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The White Horse of Alih, by Enriquez

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The author's familiarity with the film industry is immediately established. He describes the filth behind the glamour in graphic detail, so that at certain points the novel comes very close to a Harold Robbins bestseller. Also, he frequently compares his characters to Hollywood stereotypes—thus, Rosa is a mixture of Lauren Bacall and Katherine Hepburn, Rod is Montgomery Clift, Nick is Marlon Brando. Some of the scenes in the novel seem borrowed directly from soap operas: a grandson comes home to his dying grandmother; a lower-income daughter-in-law is insulted by her privileged parents-in-law, so she tearfully dashes out of the house as her husband runs after her; the court scene seems carefully staged, with someone passing out after the verdict is read.

The author, J. Eddie Infante, is billed as a "distinguished veteran actor-writer, director of film, theater and television," on the book's back cover. His language is pleasantly simple; his prose fast-paced. In the epilogue, Infante uses short, terse sentences that complement a point the novel seeks to put across—that life is indeed simple. As Lita's old neighbor Mang Kario says at the story's close: "There is a thing called destiny. It governs us all. We cannot escape it. So why worry? Bear in mind—if it is meant for you, it will be yours." (p. 169). If the author had kept his storyline similarly simple, he could have explored his material to a much deeper level, and come up with a much more serious work.

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THE WHITE HORSE OF ALIH AND OTHER STORIES. By Mig Alvarez Enriquez. Quezon City: New Day Publishers, 1985. 112 pages.

Mig Alvarez Enriquez, one of the better writers of contemporary Philippine literature in English, has written two novels, one book of plays and a collection of short stories. The contents of *The White Horse of Alih and Other Stories* were published earlier in the *Philippines Free Press*, *Solidarity* and *Saturday Evening News Magazine*. The collection is of uneven quality but each story possesses its own charm.

A majority of the stories were published in the early 1950s and these are the best in Enriquez's collection. One story was published in 1970 and one in 1984. Although his command of the language is still evident in the 1984 story entitled "The Male Chauvinist and The Liberated Woman," the story lacks depth in theme and artistry in technique. The story's contemporary theme is that modernity has undermined the once honest and pure relationship between man and woman which has changed, quite drastically, from the virtuous to the unrestrained. However, the Filipina can never be a truly "liber-

ated" woman (implying the qualities that the term "liberated," in reference to women, has acquired through time). As Adela claims, she is "liberated from the feeling of guilt but not from family and society" (p. 19).

The conflict between tradition and modernity is dealt with quite differently in "Death of a House," which speaks of the past as opposed to the present, and of dreams as offset by reality. The odd-looking house is the embodiment of these conflicts: of the past and the present ("It does not belong in our times. Either let it fall as it will eventually or remodel it to suit the modern tastes" [p. 93]) and of dream as opposed to reality ("There was almost nothing to see, except the sea running away to meet the sky, and the piles of the black dirt on the shore. I felt like a little boy whose balloon had burst in his face . . ." [p. 95]). The destruction of the house indicates the power of the present over the past and the bitter destruction of illusions and dreams. This story became the basis of a three-act play, "A Tale of Two Houses," a third-prize Palanca contest winner. Later it became a novel entitled *House of Images*. This particular story is the gem of the collection.

"Maria Clara" reveals how some people still look upon Maria Clara as the epitome of the Filipina: "ever-obedient and respectful to her parents; a modest virtuous woman who spent the rest of her days in a convent; who preferred to remain unmarried all her life to disgracing her family by running away with Crisostomo Ibarra" (p. 47). Enriquez shows that, to some degree, keeping the Maria Clara image alive is more self-destructive than constructive, more idealistic than realistic.

Another theme that pervades Enriquez's stories is virtue as the principle underlying the relationship between man and woman, and clashing with moral turpitude. This is evident in "The Bottle," in which abortion is suggested.

. . . Adopt the ways of the world. Fight the world with its own weapons.
Live in the present! (p. 41)

"The Bottle" also speaks of the hypocrisy in split-level Christianity, in which religion remains on the tongue but fails to sink into the heart:

You cannot serve two masters . . . the Bible said. And yet — there were girls across the street calling out to each other from their porches.

Tere! The picture at the Palace tonight is sexciting! It's on the blacklist, Didit, and tomorrow is First Friday.

I know but we can go to confession in the morning. (p. 41)

"Reflections in the Water" also speaks of virtue in relation to the man and woman relationship. The Filipina here is caught between the call of the flesh and the will to remain pure. The image of the lake that is at first placid and still, but becomes disturbed and filled with ripples, serves as a metaphor for Monina's life.

"The White Horse of Alih," the title story in this collection, talks of the

exotic Moslem culture. It is the story of two brothers, who in their attempt to regain the honor that they have lost, decide to become *juramentados*. The story further shows the gap between the Moslems and the Christians—Filipinos and blood-brothers—who are set apart by cultural and religious differences. This dichotomy achieves a concreteness in the river ("The school was across the river. The Moros were not allowed to set foot on the reservation" [p. 103].) Disclosing the motivation which moves the sworn killers, Enriquez says, "this bizarre fanaticism is never whimsical but profoundly motivated and like any other strange behavior of people, expressive of the human being" (p. 7). In the end, their plans fail and ironically, it is Alih who kills his brother Omar because of the former's obsession with women ("... Alih simply, did not love his white horse as he did his houri" [p. 110]). The white horse with wings they had envisioned as a reward for killing and which would transport them to heaven, remains what it is—an illusion ("... conjured by fanatics in their attempt to give reason to their behavior. The prophet never taught it. He was a man of peace" [p. 107].) They adamantly refuse to heed the Imam's wise words, that "it is wrong to kill. The prophet did not teach it" (p. 100) and persist in their plan. Omar's death at the hands of Alih manifests the truth that to take the life of a fellow human being is to take the life of your own brother.

"The Doll" is a psychological exploration of the Oedipus complex. It tells of Boy, who falls in love, first with his mother. Later on, he transfers his affection to another mother — the Blessed Virgin Mary. In both cases, his father gets in the way. When he decides to enter the seminary and become a priest, his father jeers at him and disapproves of his chosen vocation. The doll seems to symbolize Boy:

... it was sprawled on the floor, naked and broken, an arm twisted limp beneath it, another flung across its face, as if to hide the shame of its disaster. Suddenly it was as if he were the doll. (p. 56)

Never able to completely triumph over his complexes as a child, Boy grows up to manhood, with his father remaining the rival that he was during his childhood days. Boy takes a woman to spite his father, and tragically he subconsciously does to the woman what he feels his father has done to him — thus becoming both the hunter and the prey. Teodoro Locsin, *Free Press* literary editor, wrote that "The Doll" has "theme; it has language; the conflict is real not set-up" and rightfully earned third place in the *Philippines Free Press* short story contest in 1952.

"The Twelfth of May" portrays the Filipino's belief in folk religious festivals. As Enriquez claims in his Preface, the story gives "flesh to the romance between art and religion" (pp. 5-6). Moreover, it shows that religion, in the Philippines, especially in the rural areas, is a web of theism and paganism. This confusion has often given way to the split-level Christianity so predominant in the Philippine religion.

The stories in this collection speak of conflicts—the conflict between tradition and modernity (“The Male Chauvinist and the Liberated Woman”; “Death of a House”); between idealism and reality (“Maria Clara”); between virtue and moral turpitude (“The Bottle,” “Petrona, the Housemaid,” “Reflections in the Water,” “The White Horse of Alih”); between parents and offspring (“The Doll,” “Old Man and Old Woman at the Mill”); and between rule and practice (“The Twelfth of May”). Man’s relationship with women, with his family and with society, is also embodied in the stories—from a rather negative view. The man and woman relationship is reduced to a meaningless level with sex as the prime factor in the relationship. Enriquez’s picture of man’s varied relationships shows them undermined by modernity, idealism and moral turpitude.

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ARCHITECTURE IN THE PHILIPPINES: FILIPINO BUILDING IN A CROSS-CULTURAL CONTEXT. By Winand Klassen. Cebu City: University of San Carlos, 1986. xiv, 435 pages.

Fr. Winand Klassen, S.V.D. is known to Manilaños because of his occasional lectures at the Goethe Institut on architecture in the Philippines and in the West. *Architecture in the Philippines* makes available to a wider range of readers the information and insights that Klassen presents, lucidly and forcefully, in his amply illustrated lectures.

The book’s six chapters—“How it All began: Primitive Architecture in the Philippines”; “The Bahay Kubo: Vernacular Architecture in the Philippines”; “Three Hundred Years Under Spain: Spanish Architecture in the Philippines”; “Six Hundred Years of Islam: Muslim Architecture in the Philippines”; “Fifty Years with Uncle Sam: The American Period”; and “A Nation At Last: Contemporary Architecture in the Philippines”—might give the reader the impression that this is a history of Philippine Architecture. It is not. To quote the author, “This is not a history of Philippine architecture, although historical portions appear in it” (p. xiii). Nor is it an attempt to define that elusive quality of Filipino-ness” in local architecture. “This study is about architecture in the Philippines, not about Philippine architecture, to avoid for the moment the burden of defining what Philippine architecture is” (p. 10).

What then is this book about? We can describe it as a work of architectural criticism that hopes to affect building designs in the Philippines so as to make them more humane and humanizing. Or as the author puts it, “As before (referring to a previously published work on Western architecture) it is again written from a designer’s point of view, with the intention of