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## **Cuentos, by Espina-Moore**

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possible to publish entire books about Filipino psychology and world view without any reference to religious expression. In that sense Fr. Marasigan's book should be greeted as a highly welcome contribution to the still fledgling study of Filipino religion and its mentality.

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CUENTOS. By Lina Espina-Moore. Quezon City: New Day Publishers, 1985. 134 pages.

*Cuentos* by Lina Espina-Moore, fiction writer and journalist, is a collection of a dozen stories which transcend the boundaries of setting, i.e., the author's native Cebu and the Central Cordilleras, her home for seventeen years.

A sentence from "Night Out With Id" illustrates the author's favorite theme: "There is a twilight—a time when it is neither light nor dark, as there are also twilight women—wives functioning as such; women who are free but not that free; women deeply in love, loved in return but [who] can make no claim on the lover" (p. 99). In short, Moore writes of women entrapped in an illusory world with only an impenetrable void for company.

In "Holiday From Fear" for instance, Mariana's loneliness and fear of being alone are detected by Anna, from whose consciousness the story unfolds. For Mary (her self-appointed name) and her string of affairs, "there must have been a deep longing to be admired and just, perhaps, wanting the sweet choice to reject or accept admiration" (p. 17). This longing is her respite from the ultimate fear of isolation. But her holiday, like all holidays, ends. She dies alone, adorned with artificial flowers.

Cora, a "crisp" young widow in "The Ugly Man" is an "uncomplicated graphic artist" enjoying herself in her "happy, perfect world," only to discover life and herself in the ugly and the complicated as personified by Alex, "the ugly man."

In "Sam-it and The Loom," Sam-it, the Igorot housemaid, witnesses the disintegration of the devout Mrs. Allen upon the sudden death of her husband. Ironically, it is the pagan Sam-it who understands and has time for her mistress, not the so-called religious women from the Church. The discovery of Mrs. Allen's grotesque "bundles" (dead animals with their life histories) prompts them to ask, "Now, what right have we to be making new Christians when we have no patience, no heart, no time for our own?" (p. 33).

"The Silent Hills" develops Elisa's war trauma, her struggle between "common sense and Christian charity." Her painful experience with the Japanese in the war planted the seed of hatred in Elisa. Dr. Sato, a Japanese woman anthropologist "reads" Elisa's "surface accommodations," "for it is a woman

who can gauge another woman," (p.40) especially one who has experienced equal, if not more pain than Elisa.

Against the backdrop of war, "The Healer" portrays the drama of Tamara, struck deaf and dumb following the fall of Bataan where her soldier-husband was stationed. At war's end, Tamara's overt act of expressing all pain and grief, rather than Dr. Martinez's love and healing prowess, brings her back to reality.

Thirty-ish Rita, in "Night Out with Id" is quite content with her "twilight world," i.e. enjoying the theater, her lover, "feeling unfamiliar textures to find out if they were real" (p. 96). She is "deeply in love and loved in return but can make no claim on her lover." Disenchantment creeps in. Tom is the momentary escape, but he rapes her. Rita's reaction is matter-of-fact, "a matter of orgasm/no more, no less" (p. 103). A victim of bestial man, Rita remains objective in the end.

In "Gift to the Earth," fifteen-year old Teresa is likewise a victim — of a society which renders her hopeless and helpless in poverty. Her sister's still-born baby prompts her to say "It's not true that youth has no memory" (p. 144). She will remember the anguish, but like Rita, she will go on.

Two stories, "Johnny's Not Coming Back Anymore" and "Onga" focus on men, but realization in them stems from women's consciousness. In the former story, Leonora, the persona, recounts John Corelli's "mondo cane." The "dog's world" had killed his son Johnny who ironically was rounding up criminals when he died. The "fears, hate and stinking dogs" will be on this earth "a damn long time," but so will the "awkward ones who stumble and bungle and muff their simple sharing" (p. 50). For John is not alone. In "Onga," the "seeker of wisdom and truth" finds that her search ends with Onga, the Chinese adopted son of a relative. Onga, the "Puck with buttonhole eyes," like Shakespeare's character, is taken as a tease but is actually wise in his own way. His simple world of *bibingka* and *chicharon*, peopled by his wife and children, illustrates contentment. But more importantly, it epitomizes "survival," the mark of wisdom.

Three stories, "Pieces of Silver," "The Human Resources" and "Man Around A Maypole," serve as counterpoint to the women's "twilight world." Rita's lover, Ed, asks "Are there also twilight men?" (p. 99) Apparently, there are. "Pieces of Silver" depicts the power of tradition over man. Jerry, for all his learning, agrees to sell his tribe's sacred icon, but at the last moment wavers and returns it. Yet it is too late—the primitive hearts hold him in contempt; he can no longer share their world. Karl in "The Human Resources" is "modern man" who basks in sensual needs—good food, sleep, sex. But at seventy-one he feels the void of human companionship, i.e. Nicia, the girl who rose from housemaid to mistress, who was used by and used him and his money. Doc Buhay in "Man Around a Maypole" is anything but his name. His is a barren life; too straight, to the point of "lying very badly," even about his little affair. The realization that he has failed to exercise his

freedom of choice even on trivial matters, e.g. food, is too much for him. Doc Buhay goes and puts a bullet through his head.

Espina-Moore's anthology, written from 1958 to 1980, is slim yet rich. Her basic subject is the interplay of illusion and reality, mainly from the consciousness of women. Her stories speak of a wide range of the female gender—from old widows to young, socialites to housegirls, Western women to native ones. For after all, women from all walks of life regardless of race or creed or age do find themselves within the "twilight zone." And so do men.

The author is a careful and competent craftswoman who believes in a well-told narrative. Her beginnings are crisp, the development of the narratives precise. The plots build up to an exciting climax and recede to a quiet denouement of discovery. Her language is direct, and heightens the harshness of the reality her characters run away from and/or fall victims to.

Yet the author, the story-teller that she is, dismisses her passionate endeavors as mere "cuentos," stories like a "blown-glass ballerina in attitude sur la pointe twirling to its measure" (p. 42).

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AFFAIRS. By J. Eddie Infante. Quezon City: New Day Publishers, 1984. 169 pages.

*Affairs*, as the title suggests, attempts to tackle the issue of infidelity. Unfaithfulness corrupts and ultimately destroys. The author's didactic threat is hardly veiled: his three characters (Rod, Nick and Marina) who cheat on their mates, all perish in the process of indulging their passions.

Rod, the nineteen-year old high school senior, typifies the searching youth at the threshold of manhood. His saccharine-sweet sixteen-year old girlfriend is Lita de la Vega whose young widowed mother Pia works as a telephone operator in the Dagupan station. Nick Gallardo is Pia's boyfriend—a young, fabulously successful executive, unbelievably suave around women. He carries on an explosive affair in Manila with Rose Maria Virgil, a blindly ambitious screen goddess. One intriguing caricature in the story is Rod's grandmother Lola Elang, a scheming, formidable matriarch. Also worth noting is Marina, the eighteen-year old bar hostess who falls in love with Rod.

Although the greatest strength of the novel lies in its characters, the author fails to develop them to a satisfactory, plausible level. The story starts with Rod, an introspective teenager, nursing a rebellion against his aristocratic upbringing and the family's funeraria business which has been thrust