

Milton Murayama. *All I Asking For Is My Body*. A Kolowalu Book (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1988 [Originally published by Supa Press, 1975]) 110 pp., \$4.95, paper.

In little over a decade this short novel has become a classic, developing a dedicated following, not only in Asian American communities and literature programs, but also in traditional literature programs alongside books such as *Huckleberry Finn* where the strategies are the same: the view of the world through the clear eye of youth, the puncturing of both pretense and pretension by the view from the bottom up.

I can do no better in this context than to quote Arnold Hiura writing in the *Hawaii Herald*: "We have been denied, up to this work, an idea of what the real, human situation of the plantation has been. . . . we've come up with a kind of generalized myth of what the Japanese-American experience has been . . . [This is] the only comprehensive literary treatment of the Hawaii plantation experience, an experience which either directly or indirectly affects a very large segment of Hawaii's population." It may be worth noting that Hiura, now editor of *Hawaii Herald*, was a participant in the Pacific Northwest Asian American Writers Conference at the University of Washington in 1976 where many of us first discovered Milton Murayama and his work for ourselves.

All I Asking was an exhilarating discovery and remains so upon each return. It is good fun to find it rollicking along its somewhat subversive way under a sedate University Press imprint; it bodes well for both longevity and academic respectability. The sheer exuberance of language: staccato pidgin (or, more properly, Hawaiian English Creole, as Franklin Odo reminds us in his afterword) rhythms alternating with various levels of standard English create a texture that reflects the linguistic ethos in which the characters were living: standard English in school, pidgin English with peers, pidgin and standard Japanese with parents and older community members. Each language context evokes a whole subculture of its own. The genius of the work is in evoking these contexts without either getting bogged down in exposition or lost in indecipherable attempts to render phonologies rather than rhythms.

The novel traces the fate of the Oyama family from turn of the century Hawaii to those fateful days for the Japanese American community just before and after Pearl Harbor. The point of view is that of a rebellious second, nisei, generation. Whether fishing or working the plantations, they are held down by the system; for every step forward there are two back. It is a tale of *bachi*, retribution, and how traditional Japanese concepts of fate and the way humans should respond are worked out. The how is the story, and that is too delectable to reveal here. This is a classic, required reading for those who delight in the storyteller's art as much as those who long for at least a wine taster's sip of the whole wide range of the American ethnic experience.

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