explanation of the text to guide the contemporary reader towards a proper understanding of the *Passion*. Here he combines an exposition of Aquino de Belen's key points as the latter developed them in the text, and a glossary of the eighteenth century Tagalog words used in the text.

It is interesting to note that Aquino de Belen's *Mahal na Passion* encapsulates the whole Paschal Mystery into 980 stanzas of pure poetry. Keeping in mind that it is chanted in a variation of tempos suiting the narrative mood, one senses the mantra-effect it has on its listeners. It is, therefore, an effective prayer especially for its original intended audience: the bereaved relatives of a recently deceased Christian. This effect is both the intention and hope of Aquino de Belen, since the *Mahal na Passion* belongs to the religious genre of literature.

One appreciates the scholarly analysis that Javellana devoted to this edition of Aquino de Belen's *Mahal na Passion*. His socio-historical and literary analysis polishes the 1760 edition, thus enabling the 1990 reader to marvel at the poetic cadence of the *Mahal na Passion* and the literary genius of Aquino de Belen. However, the present edition could have been made more reader-friendly by juxtaposing the explanation of the text with the text it-

self. Such a practical emendation would do away with the cumbersome back-and-forth page flipping, and connect the contemporary reader more intimately with the meaning behind Aquino de Belen's Tagalog. But over and above making the *Mahal na Passion* palatable to contemporary taste, Javellana's erudition eloquently enshrines Aquino de Belen's *Mahal na Passion* in its hallowed niche in Philippine literature and culture.

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Inside Philippine Movies, 1970-1990: Essays for Students of Philippine Cinema. By J. Eddie Infante. Quezon City: Ateneo de Manila University Press, 1991. x, 189 pages.

Veteran actor-writer-director of film, television, and theater, J. Eddie Infante writes for students of Philippine Cinema in his eighth book, *Inside Philippine Movies*. The 189-page book is composed of a foreword by Espiridion Laxa, the Director-General of the Film Academy of the Philippines, nineteen essays which the author draws from his fifty-five years experience as actor, scriptwriter, and director, and of interacting closely with producers and other actors, directors, and scriptwriters, and, an appendix, Executive Order No. 640-A, which is basically an order by former President Marcos for the development of the movie industry.

The essays begin with quotes from different persons in the industry, and, cover an array of topics that affect, directly or indirectly, film. "Lights! Camera! Freeze!," shows the nondevelopment or snail-paced development of the quality of films in our country. The author is startled by the "freeze" in the movies, and hopes that the movies will be what they truly should be—"Lights! Camera! Action!"

"To Be or Not to Be a Film Producer," imparts some guidelines for interested producers, some of which are how organization is made, how production is brought about, how much money is needed, and whom to approach for help.

"The Screenwriter's Dilemma," "The Pros and Cons of Being a Movie Actor," "How it feels to Be a Veteran Actor," "Who's Gonna Support the 'Supports'," and "Is the Filipino Film Producer Making Money," give deeper insights into the life or plight of people involved in films. Among these, "How it feels to Be a Veteran Actor," is the best essay. It gives the reader a look, not only into the feelings of veteran actor Infante, but also a glance at other veteran actors and actresses as well—how they came to be stars, and where and how they worked.