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Bongbong at Kriz / Batang Pro, by Noriega

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In Demetillo, the artist still strives "to evoke the emotions and attitudes that make up an intellectual and aesthetic milieu. The imagination of modern man still tries to find the oblique images that enable us, like Perseus, to confront the gorgons of Reality" (p. 27).

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BONGBONG AT KRIS / BATANG PRO. By Bienvenido Noriega, Jr. Quezon City: New Day Publishers, 1987. iv + 235 pages; photographs.

The two plays paired in this third collection of Bienvenido Noriega's plays are, the author admits in his foreword, written very differently from each other: *Batang Pro* is "seryosong-seryoso, matipid, bumubuntal ang diyalogo, napakapanglaw ng pananaw sa tao't ating mundo"; *Bongbong at Kris* is "pantasya, sobrang daldal, binabaligtad at nililibak ang mga sinasagrado nating katotohanan." And yet they share many things: "... kapwa tumatalakay ng mga sensitibong isyung panlipunan, parehong may malasakit sa mga tampok nilang tauhan, parehong nakukuha pa ring tumawa sa gitna ng lagim at alinlangan" (iii).

Batang Pro's three characters are Ricky (16), a pimp/cigarette vendor, Nado (12), and Milet (13), both child prostitutes. The play takes them through seven scenes, three years, and a world of hellish experience.

Chilling is the way the children react to disaster. Nado is impressed by a raging fire, and a half-crazed woman trying to rescue her trapped father. He thinks it is a great sight, especially when the wind blows it bigger. Ricky is amused, then leaves to see if he can join the looting.

Callous they seem to be when talking about family: Ricky contemplates giving his three stepsisters (all from different fathers) away to beggars after his mother's death, since he had been supporting them only to help her. Nado mentions that his father had sold him to Mr. Gelber, his *amo*. Adopted, Ricky insists; "hindi ipinagbibili ang tao." "Ganoon na nga siguro," Nado says, and they laugh (p. 11). But he dreams of saving up money to buy his youngest brother from his father.

Casual is the talk of whipping and beating, of abortions and hunger, of money and prostitution:

MILET: . . . Araw-araw, me tangang tulad ko na susuray-suray diyan at handang sumabak sa kahit ano maitawid lamang ang mga unang araw. 'Tapos, pag sanay na siya sa magaang na trabaho, hindi mo na kailangang buyuhin pa upang magkalat.

Sad are the loves and hopes to which the three cling: Milet's zoo elephant—"Talagang nakakaawa 'yon e. Biro mo, ang laki-laki at saka parang ang bait-bait, pero kulong na kulong" (p. 21); Nado's master's dog named Rizal—"Me damdamin din siya—Kaibigan ko siya, aba . . ." (p. 21); and Ricky's dream of escape—"Mag-aaral ako ng elektronik. Pupunta ako ng Saudi . . ." (p. 53).

Painful are the deaths—of the dog, Mr. Gelber, the elephant, and the children—that move the play toward an ending. Piercing is the tight skill with which the playwright unfolds the grim realization that the young are scourged, scarred, and destroyed by a society in which child prostitution exists.

Noriega calls *Bongbong at Kris* "Romansa't Komedyang sa Pelikula't Pulitika." As *Romansa*, it fantasizes about 1991, when Bongbong Marcos, leader of a band of rebels in the mountains, kidnaps Kris Aquino, by then a superstar, in order to force President Aquino to allow Marcos to return to the Philippines to die. In Capulet-Montague fashion (Noriega acknowledges Shakespeare in his credits), the two fall in love:

KRIS: Bakit ka pa naging Marcos? Bakit ba ako naging Aquino! Giyera nga lang dapat ng ating mga magulang, damay naman tayo—Kung maaari lang nating itakwil ang ating mga magulang, mga ninu- ninuno, ginawa ko na agad, mapalapit lang uli sa iyo . . . Ang sarap bigkasin ng pangalan mo . . . Ay! parang *burglar alarm*! . . . Ay, parang tambol Latino! . . . parang kampana ng angelus—Bong — Bong — (p. 144).

As *Komedyang*, the play makes highly entertaining comedy of contemporary people and places. The story is set in a framework of places and dates meaningful to any Filipino: 14 February (Valentine's Day and Kris' birthday); 26 February (EDSA Revolution); 21 August (Aquino Assassination); 11 September (Marcos' Birthday); 21 September (Proclamation of Martial Law); TV studios, the Cordillera, Malacañang, Camp Crame, the Manila International Airport. And the bit players are so well known—film stars, TV and newspaper reporters, President Aquino, the Marcoses—that the characters reverberate with references and associations that supplement the action on the page or stage (the play has been presented more than 50 times).

Noriega's skill is especially evident in the dialogue, which reproduces the many different levels of colloquial Filipino (the college girl type, the movie/television/gay variants, the almost-formal, etc.), the editions of code-switching, and the variations proper to each character. The writer's ear is true, his comic hand sure.

Bongbong at Kris, which won a prize in the 1987 Cultural Center of the Philippines Playwriting Contest, was one of the first plays to be written and staged after the end of the Marcos regime. This was a time when the playwrights who had written veiled or direct protest plays in the previous two decades were reassessing the matter for drama, after the end of a period of unspoken but real

censorship and suppression. The board of judges cited its comic treatment of the relevant theme of reconciliation. Controversy attended its first staging, however, since some charged the production with an overly sympathetic treatment of the deposed Marcoses, to the disadvantage of the new president.

The published edition (which is accompanied by an English translation), although revised from the contest entry, leans to neither side, but is sympathetic to both and, the playwright says, was only meant to draw forth laughter, a bit of thought, release, and understanding: "Ibig lamang ng may- akdang matawa tayo sa mga talaga namang nakakatawa sa atin, kahit totoo na minsan, mapaisip nang kaunti, magkalabasan ng ilang sama ng loob, at magkaunawaan bago magkaisa" (p. 179).

"Sana'y maaliw tayo," Noriega ends, and indeed the play amuses and entertains. It is welcome comedy, especially since not too many contemporary playwrights—and indeed comparatively few in the history of Philippine drama—have devoted their talents to the comic genre. And it is welcome laughter, since it comments lightly but pointedly on the world of "pelikula't politika"—on the mores and manners, on the pulsing and possible lives within Philippine media and politics.

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ANGRY DAYS IN MINDANAO. By Peter Schreurs, M.S.C. Cebu City: San Carlos Publications, University of San Carlos, 1987. vi + 147 pages, maps, photographs, glossary, index.

Father Peter Schreurs, now living in his native Holland, is the kind of historian who knows his subject not only from archival records but also from first-hand acquaintance with the land and the people who inhabit it. He became interested in the history of northeastern Mindanao during the years of missionary work he spent in that region.

The "angry days" of the title refer to the turbulent period of the Philippine Revolution following upon the declaration of Philippine Independence in June 1898 and ending with the American occupation of northeastern Mindanao in 1901.

The book begins with a discussion of the source material (to which we shall return presently) and then proceeds to give a bird's-eye view of the Philippine Revolution. That account (entitled "The National Scene") occupies only four pages, but it would be difficult to find any summary of the Philippine revolutionary period as good as this one. It is brief, perceptive, masterly.