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## **The Bald Mountains and Other Stories**

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to social justice for them" (p. 76). The author selects a few witnesses from the Third World to drive home the point that a "church for the poor" in the midst of massive poverty, a "prophetic church" in the face of grave social injustice, call for "religious of the poor" (p. 77). Where else will these evangelizers come from, if not from the Third Church? These are some of the author's bold conclusions.

In the view of Degrijse a deepened and renewed vision of evangelization demands a mutual contribution of all cultures and religions of each continent to the Christian faith, a mutual process of "giving" and "receiving" between the old First World "older churches" and the Third World "younger churches" because universality, solidarity, and reciprocity have become inseparable dimensions of inter-church transnational relations. Although the author is strongly in favor of the continuation of international and local mission institutes and the internationalization of their mission personnel, he does not fail to come to grips with the nagging question: if we have reached a turning point in the mission history of the Third World, will there still be need for foreign missionaries? Will evangelization by established churches still be necessary? Degrijse's answer, of course, is that evangelization is the vocation of the whole people of God. "Every local church must be missionary if it intends to be a true church" (p. 89). Hence, it remains the responsibility of the missionary institutes "to safeguard or to reawaken the missionary consciousness of the Western churches" (p. 89), which at all cost must remain missionary not only within but outside one's native country.

Inasmuch as all Christians and in particular Filipino Christians are "sent" to "GO FORTH" and be evangelizers of the Good News of Jesus Christ especially in Asia, they will find this book informative and inspiring. Although the author limited his survey to *Catholic* missionary consciousness, he recognizes the great missionary consciousness and contribution of other Christians especially the Evangelical and Anglican young churches (p. x) to the spread of the Christian Gospel. Hopefully, they too, will find this book profitable reading.

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THE BALD MOUNTAINS AND OTHER STORIES. By Godofredo M. Roperos. Quezon City: New Day Publishers, 1984. 105 pp.

The stories in Godofredo Roperos' collection are centripetally arranged to unwind a variety of themes which are framed by his rustic experiences. His technique blends the sentimental, the imaginative and the tragic with cathar-

tic effect, the reader being taken to the basal realities of Philippine life close to the soil, and invited to recognize himself and his roots. Tragedy is skillfully kept an undertone, the tears held unshed, so to speak, as the plots unwind insights about the ravages of nature, the rebelliousness of childhood, growth to manhood, the search for meaning at middle age, tradition and change, and kinship with others in God. Most of the stories use war as the background upon which people face the present and the bitter memories of the past.

The anthology opens with the title story. Continuous heavy rains make the Siamong river overflow its banks, and "the far mountains . . . had become bald. The thick forest on the sides had slowly disappeared" (p. 7). Iyo Perto and Iya Lucia blankly stare at the cornfield, their grandson Dino's inheritance from his deceased parents. It has become a wasteland. In a dream, the old man sees a young man with the face of Dino, his body sprouting worms, trying to reach a river, and he is not able to help him. Premonition turns to reality when, the fields flooded because of the bald mountains, he tells Dino: "I'm sorry, *anak* . . . I cannot help you anymore. The land cannot help you anymore" (p. 13).

The rebelliousness of youth is exhibited in two stories, namely "Myself at Seven" and "A Summer Catechism." In the first, a boy nurses anger toward his mother, who reprimands him for bedwetting and forces him to attend catechism class instead of playing with cousin and friends. He becomes interested in drawing and molding figures of animals, and of his mother. One day, he notices all his figurines "swept by a foot" (p. 21). His fingers "like the steel teeth of the carabao-drawn sugar mill tightened around the image of [his] . . . mother . . . crushed it back to its former state: mud" (p. 21).

In "A Summer Catechism," the boy not only finds playing more enjoyable than catechism class, but also observes the inconsistency between church attendance and moral conduct. Dragged to church by his mother and reprimanded by Padre Tomas, the boy retorts: "I am not afraid of God . . . God [has] . . . a long brown beard and he [is] . . . made of wood. I am not afraid of God" (pp. 26-27).

In "Manhood," Roperos realistically describes the rites of passage and the agitations of Arturo who asks, "Will it be very painful, father?" (p. 35). His apprehensions are ended when, after the circumcision, he swims in the river and feels the cool water slide across his back. He wonders what his father would say "seeing him in the water, unafraid, though the river was turning red with his blood" (p. 43).

The young narrator's brush with harsh reality is illustrated in "The Boy Who Knew Death." The facticity of death impinges on the consciousness of the boy on two levels: death as an eventuality, and death as an ever-present reality. A town resurrects from the rubble of war, and men about to rebuild

their houses unearth skulls and bones from the ruins. The boy "could not think of them as houses . . . all around these houses were skulls, skulls gaping at the living people come to visit the graves of their ancestors" (p. 50). He dreams of "a kaleidoscope of faces" (p. 50), and of the Blind One, his grandfather who refuses to come down from the hills. And the boy thinks that he too, will join his ancestors, for "There will always be . . . death wherever man is, wherever life exists" (p. 44). The erosion of tradition is suggested as well, by the pressing demands of survival vis-a-vis the cemetery for houses of the living.

"The Burial" is a sequel to the preceding story, with death depicted as "nothing but a long rest." The boy's father tells him: "Your Lola is dead . . . All of us will die — no one is an exception — sooner or later our turn will come. Death ends our misery on earth and the burden of living" (pp. 53-54).

As counterpoint, the volume provides ironic humor in "The Boy With Fourteen Fingers." Cristino's fourteen fingers seem related to his powers of divination. The fingers, which "looked like snake heads" (p. 61), made the boy self-consciously hide his hands in his pockets. Cristino is caught in a dilemma since he doesn't know whether his powers would aid him in a bet with Polito. The wager was that if Cristino's cock won, he would win the twenty-centavo bet, but if his cock lost, Polito would cut off his extra fingers. Polito wins, and Cristino marches to the hill where his fingers are to be cut off on a tree stump. The unexpected happens, and may or may not be confirmation of his power.

Roperos introduces sterner stuff in "The Hollow Man." After the war, Lesto travels around Luzon doing menial jobs, unmarried, "All he wanted was to be able to eat everyday, nothing more. No responsibility" (p. 67). Hollow to the core, he feels alone and helpless. He goes to clean the graves of two persons whom he had abandoned in fear of responsibility: Agnes, his fiancée when he was seventeen, and who was with child, and Miriam, their child. The sight of the graves puts sense and decision into his life.

Aptly placed, "The Father" deals with domestic quarrels between husband and wife. The husband resorts to drinking to assuage his disappointment; his wife, nearing delivery, "was very pale. Her eyes were closed" (p. 74), and she had earlier dared her husband to kill her "so she would not suffer anymore" (p. 75).

"The Man on the Other Side of the River" confronts loneliness and the search for fulfillment. Perfecto, an old bachelor nearing sixty, would "lie awake until dawn listening to the night sounds" (p. 79), finding relief in smoking and sitting by the table until daybreak. He invites people to live with him, but they shy away. One Sunday, he notices a boy sleeping on a church bench, invites him to his hut and feeds him. Perfecto joyfully makes plans for him, but the boy leaves.

"Last Summer" treats happy recollections of the past that give meaning to a war-weary people. The villagers come down from the hills to their "desolate town with most of the houses burned down and the rest destroyed" (p. 86). In the boy's mind the months unroll fast, summer is ending, and this gives him "a strange feeling of dejection and loneliness" (p. 89). War changes him into a young man.

The interplay between tradition and change is manifested in "Wrath of the Ancestor." A family with a weak, sick mother wait for the father, a teacher, to return. Iyo Meroy, the healer is poised to conduct a sacrifice to appease ancestral spirits who, he says, are causing the illness because they have been forgotten. Moises, the father, has gone to get a doctor. Thus traditional beliefs are posed against science, and a life hangs in the balance.

"Holy Night, Silent Night," the last story, clinches the collection in the theme of goodwill and happiness in Christ's birth. War is lulled by the Christmas season. The Japanese garrison commander, Major Takami, plans a Christmas program, but the townsfolk believe that it is a scheme to lure the guerillas from the hills and capture them.

Ironically, the people plan a mass exodus on a moonlit night while the Japanese are at supper. The plan is foiled by a guerrilla ambush at which some Japanese are killed. Curfew is imposed. A man and his wife heavy with child seek shelter in a corn mill, and her moans attract the attention of a Japanese squad. When a courageous woman tells the soldiers about the baby to come, the corporal orders his soldiers to fetch the Japanese doctor, and Takami orders the bells rung.

Godofredo Roperos' narratives rend the heart, and awaken the readers' sense of kinship with others in different circumstances, especially the lowly and downtrodden. His simple, rhythmical language imbues familiar situations with a Cebuano/Filipino sensibility. An epigraph from Hilaire Belloc for one of the stories ("The Last Summer") aptly encapsulates his sense of oneness with land and people, of belonging to the life of the land, (p. 85).

He does not die that can bequeath  
Some influence to the land he knows  
Or dare, persistent, interweath  
Love permanent with the wild hedgerows;  
He does not die, but still remains  
Substantiate with his darling pains.

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