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Upon the Willows and Other Stories

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and, willy-nilly made the Philippines “more militarized as the centuries wore on.” The statement continues to say Hispanic peace in the Philippines was maintained “literally by blood and fire methods because the Filipinos were becoming less and less docile and more and more assertive of their rights.” One would wish specific facts were available to support such a magnanimous conclusion. And, finally, to assert that the

Mexican *situado* to the Philippines contributed to the friars’ despotic authority by keeping them financially well-off, even as the subsidy kept that underhanded galleon trade going, from which the religious orders likewise derived immense monetary benefits

without offering the evidence is to open oneself to the charge that he is writing, not history, but propaganda.

In more than one way, then, this book is a disappointment. In places, the English style hobbles the thought. One hopes that a reedition improve both the content and the style of writing.

Jose S. Arcilla, S.J.

UPON THE WILLOWS AND OTHER STORIES. By Rowena Tiempo Torrevillas. Manila: New Day Publishers, 1980. 192 pages.

Rowena Torrevillas comes upon the Philippine literary scene with impeccable credentials. She is the daughter of Edilberto and Edith Tiempo who have already made their mark on Philippine writing in English. She has a Master’s degree in creative writing from Silliman University and is on her way to a doctorate. She has been a consistent winner in the Palanca Literary Awards, the Philippines’ most prestigious awards for literature. This is her first volume of published fiction, and her first volume of poetry, *East of Summer*, is soon to be published. For a writer still in her twenties, her literary debut is impressive.

Three of the five stories in this collection have won Palanca Awards — “Sunday Morning” in 1978, “Behind the Fern” in 1979, and “Prodigal Season” in 1980. “Sunday Morning” has clear echoes of Walter Van Tilburg Clark’s “The Portable Phonograph” with its post-Armageddon setting and the ritual “Listening” to a carefully preserved recording of the “Messiah.” But Mrs. Torrevillas has tried playing with too many themes and the story does not hang together very tightly. “Behind the Fern” succeeds much better for the author has focused on one character, and is obviously much more at home with the simpler structure. “The Fruit of the Vine” plays with a familiar Filipino theme — the conflict of country and city, of the soil and of increasing urbanization, and the clash of values that follows upon that conflict.

The theme is cleverly underlined by the use of the blind girl (Heraklia!) to emphasize the predicament of those who "cannot see." "Prodigal Season" continues the same theme and emphasizes the contrast of old and new, soil and city, by translating the central character from one culture to the other and watching his reactions to the turmoil of change as a Filipino in exile from both country and culture. The final and longest story in the collection, "Upon the Willows," is once again the familiar theme of the Filipino exile from his own country, reminiscent of Gilda Cordero Fernando's "A Love Story" and "Sunburn," with the gentle perception of Bienvenido Santos' "Scent of Apples." In all five of the stories in the collection, it is clear that Mrs. Torrevillas is firmly rooted in the tradition of Philippine writing in English. She has done her homework; she has read widely. But in each story she has managed to add her own peculiar touch.

Mrs. Torrevillas is a remarkable craftsman and her command of the English language is beyond reproach. These are both remarkable achievements, especially in view of the fact that they are so often lacking in contemporary Filipino writing in English. Her best quality is her gentle hand and the skillful understatement with which she writes — again a quality that is often lacking in much of contemporary Filipino writing. Her style is often lyric and betrays the poet in her; some would call her style "feminine." Descriptions are therefore her strong suit, and her characters are sometimes flat and "bookish." Only Christina in the final story really comes alive and that is perhaps due to the fact that there is a good deal of the author herself in the character.

If there is a criticism to be made of Mrs. Torrevilla's stories, it is that her stories are not really Filipino. (One might argue whether that is really a criticism.) Alfredo Salanga says that her stories "do not yet articulate a full Filipino consciousness. Her characters are Filipino, but unfortunately limited to a minority — the Western-educated middle class that reads Hemingway, listens to Bach and dreams of the Little Mermaid in Copenhagen." But perhaps the Filipino consciousness, at least in so far as it is reflected in Filipino writers in English, is one of exile and alienation. One cannot deny that Mrs. Torrevillas has most competently pictured the world — Filipino or whatever — which she has seen and experienced. For a young writer that is very high praise indeed.

Joseph A. Galdon, S.J.

THE PHOTOGRAPHS AND OTHER STORIES. By Geraldine Maayo. Quezon City: New Day Publishers, 1981. 98 pages. ₱10.

Franz Arcellana, in the Introduction to this little collection of short stories, calls all of them photographs, "as much portraits of their subjects as they are