

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.

Edjop did not have Rizal's athletic bent (though his son, a triathlete, has it); neither did he paint or sculpt or operate on his mother's eye, yet his life was equally speckled with superlatives: the most celebrated student leader with the highest academic honors, the most reviled "moderate" in his time, the activist who executed the most dramatic shift in political choice, the cadre who took the "*simpleng pamumuhay, puspusang pakikibaka*" most seriously. His was the martyrdom most mourned.

Meanwhile he was, like Rizal, among the shortest. He was also reportedly stingy, dogmatic, inflexible, and humorless. But these traits have not dimmed his shine (warts, after all, make one human). He probably was much too regimented for comfort, too much of a good soldier. He was the overachieving type with the feverish drive to get straight A's; he studied more than required, and necessarily graduated valedictorian. He enjoyed challenges defined by his formal environment and possessed the optimum mix of aptitude and diligence to take them on. He kept this singular devotion to excellence all the way to the revolution: overperforming, doing tasks that would make the superiors happy, proud, and satisfied; performing the quality work of a true-blue cadre. When he was deployed in Mindanao, he came out with the most comprehensive "SI" (social investigation) of the island, applying his well-honed rigor for the task.

Edjop was the consummate revolutionary. He was not, however, a "rebel"—not in the real, boat-rocking sense; not the type who would question the ethos and foundation of the alter-world he chose. He lashed out at society, but he never questioned his organizational seniors.

But that may be asking too much. Besides, Edjop did not survive long enough to realize possible new trajectories in his life. He was felled quickly and decisively while his gifts had yet to be fully realized or even redirected. But then again, his was not a totally unfortunate circumstance, for his martyrdom was not contested. He was gone long before the revolutionary Left was decisively cracked, after which the heroism of revolution-related deaths has become a much-debated affair. Such was the sadder fate of former New People's Army (NPA) chief Romulo Kintanar.

A picturesque scene is quoted from Edjop's friend Freddie Salanga early in the book, describing the meeting between former president Ferdinand Marcos and the student leaders led by Edjop. "As the tension eased in the room, people began to notice how like a boy indeed he was, his feet barely touching the polished floor ... To the

President's right was an equally small person, Portia Ilagan, who then headed the National Students' League ..."

Marcos was also famously short, and I cannot help but imagine how these tiny people with huge influence in that large room were negotiating the fate of an entire nation. For a long time, the most powerful of the short ones, aided by long arms, prevailed. Ultimately, Marcos's extended rule had to be cut short. (This is not to denigrate the vertically challenged, just that it is hard to resist the pun.)

In his foreword, Pimentel explains, "This is a retelling of Edjop's story. The main story line has not changed ... (but the previous narrative) flowed in a bigger context which I missed in my earlier attempt to tell it. That's why ... this is a different book." Boying reworked his original template using a new lens, one colored by how the revolutionary movement has evolved from Edjop's time, when everything seemed far simpler and straightforward, to the present, when the complex interplay of revolution and "counterrevolution" rhetoric gives no convenient, black-and-white answers.

The first version of the book (*Edjop: The Unusual Journey of Edgar Jopson*) came out in 1989. It spoke of Edjop and the revolutionary movement in glowing terms, hence the latter bathed it with typical revolutionary praise. The new version, on the other hand, created a tempest. It keeps the Edjop radiance but casts a darker eye toward what the revolutionary movement has sorely become in Pimentel's view. Naturally, the movement was not particularly happy with the author's new spectacles.

Pimentel's critique against the movement shows up clearly in three interrelated aspects of the book. First, the hard-hitting content of Jovito Salonga's introduction, which took off from a devoutly Christian faith, is critical of the Chinese experiment, and is unequivocally anti-communist. China in 1980, he says, "had been exhausted by the violence and chaos of the Cultural Revolution." Joma Sison, he believes, is no different from Marcos: "Both had been playing God."

Second, it strongly implied Communist Party of the Philippines (CPP)-NPA's direct hand in the 1971 Plaza Miranda bombing, as argued by Salonga as well. A poignant part of the book's epilogue was the conversation between Edjop and wife Joy, where this was talked about in somber, almost dreadful tones. "He did not lie and he did not deny what he had heard," narrates Joy. "The impression he gave me was that there was talk about the Plaza Miranda bombing in the highest party circles and its correctness or implications on the genuine united-

front work especially with the political allies.” Joy says Edjop seemed to be ashamed that others might discover this.

Sison and his followers deny culpability in the bombing of Plaza Miranda, practically saying that these were just the rantings of an old man. Will the incontrovertible truth about the biggest mystery in Philippine revolutionary history be finally out? If so, and if indeed the CPP was responsible for it, then the truth will definitely rewrite Philippine history itself and redefine the CPP-NPA’s actual role in how our society was shaped, especially during the Martial Law years.

While the CPP-NPA flatly denies responsibility for the Plaza Miranda bombing, it claims full responsibility for the killing of Kintanar, which brings us to the third aspect. It is hard to escape the irony of Kintanar’s execution. He was primarily responsible for the growth of the NPA. A gifted fighter, he came out of successful battles scarred but unyielding, evaded military dragnets, escaped detention, and trained numerous NPA fighters. In the end, he was done in by the very organization he carried to its peak military strength.

Even before the rewritten book on Edjop came out, Pimentel already delivered a stinging rebuke of the party’s execution of Kintanar, saying “they spit on the grave of Edjop” for exterminating the life of the person who stood as father to his orphaned children. One of the interesting articles I found on the Net that extolled the Party and, ergo, defended the killing of Kintanar was Karlo Mikhail Mongaya’s blog entry on August 27, 2006. He says, “To make the comparison of Edjop to Kintanar by exploiting the fact that Edjop’s widow became Kintanar’s wife is simply vulgar.”

Mongaya’s article, entitled “Alternative Notes from the Underground,” is an attack on Pimentel’s rewritten book as well as a rejoinder to Gemma Nemenzo’s review in *Filipinas* magazine, “Notes from the Underground.” (Fyodor Dostoevsky, who first used that title and was persecuted for his political involvement, must be turning in his grave, what with the debates in his time and place remaining to this day in a country so removed from his.) Moncaya, and even Jose Maria Sison himself, mistook Gemma Nemenzo for Anna Maria “Princess” Nemenzo, chair of the Freedom from Debt Coalition and wife of former UP president Francisco “Dodong” Nemenzo. Mongaya proceeded to attack Dodong Nemenzo’s politics as well for eschewing the violence inherent in prolonged revolutionary projects. “She may believe like her husband, Francisco Nemenzo, that urban insurrections

a la the Bolshevik October Revolution are quite peaceful, and thus 'better', while people's wars are 'hopeless.'"

Equating "intellectual courage and humility" with the "natural-democratic cause" is of course problematic. The "national democratic cause" that Edjop lived and died for, and that later decided Kintanar was worth killing, has itself become the crux of the polemical divide. A line was drawn between the people who continue to believe in the national democratic cause (they hate the book), and those who have grown critical of the movement (they like the book). There's still that thing called "everything else in between," of course, for we now live amid "spectral politics." Nevertheless, the core of the debate shakes the validity of the present revolutionary war being waged by the CPP-NPA.

I appreciate Pimentel's attempt to breathe new meanings to an important slice of our past through the short, storied life of Edgar Jopson. His rewriting of the book proves that history is as much a recording of the past as a continuous reinterpretation of it based on the contingencies and realities illuminated by the present.

"The light that shines twice as bright lives half as long," says a line in the film *Bladerunner*. Edjop shone brightly but was extinguished before reaching new crossroads the rest of us had the luxury of contending with. He was slain so young he was denied the privilege, and agony, of choice. Had he been spared, my unabashedly biased conjecture is that he would have eventually questioned some fundamental assumptions too, and become a maverick. He agonized over Plaza Miranda after all. His heart, I trust, was in the right place (at the center of the chest, with the aorta pointed to the left), and most importantly he read. Who knows what he could have read along the way?—**ROBERT FRANCIS GARCIA**, SECRETARY GENERAL, PEACE ADVOCATES FOR TRUTH, HEALING AND JUSTICE (PATH), AND AUTHOR, TO SUFFER THY COMRADES.

ERRATUM

The *Kasarinlan: Philippine Journal of Third World Studies* received an email from Karl Mikhail Mongaya, which states:

In the 2007 Vol. 22, No 1. issue of your publication, Robert Francis Garcia's book review of *U.G: An Underground Tale; The Journey of Edgar Jopson and the First Quarter Storm* by Benjamin Pimentel Jr. erroneously cited me as the author of an article titled "Alternative Notes from the Underground." I would like to clarify that I never wrote the said article. Mr. Garcia made a mistake when he credited the article to my name. It was written by one Malaya Magtanggol and is available online at <http://qc.indymedia.org/news/2006/08/8296.php>. I merely reposted Magtanggol's article along with Gemma Nemenzo's "Note from the Underground" (<http://qc.indymedia.org/news/2006/08/8283.php>) in my now defunct blog account.

Kasarinlan accepts this correction.

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