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# philippine studies

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## **DevilWings, by Madrid**

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lected material. Thus writing is a social practice. The historical Marxist perspective can help us elucidate Third World formation, for Marxism incarnated a vision of human liberation realized in history. It also offers a prophetic message of new life for humanity."

San Juan's *History and Form* represents his attempt to intervene in what he called the cultural and ideological terrain of a struggle for national democracy in the Philippines as well as in Filipino diaspora around the world. He says: "As we approach the centennial of the 1896 revolution and the founding of the first Philippine Republic in 1898, we are also entering a new stage of more profound and unprecedented social transformation all over the world that promises not to leave the peripheral regions, the Philippines included, intact and pristine." The book is an excellent collection of essays by the leading authority on Filipino-American literary relations, who is also a leading intellectual on Marxist criticism, anti-colonialism, and the liberation of Philippine culture, both in the Philippines and in the U.S.

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**DevilWings.** Renato E. Madrid. Quezon City: Ateneo de Manila University Press, 1996. 262 pages.

*DevilWings* is the first novel of Renato E. Madrid. His short stories collected in *Southern Harvest* won a National Book Award from the Manila Critics Circle. The novel is told from the point of view of the apostolic nuncio, who has been tasked by the Vatican to investigate the massacre of four men inside a remote suburban church in the Visayas. The murdered men include an old priest and a younger one, a former seminarian and a close friend of the two men, and a respected country doctor.

This is a Southern gothic novel, grim and serious, yet absurd and funny at times. It probes the grace and generosity, the intrigues and betrayal, between the opposing ideologies in the Church. The rollercoaster events in the small parish church may well stand for the Church hierarchy itself. The titles of the novels' chapters are an adroit mixture of Church holidays ("The Gift of Kings"), classical music ("A Little Night Music"), and Shakespeare ("A Remembrance of Things to Come," "Perchance to Sleep"). Throw in the recurring metaphors of the papaya and bonsai trees, and you have a heady novel about Philippine church life and lore in the last thirty years. After asking a lot of questions and rattling some old skeletons in the closet, in the end, of course, this is still a Catholic novel that has solid moral concerns.

First published in *The Manila Times*, 24 August 1997.

But trust Mr. Madrid to carry his learning in philosophy and theology lightly, the way it should be. Consider these ruminations: "Exactly the trouble with words—those chameleons of sense: able to clarify as easily as obfuscate. Let an enemy but reset the surroundings, and a man's best words could also be his worst betrayers. They were right in the very beginning, when the world was new, and even God dressed his thought in words because they were a marvelous invention. So marvelous that when God thought *Son*, thought was simultaneously Word and Son. God's only *Son*, it turned out, for he never spoke, or needed to, again." (pp. 50–51)

The characters of this novel also take time to go into the heart of the matter. After the verbal joust between the priest and the former seminarian in the boat, the two friends say farewell to each other.

"Is it time to go?" La Crava asked, somewhat surprised. And saddened. He felt that in their hurry to talk about important things, they had left out the unimportant ones that really mattered: loving, being alone, dying." (p. 111)

Or listen to this interior monologue of the doctor whose father is slowly dying: "Aphasia soon took place, enveloping first the lips and then moving backwards to devour the tongue and throat. This soon gave way to conversationless hands: later, to hands that refused to grasp or grip.

"It was some Greek, he recalled, who had advanced the theory of memory being the soul. It pained the young doctor most of all to gaze in his father's irises, and there to watch the memories gradually disappear as recognition became less and less forthcoming." (p. 177)

You could sense the influence of Nick Joaquin in the gap between the generations, and the influence of Gregorio C. Brillantes in the absence of grace in the modern world. And hovering all over is the spirit of the great Graham Greene. The blurb at the back has no byline but it should have been credited to Mr. Brillantes. The blurb goes: "*DevilWings* is, in the best sense of the word, a Filipino Catholic novel—and the narrative . . . of innocence, guilt, corruption, rebellion, politics, the prevalence of evil and the persistence of sanctity, is also a psychological thriller, a metaphysical detective story, a spiritual adventure tale, a tantalizing good read. And, I suspect, something of a treasure trove of ideas for critical discussion, if not controversy."

All true, but then we also have to note some small warts in the book. This includes the cover that shows a gnome with wings, which is too literal an interpretation of the novel. It calls undue attention to itself. The cover also has four clashing colors—orange, blue, mauve and pink—done in blazing neon. There are also lapses in preposition ("Did the Father dwell too long *in* the subject of plants?" [p. 81]), typos and an unacceptable statement that called gays "perverts" (p. 166).

The other short stories of Mr. Madrid will be collected in a book called *Tales from Valladolid*. He also has a collection of plays in English entitled *Scenes from a Martyrdom*, written in 1995. This play deals with a Cebuano

teenager who was martyred in Guam in 1752. On account of his earlier book *Southern Harvest* and now, *DevilWings*, these are texts that should also give us hours of pleasure.

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**Tibok: Heartbeat of the Filipino Lesbian.** Edited by Anna Leah Sarabia. Pasig City: Anvil Publishing and Quezon City: Women's Media Circle Foundation, 1998. 199 pages.

Finally out is the long-awaited anthology called *Tibok: Heartbeat of the Filipino Lesbian*, compiled and edited by Anna Leah Sarabia. As I have said in my blurb, this book is peopled by maiden aunts, housewives, singles, poets, professors, cooks, artists, students and activists—all of them showing us the inner rooms that house the life of the Filipino woman as a lesbian. The texts are strong and lyrical, pained and liberating, threaded with longing and with love. This landmark collection shows an important group finally finding their own voices—and thus, their own homes.

In her preface, Sarabia tells us that they first thought of the book in 1993, as soon as the group Can't Live in the Closes (CLIC) was organized. Like in *Ladlad: An Anthology of Philippine Gay Writing* which J. Neil C. Garcia and I edited, she found some difficulty soliciting materials for publication. Thus, new works were given a premium, which should then be signed by the writers—with their own names. It was "almost like signing their names in blood. Convincing and persuading some writers to do this took even more time. A few whom we approached were not ready to come out so publicly, as in a book, and take the consequences . . . One poet, who could have joined us here, had to pull out after her daughter threatened to declare war" (pp. 7 and 8).

But pour the works did, even if they came in trickles at first. Lesbian writers who have migrated in the West also pitched in, sending works through the e-mail. Clearly, then, poverty is not the only reason Filipinas migrate. Others also want more elbow room with which to move about, a bigger space for their lungs to breathe in.

*Tibok* is divided into four parts: Heritage, Articulation, Strife, and Singkil. "Manuel's Aunts" by Gigi Bautista is a wry, if occasionally funny, recollection about a straight man's two elderly aunts. Like the society around him that wears blinders, Manuel seems oblivious to the relationship between his aunt and another woman.