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The Photographs and Other Stories

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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

portraits of the photographer." If so, they are photographs from a college album, for Geraldine Maayo writes about college life or about young working girls whose lives are still bound by the memories and dreams of college. Both "Breakdown" and "Sea-Blue" have their setting in what is clearly enough the campus of the University of the Philippines. Most of the other stories are set in the context of the business world — mostly research projects and government agencies whose young workers are still college girls at heart, not yet grown up, pursuing husbands and degrees in Environmental Planning or Literature, or wandering aimlessly in search of something they can not yet define.

The stories often read like a self-conscious college diary as well. They are sprinkled with references to singing groups once popular on the college scene — The Bee Gees, The Association, Simon and Garfunkel, Chad and Jeremy (p. 17), Kenny Rankin, Michael Parks, Earl Klugh and Deodato (p. 24), Joan Baez (p. 91), The Jazz Friends and God's Ego (p. 74), Cat Stevens, James Taylor, John Denver and Rod McKuen (*sic*, p. 75). The college movies and movie directors are there as well — Bergman, Truffaut, Scorsese, Coppola (p. 61) and "A Certain Smile" (p. 95). There are also the Pied Pipers of the AB lit major — John Fowles, Murdoch, Colette, John Briane (p. 87), as well as Dostoevski, Byron, Apollinaire, Rilke and Agee (p. 90). There is often a post-adolescent preoccupation with sex: "Shall I go to bed with him?" (p. 16), which leads inevitably to: "Not that it was the first time. After all, I was twenty-eight" (p. 61), and a nervous worry about men who turn out to be homosexuals (p. 20). Miss Maayo's characters are often college girls trying too hard to grow up. The majority of the stories read like the kind of feminine gossip that goes on in university campuses, trivial in its details but shattering and often tragic in its implications.

Almost all Maayo's characters are women (she seems most at home with female characters) and almost all her heroines are abnormal in greater or less degree: Patty in "Breakdown," the mother in "A Patch of Gray," Ethel in "The Arrangement" and Therese in a "A Weaver of Tales." One looks in vain for a healthy girl or a happy marriage. But Miss Maayo has a sharp eye and her descriptions of all these characters are particularly deft, especially her catalog of college types in "Sea-Blue." She uses a clever flashback technique in several of the stories and her experiment with a revolving point of view in "The Arrangement" works well. Several of the stories, however, are spoiled by digressions that detract from the main movement of the story (e.g., the paralytic girl in "The House of Mirrors"), or by too obvious analysis and moralizing, and by trite comments (e.g., "She was in love with love" [p. 17]). Her sentences sometimes wander aimlessly around commas without coming to an end, e.g., "For some reason, her mysterious silence, her aloneness which struck me as being authentic, quite genuine, and not a pose, not at all like the 'aloneness' certain people love to affect, to project noisily, proclaiming to the world that certain uniqueness about them, an aura of mysticism, because

there are simply no other way, they had found out, that they could attract other people to them" (p. 31).

Perhaps the most representative of the stories is "The House of Mirrors." It is a story of a one-week stay in Maasin, Leyte. It tells of a boy who plays "Misty" on a piano in an old house of mirrors and photographs, and of a romantic girl who lives in a world of dreams. She asks the boy to play "Misty" for her on the piano every night when she is gone, and remembers for years afterward the house full of mirrors, the night on the beach, and a boy taking up medicine who played the piano. The girl is trapped in all her romantic daydreams and memories.

The exception to the pattern of college stories is the title story, "The Photographs," which won the *Focus Fiction Award* in 1977. It is a story of a failed Filipino who has gone abroad to apparent success and returns home to failure and despair — ". . . he was my uncle — a man we never knew and never loved but who belonged to us by blood ties. And as I gazed at the remains of the man, I wondered how a life come down to this?" (p. 15) But the central character is not very real and it is the reaction of the relatives that one remembers in the story rather than the tragedy of the hero.

Miss Maayo writes well. Her language is competent and her technique is often quite good. She is particularly good in the moments when she captures a character in a neat phrase or a striking detail. She has an ear for dialogue and a good insight into the way a woman's mind works. But her stories are still the stories of a college girl, not those of a woman. Perhaps that is due to the fact that these stories have been collected over fifteen years and often represented the young writer rather than the mature woman. One might wonder what her obvious talents could accomplish with a theme of greater moment and maturity.

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CATHOLIC POLITICS IN CHINA AND KOREA. [American Society of Missiology Series I No. 2]. By Eric O. Hanson. Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1980. xvi + 144 pages. \$9.95.

(George Dunne, the reviewer of this book, is the author of *Generation of Giants*, the lively and controversial history of the Jesuit effort begun by Fr. Matteo Ricci, and carried on by Frs. Adam Schall and Ferdinand Verbiest to inculcate Christianity in seventeenth-century China. Hanson's book and Dunne's review deal with the Chinese Rites controversy concerning the Jesuit methods. Hanson's thesis (it appears) is that the Chinese have *always* tried to penetrate and subject any other religion to their culture, not just the Chinese Communists. Dunne's own position is that Christianity could have succeeded in China were it not for the European-