

Recah Trinidad. 2006. *Pacific Storm: Dispatches on Pacquiao of the Philippines*. Pasig City: Anvil Publishing. 179 pp.

In this world, the power of one boxer's fists mesmerizes politicians, contributes to the administration's stability, and determines the national advertising trend besides rescuing an entire people from the depths of its inferiority complex. Recah Trinidad's *Pacific Storm: Dispatches on Pacquiao of the Philippines* is an exploration of what Philippine society has become since Manny Pacquiao knocked out Mexico's professional boxing giant Marco Antonio Barrera in a 2003 Texas match. Apart from compiling the sports correspondent's news articles on Pacquiao's successful and not-so-successful bouts with what the boxer refers to as the three Mexican *balod* (waves): the fighters Barrera, Juan Manuel Marquez, and (his last opponent) Erik Morales, *Pacific Storm* offers an insightful narrative on hero worship in which boxing is intricately intertwined with the country's culture, history, politics, and economy.

The entire nation is the worshiper in the true-to-life tale, and Pacquiao is the idol whose phenomenal rise deeply underscores the virtues of the Filipino character as well as all that is wrong in it. Trinidad keenly observes that just as Pacquiao's triumphs, including his victorious 2006 rematch against thrice-super featherweight champion Erik Morales, demonstrated how far one could get in the international arena, thanks to the Filipino resilience and ability to bounce back from crisis. It also highlighted the extent to which politicians would be more than willing to associate themselves with the immensely popular in order to project themselves as deserving of the voters' mandate. Trinidad, who was an international boxing judge and editor of an anti-Marcos newspaper, for instance attacks with his social critic's candor the First Gentleman's act of getting into the ring—in full view of the live and media audiences—so that Her Excellency waiting on the line's other end could congratulate the new champion after Pacquiao was declared winner of the 2006 Las Vegas bout against Morales. He assails how “the worst of the Pinoy as freeloader” was demonstrated “in that on-ring sideshow” (172) and laments that “the embattled government of Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo, accused of stealing the vote, did not hesitate to overfeed the hungry with the boxing hero” (3). One of the Pinoy's whose “raging political sentiments” were “blunted by his joy over the boxing hero's triumph” (43) is fifty-three-year old Ingo

Aquino, a laborer who did not approve of the current leadership. Aquino, interviewed by Trinidad, confessed that he stopped participating in anti-Arroyo protest rallies following Pacquiao's January 21, 2006, knockout of Morales, which he and his friends celebrated for the day over gin and sardines.

The author relates poetically how the celebrated athlete's homecoming motorcade after that fight drew "countless fanatics" who "pushed and shoved ... for a glimpse of the hero" that "chroniclers could no longer measure the crowd" (20). Pacquiao has also become a most coveted endorser of politicians and products as diverse as socks, fast food, fresh milk, and painkillers. His ubiquitous popularity and appeal to the people and to those aiming to gain their confidence is not surprising at all. For this book, straddling and useful to various fields of social inquiry, asserts that the boxer's solid performance in the boxing ring upended the Filipino people's inferiority complex borne out of their country's centuries-old history of subjugation by White-peopled nations, as the brown-colored Pacquiao knocked out lighter-colored foes.

Trinidad's work also reveals that the national idol's rags-to-riches biography is actually a euphony of scripts that would appear in those of countless other Filipinos, should their life stories be written: the common *tao* struggling with the everyday challenges of a hand-to-mouth existence, the little boy who stops going to school due to lack of money, the destitute *provinciano* drawn by the dream of the better lot in life promised by *Maynila*, a father who abandons his family for a mistress, the mother devoted to the task of single-handedly raising their children, strengthened by prayer. The crowd-drawing athlete is the son of a woman twice married but abandoned along with six kids for other women by her first and second husbands. The child who would grow up to be the great enemy of Mexican boxing dominance helped her peddle native delicacies to support their fatherless family and was always present to pray the rosary with her. Forced to quit school to help augment the family's finances, Pacquiao—who had to make do with thin porridge just so the family could eat twice a day—went to live in the Philippine capital to compete and further his training as a boxer, from where he would send his earnings to his mother and siblings back home. In Manila, he met the manager who would bring him to the United States for training and the professional bouts that would lead to his international fame. Pacquiao's great success story is thus made complete by another familiar storyline,

heard, told, and retold by generations of Filipinos: that of a fellow citizen overcoming his destitute circumstances, thanks to the opportunities provided by Uncle Sam.

Trinidad further rationalizes Pacquiao's fame in his celebrity-struck country, where a candidate's chances of winning in the elections multiplies several times over if he or she is a showbiz star, in terms of the boxer's being a "genuine hero who was no product of fantasy ... emerging from a real blood-and-guts battle" (3). He was "no longer starring in a shallow blockbuster movie" as opposed to "movie stars and entertainment icons that had freely stolen the adulation of gullible Filipinos" (3). By setting apart Pacquiao as a binary opposite of entertainment figures, Trinidad overlooks the fact that professional boxing is essentially a form of entertainment, fueled by investors aiming to capitalize on the public's penchant for the drama of aggression. Such contrast drawn by the writer ironically reveals the extent to which the Filipino psyche has blurred the boundaries between fantasy and reality.

Pacific Storm offers the reader a candid view of Philippine society as seen from a ringside seat.—KATRINA MAQUILAN, RESEARCH ASSISTANT, THIRD WORLD STUDIES CENTER.

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Benjamin Pimentel Jr. *U.G.: An Underground Tale (The Journey of Edgar Jopson and the First Quarter Storm)*. Anvil Publishing, 2006. 284 pp.

Edjop had been dead before I became an activist in 1983, at the height of massive nationwide protests against the assassination of Benigno Aquino. His name reverberated loudly even then. I remember shouting his name in rallies and in street plays where I got to indulge my amateur theatrical, artistic side. "*Katarungan para kay Johnny Escandor! Bobby de la Paz! Edgar Jopson!*" we hollered while emoting, affecting a grim look, and flailing our fists in the air. The dead revolutionary martyrs would have been flush with pride, seeing how we up-and-coming radicals took after them, and even tried to be creative.

Poring through each page of Benjamin "Boying" Pimentel's fast-paced book, *UG: An Underground Tale (The Journey of Edgar Jopson and the First Quarter Storm Generation)*, one can't help but be in awe of Edjop the man. It would not be a stretch to compare him with Jose Rizal.