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Scent of Apples

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tain information on the source of publication. The literary historian may use such data in tracing the growth of Corazon de Jesus' poetic genius. On the other hand, teachers of literature will find *Halimuyak* a treasury of poems that illustrate the assertion of traditions, both formal and thematic, in Tagalog poetry. *Halimuyak* becomes an invaluable aid to a study of Corazon de Jesus, which to a scholar or teacher could be a tremendous labor of love.

Books on Corazon de Jesus' poetry that are to follow should contain what both Gener and Valeriano missed: a critical introduction to the poems that make up the anthology.

Buenaventura S. Medina, Jr.

SCENT OF APPLES. By Bienvenido N. Santos. Seattle and London: University of Washington Press, 1979 xxi + 178 pages.

Filipino writers in English have been enjoying a renaissance of sorts in recent years, both here and abroad. The University of Queensland Press has reprinted the stories of Nick Joaquin and Antonio Enriquez, and Heinemann in Hongkong has published Edith Tiempo's *A Blade of Fern*. New Day has published Sionil Jose, Edith Tiempo, Linda Ty Casper; Alemars has reprinted Javellana, and National Book Store has reprinted a number of Philippine writers in English (Joaquin, Mig Alvarez Enriquez and Bulosan). The University of Washington Press has published Bulosan, and has now given us the collected short stories of Bienvenido Santos.

Santos' first published work was a collection of short stories, *You Lovely People*, published in Manila in 1955, which dealt with the lives of Filipinos in the United States, "adrift in a world that can never quite feel like home." A second collection of short stories, *Brother, My Brother*, was published in 1960. Leonard Casper describes the stories in this collection as "recollective of an original flight from the Sulucan slum of Manila to the greater opportunities in the less crowded prewar barrios of Albay under the shadow of Mount Mayon." (p. xii) Santos' two major works, both novels, were published in 1965, the same year that he received the Republic Cultural Heritage Award in Literature. *Villa Magdalena* is the first and better of the two novels and echoes the theme of search for roots evidenced in *Brother, My Brother*. Critics have been impressed with *Villa Magdalena* [see Soledad Reyes in *Essays on the Philippine Novel in English*, edited by Joseph A. Galdon, S. J. (Manila: Ateneo de Manila University Press, 1979)], though it is clear to me that Santos is not fully at home in the novel. *The Volcano* is even more contrived than *Villa Magdalena*. Both novels are top heavy with labored symbolism and Santos is not always in control of language and idiom, particularly in *The Volcano*. Santos is much more subtle and his touch is surer in the narrow confines of the short story, particularly in *You Lovely People*. *The Day the Dan-*

cers Came, Santos' third collection of short stories (1967), returns to the themes of *You Lovely People*. A third novel, *The Praying Man*, was serialized in *Solidarity* (May 1971 – February 1972) and is a return to the Sulucan themes of *Brother, My Brother*. The novel was scheduled for publication in December 1972, but became, as Santos puts it, "a casualty of Martial Law; it was disapproved for publication." (p. xix) Santos has published one volume of poetry, *The Wounded Stag*, but it is clear that he is even less at the home in poetry than in his first three novels. Santos has an unpublished novel, *The Man Who (Thought He) Looked Like Robert Taylor*, and he has been (since 1972) working on a novel of the new Filipino exiles in the United States after Martial Law, entitled *What The Hell For You Left Your Heart in San Francisco?* One can speculate that this latest novel, if ever finished, will complete the cycle of the Filipino exile in the United States, begun with *You Lovely People* and *The Day the Dancers Came*.

Scent of Apples collects sixteen short stories of Santos, four from *The Day the Dancers Came* ("The Day the Dancers Came," "The Contender," "Quicker With Arrows," and "Footnote To A Laundry List"), eleven from *You Lovely People* (nine stories that might be called the Ambo Group, for they center on the old timer, Ambo, and form a kind of loosely strung novelette, "Scent of Apples," and "And Beyond, More Walls"), and one late story, "Immigration Blues," (1977) which did not appear in either *You Lovely People* or *The Day The Dancers Came*.

In the Introduction to the present volume, Leonard Casper, longtime observer and critic of Philippine writing in English, enumerates the three themes of Santos' short stories in *Scent of Apples*. The first is the theme of exile and homelessness. The obvious exile is that of separation from country and from home. The old timers "suffer from three kinds of distance at once: distance between themselves and their homeland; between themselves and their children who have known only America; and between themselves and recent arrivals whose Philippines, in some ways is very different from their own." (p. xiv) But there is also a "new loneliness" – "the fear of no longer belonging to a culture which itself seems at times to be wasting away." (p. xv) This theme of double alienation finds expression in "Immigration Blues," the Ambo Group and "The Day the Dancers Came." Santos writes rather movingly of this alienation, for as he chronicles in his Preface and as he autobiographically says in *The Day The Dancers Came*, "I, too, have been an exile." (p. 162)

The second theme is the Theme of the Lost Dream.

As penetrating as the scent of autumn apples is this single, persistent dream: the return of the Philippines to the man, whether or not a return to the Philippines is ever managed. Through dreams one presumes to distinguish the momentary from the momentous. For Santos, that ideal has too often been realized to be marked as imaginary. (p. xvi)

Casper wrote of this theme in a somewhat more negative way in his introduction to *Brother, My Brother*. (p. viii) "In *You Lovely People* Santos commemorated those Pinoys, who with their American wives, confined in run-down neighborhoods as if in crypts, constructed an elaborate Filipino dream which was shattered when they returned to post-war, mutilated Manila . . . (that) immigration in reverse. . . from that horizon of hope which was a mirage." Three of the present stories are examples of the theme of the Lost Dream. "Letter: the Faraway Summer," "Quicker With Arrows," and "Footnote to a Laundry List," show the shallowness and selfishness of Filipinos, both in exile and at home, ironically the same people called "you lovely people" by unknowing Americans. Santos, however, has not been afraid to speak the truth. "The wonder is that, under all this cultural stress. . . so very many Pinoys managed to remain 'lovely people'." (p. xi)

The third theme, which Casper mentions only in passing, is the theme of the Filipina. He quotes N. V. M. Gonzalez, who wrote that this theme provides *You Lovely People* with

. . . a heroine, the Filipino woman. Obviously she is what no woman in the flesh can ever be; still, the hurt men are as if possessed. I suspect it is the private vision of her which made them different, handsome in their awkward way, and which guaranteed survival of some kind. (p. x)

The best and most poignant expression of this theme is found in "Scent of Apples."

Weaving these three themes together in this collection of Santos's short stories is a remarkable sense of compassion for the "hurt men" who are Filipinos in exile. Fr. Bernad describes the prose of *You Lovely People* as "emotionally weighted," [*Philippine Fiction*, ed. Joseph A. Galdon, S. J. (Manila: Ateneo de Manila University Press), p. 102] and Casper, in describing the theme of "humble commemoration and charity," commented that the "elements essential to charity are apparent, the merely pathetic is transcended," (*Brother, My Brother*, p. x) This compassion is less evident in Santos' novels where it is sharper and more bitter, but it is a gentle presence whenever Santos writes of the Filipinos in exile.

As the years pass by, in the hour of our young manhood, we become nothing but a name mentioned now and then, casually, and always, without love; a blurred face in a picture fast yellowing with the years; then completely unrecognizable in some family album, or on the wall among a hundred other faces. Or if someone remembered still, those whom we knew, those with whom we were young, would say, yes, yes, he left for the States many years ago. Maybe he's dead now, or maybe he's still around, standing in some shady corner of a despised city. Then everybody would be talking for a while, giving many reasons why he left. (pp. 82-83)

It is this compassion that adds an aura of quiet and painful dignity to Santos'

best stories, and captures in devastatingly simple prose part of the heart of the Filipino.

Every reader has a favorite story and mine would have to be "Scent of Apples." This one story, long enshrined among the better Filipino stories in English, expresses all three themes — the theme of exile and loneliness, the frustrations of the lost dreams, and the gentle, pervasive presence of the Filipino woman. And it is here, in "Scent of Apples," that Santos' gentle compassion is most touching.

Scent of Apples is a rather remarkable collection of twenty-five years of the best writing of Bienvenido Santos. It is ironic (perhaps tragic?) that his best writing is as an exile and about exiles.

All exiles want to go home. Many of the old Filipinos in the United States, as in these stories, never return, but in their imagination they make the journey a thousand times. . . . Some fool themselves into thinking that theirs is a voluntary exile, but it is not. The ones who stay here to die know this best. Their last thoughts are of childhood friends, of parents long dead, old loves, of familiar songs and dances, odors of home like sweat and sun on brown skin or scent of calamondin fruit and fresh papaya blossoms. (pp xx-xxi)

The tragedy of Santos' characters in many of these short stories is that they must remember papaya blossoms in a land of apples.

Joseph A. Galdon, S. J.