

Title: Her Wild American Self. (book reviews)

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M. Evelina Galang. Coffee House Press, 1996. 180 pp. Paper: \$12.95

In the afterword to this absorbing first collection of short stories, Galang writes that all of her women characters are, "working to figure out who to be and how to do it." Galang's Filipina-American women explore identity--who and how to be--within and against cultural narratives about gender, ethnicity, family, and the American Dream. Their voices are often confused, angry, or sad and always honest, loving, and real. And the process of negotiating identity is, like and perhaps because of Galang's characters, always varied and never boring. Through these richly drawn women, we experience what it might mean to be a Filipina-American woman in the U.S., how it feels to be seen through the eyes of white mainstream culture, and how one might create a self in spite of this vision. Even as Galang's characters speak from specific ethnic positions, their questions of identity, voice, family, career, and love are those over which we all agonize.

These stories take place along boundaries created by age, culture, gender, and geography, where two ways of thinking and living meet and force reconsiderations of assumptions and choices. For example, in "Rose Colored" Rose visits her dancer-cousin in Chicago and confronts her own investment in the middle-class American Dream. "Contravida" and "Our Fathers" explore in simple, sad terms the conflict between generations and, in a childless aunt's touch of her niece's pregnant belly or the sound of a father crying, how love might provide--always at a cost--some form of redress.

Galang's title story recalls Kingston's *The Woman Warrior* by positing self-created fictions as resolutions to questions of identity. In revising her grandmother's cautionary story about her wild aunt Augustina, the narrator remakes her aunt in her own image, empowering herself to define her own relationship to religion and family. In other stories characters struggle with voice. "Talk to Me Milagros," "Miss Teenage Sampaguita," and "Filming Sausage" consider the costs of silence to women living through cultural upheaval, a father's control, and sexual harassment.

Galang requires only this of her readers: that we be interested in sisters, brothers, mothers, fathers, friends, and lovers and what these roles provide. In return she shows us how we might find in art, dance, play, family, friendship, or community that which can save us from our cultural scripts. These are the sources of identity and growth that, while differently understood and expressed by each of us, create and sustain us.
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