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## **From Peking with Love and Other International Tales**

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## FROM PEKING WITH LOVE AND OTHER INTERNATIONAL TALES.

By Joe Quirino. Manila: National Book Store, 1982. xii, 204 pages.

Joe Quirino, one of the most prolific Philippine short story writers in English, has written his own Foreword to this, his twelfth collection of stories. Quirino says he wrote the Foreword for young writers, and it tells about his own roots as a writer, about the writer's eye and the writer's ear at work in postwar Manila, on Calle Carriedo, with Humphrey Bogart and Ingrid Bergman in *Casablanca* and burlesque shows and show business—"the dark heartbreak street in which every ruin teemed with stories" (p. xii). The road from Carriedo led to fiction and the beginning of the JQ stories. Quirino says that his later stories have reached a horizon "so far unexplored in Philippine writing . . . the Filipino going out into the great world" (p. xiii). (Quirino overlooks N.V.M. Gonzalez, Bienvenido Santos, Sionil Jose, even Zoilo Galang fifty years ago, and a host of other Filipino writers in English who wrote about the Filipino in the great world.) But in his last two collections of stories (*Short Stories Around the World* in 1981 and this latest collection) Quirino does write "international entertainments" of the Philippine *diaspora* in Peking, Singapore, Japan, Cuba, Brazil, Rome, Bethlehem and London.

Critic Isagani Cruz, in a review of Quirino's 1981 stories (Quirino includes the review in this collection) called him the "Philippine answer to the American O. Henry" (p. 198). Nine of these stories are of O. Henry vintage. In "The Princess of Singapore" Louie Sevilla is in search of his mother and at the end, he does not know whether he has found her or not. The helpful stranger whom Joel meets on the Janiculum in Rome in "Quo Vadis, Joel Syquia" turns out to be the Holy Father. In "Kikugi's Tour Erotique," Kikugi finally frees himself from a nagging mother and sister and should be happy, but is not. He finds another nagging mother and sister on an erotic tour in Manila, transports them to his house in Japan, and finds peace once again in nagging domesticity. Aunt Lulu in "Aunt Lulu and a Carnival in Brazil" arrange a mysterious hotel promotion that pays off in emeralds. "A Vow For All Souls' Day" uses a typical O. Henry twist in the plot, as does "Seven Aboard the 747." In "Jealousy, Expatriate Style" Louie Besa shoots the wrong couple in his bed and in "Tondo in Tokyo" Miyako abandons the gallant, man-about-town expatriate Rene for a "real" Filipino from Tondo. Even "Monet's Cuban Love Song" and "Kundiman in Manhattan" are romantic O. Henry. "A Sentimental Education" also belongs in that class, although O. Henry would never have written on that sexual theme. Quirino is, as Nick Joaquin says, "a Scheherazade who can lure us from play or pleasure and hold us spellbound with his stories," much like the American O. Henry.

The rest of the stories follow the pattern of *Short Stories Around the World*. There are two good detective stories—"Uncle Goyo's Pirate Treasure" and "Johnny Oro in London"—although there is something culturally dis-

concerting about a westernized Filipino detective. "The Demonstrator" is a ghost story with a political message that is somewhat dated, and "Christmas in Bethlehem" is a story of the supernatural with a theological note. "Stop-over Saigon!" is more of an essay than a short story. "And looking on the fair city, he felt no resentment, no hatred of it because it had bewitched him. He looked on its lights and his heart swelled with love . . . It was enough" (p. 156). "Quo Vadis, Joel Syquia" is a parable for the Filipino's search for meaning, and "Seven Aboard the 747" is an experiment with point of view that doesn't quite succeed. Patterned on Thornton Wilder's *The Bridge of San Luis Rey*, it is a story of seven Filipino (one supposes) lives in the economy class of a 747 traveling west, linked by the memories of what they were and what they are. "In that hushed darkened cabin 45,000 feet up in space, the dreamers form an image of each (sic) of their own memory and desire, of past and present. And so they sail on, boats against the wind, lights whizzing past in the night, towards Camelot and the Klondike and other points West" (p. 49). But there is no real unity beyond the cabin of 747 and the common dream of the Filipino who cannot go home again. Isagani Cruz lamented that Quirino "should not be writing short stories anymore. The time has come to write longer works, to experiment with novels" (p. 203). Quirino responded: "I've begun writing several novels only to cut them short to be converted to short stories." Perhaps, Quirino is right. One should not tamper with the talent that is here—the talent of the journalist who writes with ease about every topic under the sun. He is, as he himself admits, an entertainer. Maybe we need more of that in our sad and disillusioned world.

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KASAYSAYAN AT PAG-UNLAD NG DULAANG PILIPINO. By Arthur P. Casanova. Manila: Rex Bookstore, 1984. 468 pages.

The topic that Arthur P. Casanova seeks to explore in his book, *Kasaysayan ng Pag-unlad ng Dulaang Pilipino*, is broad indeed. He narrates in 468 pages the history of Philippine drama from the precolonial period to the present '80s. The broad scope of his topic is at once the strength and the weakness of the book. Often when a writer wishes to cover a topic extremely broad his analysis tends to be shallow, his argumentation shoddy and his manner of exposition hurriedly done.

As a book that seeks to fulfill the need of students on the tertiary level and as a reference for those taking up courses in Education, Pilipino, or the Theater Arts, Casanova's book, in spite of its shortcomings, has its virtues.