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Where Only the Moon Rages, by Hidalgo

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Humanae Vitae, the sentiments of the surviving members of the PBCC, the hitherto unknown events behind *Humanae Vitae* which historians will consider as the turning point and lost moment in the history of the Church. All these come alive as if the reader were present. But of what positive value is this book now that the Church has spoken the last word?

Since Vatican II, the important role of the laity in the Church has come more and more to the fore. This book is by a layman and gives the viewpoint of significant dissenting voices of what is called today "sensus fidelium," or the sense of the faithful which more and more will play a crucial role in the evolution of Church doctrine, morals, and Christian life. The Epilogue of the book entitled "What if" is noteworthy. It states forcefully some perplexing questions on the use of Church authority to exact assent and obedience to Catholic truth whose answers will be a long time coming.

McClory concludes, "On the basis of what happened between 1963 and 1968, if the Holy Spirit was the inspiration of *Humanae Vitae*, then the Spirit in that case worked in and through a small minority who fervently believed the old way was the only way, who operated in nearly total secrecy, who denied that the witness of the faithful could have any connection with theology, who bypassed the intent of the Commission they served on, and who achieved their goal in the end by playing on the fears and hesitations of the Holy Father."

Many of the members of the PBCC have since died, but among the survivors is our very own demographer Mercedes Concepcion, now retired from the Population Institute of the University of the Philippines. She has not lost faith and hope because she believes there will always be room for enlightenment in the Philippine Church.

One may not totally agree with the author's conclusion or one could have wished that this book were written instead by a Catholic moral theologian of international repute or that the side of the minority had also been presented. Be that as it may, McClory has asked serious questions that the Church authorities cannot ignore forever.

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Where Only the Moon Rages. By Cristina Pantoja Hidalgo. Pasig, Metro Manila: Anvil Publishing, 1994.

It is helpful to recall Coppard's distinction between the modern short story and the tale when one reads *Where Only the Moon Rages* by Cristina Pantoja-Hidalgo. The one form belongs to a written tradition; the other harks back to a preliterate past. As such, their conventions and demands are different.

As the cover of the book announces, Hidalgo's output is not the perfectly polished pieces of the modern, more artful age but as she calls them, "tales," narratives to be recited among friends and kin around a fire, stories episodic in structure, simple in language, often fanciful in matter.

Hidalgo employs many of the techniques of the tale. In the manner of the anonymous tale-tellers of old, she assumes the voices of her characters and muffles her own. Several of the tales come to us in the guise of stories one character recounts to another. Other tales address the readers and unfold by flashback. Thus, Hidalgo creates an illusion of oral transmission and allows room for loose construction, digressions, and slight inconsistencies in tone, perhaps faults in modern fictioning but all hallmarks of the tale.

As things are, Hidalgo makes good use of what she has. Rather in the manner of Conrad (but perhaps with less texture), she weaves tales whose matter is at some remove from its telling. The effect of framing her tale can be teasing, as in "The Woman in the Lighthouse." A chance meeting between the narrator and a woman, at first nameless, leads to a date in which the mysterious and "still quite attractive" woman (named Anna, as we find out later), tells a story of forbidden love. When the tale ends, we wonder how the narrator and Anna, lonely characters both—sipping coffee in a hotel, she "running her hand through her sleek, shiny hair," and he enchanted by her "accent which [he] could not place"—will end up. Will Anna's "tale within the tale" spill over the frame? Hidalgo leaves us guessing.

The folksy flavor of the tales is here and there spiced by a sprinkling of the supernatural. In "Sylvia," the appearance of Sylvia's ghost triggers the chain of flashbacks which one links together to understand her character—amorous, adventurous, and in the end, "excessive." "Goddess of the mountain" draws a familiar theme from the wellspring of Philippine folklore—a love-struck goddess is spurned by a mortal. "The Princess in Disguise" casually infuses elements of the fairy tale into an otherwise realistic story. The protagonist Tani leaves her nameless birthplace, ruled by a Wicked Wizard, for the Big City with its parks like miniature forests and "imposing castles of glass and steel."

The inclusion of folk wisdom in many of the tales adds to their quaint quality. Manong Kardo explains the workings of an *encantada* to the initially incredulous Ruben, an urban writer, in "Goddess of the Mountain." The narrator in "Sylvia" tells her friends that "ghosts are the souls of dead people who cannot let go, because they're afraid, or can't accept that they're dead, or have left some things unfinished," an explanation she heard from her aunt.

Among the nine tales, however, "How Bartolo Came to Be Called Bartolo"—titled like an etiological fable, told as a story the narrator had heard long ago—most closely adheres to the conventions of the tale. Behind the explanation for the name is the story of rival brothers, sworn enemies turned severed sweethearts, a *babaylan* with a magic potion, foreboding dreams,

twilight meetings beneath flame trees in bloom—in a word, romance. The narrator begins with a formula ("Once upon a time in an old town that stood on the banks of a river, there lived two brothers.") and intermittently reminds us about the "orality" of her story ("It was my mother who told me this story of how Bartolo came to be called Bartolo. She must have pieced the tale from the whispered fragments which make up all family legends. . . .") Hidalgo even repeats a line ("... a faded elegance, a trace of haughtiness, which touched the shabbiness of her *entresuelo* with a certain somber gentility") as if to imitate the "redundancy" of oral literature. Time and again, Hidalgo reminds us that we are listening to a tale twice told, and in a startling metafictional twist, she writes, "But a small town has many tales, not all of them true."

The other stories in the collection are less romantic. The narrator in "The Mother" recounts her travails, living with an unfaithful husband and raising a "difficult" daughter, and finds that she has survived. Mother and daughter are caught in a cycle of insecurity and regret for which the only solution, so the story implies, is love and forgiveness. In "The Boy in the White Shirt and the Khaki Pants Two Inches Too Short for him," Carlos, a country boy, enjoys initial success as a writer in the city but finds that he is "having trouble writing." He wanders around the world in search of inspiration, but in vain. However, in an ending that recalls Graham Greene's *The Power and the Glory*, Carlos finds his nephew newly arrived from the province and eager to take his place.

The last story in the collection, "The Warrior," is about a dying agnostic's last words. Ophelia Dimalanta, in her introduction to the book, praises the "philosophical overtones" of the story. However, Hidalgo's merit lies rather in the meticulous evocation of milieu. She enswathes the bareness of tales in a colorful robe of realistic details, doubtless drawn from her many travels and experiences. The dizzying domestic disorders in "A Princess in Disguise," it can be surmised, are not too far removed from Hidalgo's experience in Beirut. (Tani, in fact, could be an anagram of the author's name.) One finds quaint portraits of the Commonwealth days in "Bartolo" (p. 1):

Those were the days before the "talkies," when black and white figures on the screen jumped about like jerky shadows, to the tune of waltzes or marches played by a live orchestra.

The sights in and around the U.S.T. campus are lovingly limned in "Sylvia" (p. 39):

. . . Nostradamus' predictions and Maria Paz Mendoza's *Notas de Viaje* in the library, a clover patch between the gym and the University press, copies of old maps in the museum that we could buy and have framed in a small shop in P. Noval, a waiter in the girls' canteen who looked

like a *Pinoy* version of Ricky Nelson, a man who sold dirty ice cream by the Forbes gate at exactly three in the afternoon, a wishing well in the Pharmacy Garden.

There are also descriptions of the Philippines, pretty enough for postcards, in "Lighthouse."

Here and there, Hidalgo dabs a dark shade of social realism on the bright romantic canvass of her tales. Tani in "Princess in Disguise" is any lonely expatriate eking out a living in an indifferent city, and the Wicked Wizard is Marcos garbed in cap and gown. In "Sylvia," the hospital hastily built (to satisfy the whim of a Vice-President's wife) and haunted by the ghosts of its laborers left to die in quick-drying cement, Sylvia's queer car accident which kills her—these obliquely resemble the eerie circumstances surrounding the construction of the Manila Film Center. In "Boy in the White Shirt," the military witch-hunts of the Martial Law years are alluded to.

However, what is most interesting is that Hidalgo seems to play with her own material. She herself seems to regard her work with tongue in cheek. The seriousness of "The Mother," for example, is undercut by her self-conscious references to the many clichés she uses: "*She was always a difficult child. I know that is cliché. But the thing about clichés is that it isn't easy to find something else that will say what one means quite as well.*" "Princess in Disguise" loses its gravity in much the same fashion. Torn between an unemployed husband, two wearisome children, a feckless nephew, and "a thousand outdated scruples" on the one hand and a Prince Charming and "freedom" on the other, Tani reaches an epiphany in what to some might resemble a telephone company commercial. In "The Spinster," Hidalgo transplants a commonplace romantic image onto wartime Manila and thus creates an incongruity: "From where the de las Alas house stood, you could see a long way. I used to imagine the fair Elvira seated at the window of her bedroom, waiting for her lover to come pedalling down the road." Then, there is this sentence in "The Warrior" (p. 138):

They had wounded each other deeply, had drawn apart, had discovered that each needed the other more than they needed to be free, realized that they had forgotten *the way of the warrior*, resolved to keep the faith and continue to travel *the path of the heart*, to conquer fear and certainty and power. (italics mine)

Hidalgo deflates what should be the story's most touching scene by playful self-reflexivity.

These nine tales may want the penetrating wisdom that the greatest literatures offer, but they are not without their share of insights, perhaps trite to some but nonetheless genuine. We may also quibble about such matters as tone, point of view, texture, structure, and language should we choose,

but to bother with these may be to waste our time. After all, we are offered tales—and we get them—and fascinating ones at that. Complaining that we have been shortchanged is perhaps like demanding a transcendental insight from a commercial birthday card.

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The Book of Martyrs: Selected Poems 1982–1992. By Constantino Tejero. Pasig, Metro Manila: Anvil Publishing, 1994.

This book gathers together for the first time some 100 of Constantino Tejero's poems. The book is divided into three sections—"The Book of Songs, Prayers, and Revolt," "The Book of Curses and Exaltation," and "The Book of Martyrs"—each graced with the delicately detailed drawings of book designers Albert Gamos and Raquel Gomez.

Written between 1982 to 1992, the poems reflect the tensions and troubles of one of the most tumultuous decades in recent Philippine history. Especially in the first section, Tejero's journalistic background surfaces, as newspaper headlines (e.g., the assassination of Senator Aquino, the downfall of the Marcoses, the Mt. Pinatubo eruption, etc.) form the stuff of his poems. As he himself writes in a passage from "Attack of the Pagodas," which sounds strikingly similar to a speech from *Hamlet*, "There are more emotions in history/ Than anyone would assert or acknowledge."

One finds stirrings of social unrest lurking behind the nighttime stillness in "Nocturne in an Old Town" and intimations of violence in "Marag Valley Lament" and "Revolutionary Aubade." The desolation of the Marcoses rings loudly in the closing line of "Mrs. Imelda Marcos and the Darkness": "Ah, nurse, bring me the cup without poison." Poverty greets us in the form of Gregorio Añonuevo's "moss-grown face" and "two rows of lichened teeth" in "The Finest Hour of Beggar Goryo." "The Wedding of Crisostomo Ibarra" may be drawn from an earlier historical epoch but nonetheless conveys the unease of current times.

In such poems as "Oyster Country," "Urban Planning for the City of the Mind," and "Inner City" is depicted the grim and sordid landscape of Manila (p. 16):

The culvert clogs with dead cats. The plumbing
chokes, gasps, the faucet pours sand and dust.

"The Fog," another description of city seediness, resounds with imagery drawn from T.S. Eliot, notably "The Wasteland" and "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock" (p. 13):