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Requiem for an Older Timer: Bienvenido Santos's The Man Who (Thought He) Looked Like Robert Taylor

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Notes and Comments

Requiem for an Old Timer: Bienvenido Santos's *The Man Who (Thought He) Looked Like Robert Taylor*

J A I M E A N L I M

These Filipinos are in America in large numbers. . . . They had heard of the good life in the United States: the dazzling cities, the good schools, the plentiful jobs, the fabulous salaries, the intoxicating night-life. They heard of these things from their friends and relatives in the States, or they saw them in the magazines and motion pictures. They contrasted these things with the drabness of their farms or their wretched dwellings in the towns. They went to the United States with little money in their pockets and a boatload of hope in their hearts.

—Miguel A. Bernad
Bamboo and the Greenwood Tree

For every Filipino abroad who decides to return to his native soil, there is at least one other Filipino who chooses to remain a perpetual exile. Bienvenido N. Santos, who has written extensively about the Filipino expatriate in America, particularly in his short fiction collections *You Lovely People* (1955), *The Day the Dancers Came* (1967), and *Scent of Apples* (1979), returns to familiar territory in his novel *The Man Who (Thought He) Looked Like Robert Taylor* (1983).¹ Here, the dramatis personae answer to different names and have different distinguishing marks, but they are the typical Santos characters. Solomon King, the novel's protagonist, can be seen as an elaboration and a composite of earlier characters, most notably Fil and Tony in "The Day the Dancers Came" and Bernie in "The Contender." But if the novel's range is

1. Bienvenido N. Santos, *The Man Who (Thought He) Looked Like Robert Taylor* (Quezon City: New Day, 1983). All quotations are from this edition.

limited, its treatment of the theme of the exile's quest for his dream achieves a new depth and complexity.

THE STORY LINE

The novel covers the last few months in the life of a retired butcher, Solomon King (Sol for short) from June 1969 to the first months of 1970. The flashbacks and reminiscences, however, which make up a good half of the novel range from the 1930s onwards. This means that remembered incidents go back to the last decades of American rule in the Philippines (1930) and onward to the first decades of the independence period (1970). The exterior action itself is spare, ordinary, even uneventful—a day in the stockyard, a visit to the doctor, a chance meeting with a stranger in a bus depot, a visit with old friends. From this unpromising sequence of events, Santos weaves an elegiac tale of unrealized dreams, betrayed loves, and wasted time, made more moving by its singular lack of self-pity and sentimentality. An air of sadness, of wistful loss, does pervade the narrative; its pall is kept at bay only by an indefatigable sense of humor that bolsters the protagonist's outlook on life.

The opening section is brief, seemingly inconsequential snippet of conversation on the phone, probably overheard, of somebody asking a member of the consulate staff for the time in the Philippines. (The structural function of this and similar free-standing materials interspersed between chapters or narrative sections will be discussed later.) The exterior action commences with Sol coming across the news of Robert Taylor's death from lung cancer. To Sol, the actor is more than just an impersonal figure from the entertainment world. Robert Taylor is his own secret double, his spiritual twin. They share not only similar physical attributes, but also similar joys and vicissitudes in life. As Sol says in a letter to the actor, their lives are linked by an unbreakable bond. The actor's death, therefore, is a very personal loss for Sol, for it signals his own imminent demise. Lately, his body has been sending urgent messages which he has been loath to acknowledge: the knocking in his body, the throbbing pain in his head and chest, the aches in all his joints. Now Bob is gone and Sol knows that he will follow soon. He knows it in his bones, as one privileged to decipher the inscrutable handwriting of fate. The late summer edges into fall and then winter, a particularly harsh one that year. It is Sol's final winter; he will not live to see another spring.

The consciousness of time running out lends an urgency and pathos to Sol's remaining days. All his life, he has roamed the vast continent of America in search of work, home, love, a sense of belonging. He

is a part of the first adventurous wave of Filipino immigrants who sailed across the Pacific to pursue the Filipino Dream in the plantations, canneries, and cities of the mother country. He has tried his hand at every menial job—janitor, construction worker, stevedore, unskilled laborer, mortician's assistant. He has been to the big cities—New York, San Francisco, Washington, D.C.—as well as to the small towns, places which are no more than pencil dots on the sprawling map of America. He is still a bachelor—an aging bachelor—a fate not too uncommon for many of the Filipino immigrants who came to America during the first decades of the century.

But the years have not been terribly unkind. Chicago is now his second Sulucan. He has found a basement apartment on Honore Street in the Polish neighborhood which he now calls home. He holds a responsible job as a supervisor of operations in a stockyard. He has risen to this position, rung by rung, through hard work and determination, which in itself is a personal triumph. Justly, he is proud of what he has accomplished, a retired butcher with decent savings stashed away in the bank. Now sixty-two years old, Solomon King, who is ironically neither very wise nor kingly, suddenly realizes that he has not really had the time to do the things that he always wanted to do or visit the places he always wanted to see. All his past vacations have been only imagined in his mind. Will there be time enough to make real those imagined holidays at Lake Tahoe and Lake Okoboji, those invented camping trips to the Black Hills or Yosemite Park? Will there be time not only for the vastness of America, but also for the rest of the world—Greece, India, France, Indonesia, Switzerland?

During the long lean years, Sol has assiduously practised the virtues of frugality and industry as strategies for survival and self-preservation. The lessons first learned the hard way in Sulucan have proved equally necessary in the asphalt jungle of the American metropolis where the laws of survival, if more civilized, are no less ruthless. Now that he has a solid roof over his head and money in his pocket, he realizes that he no longer has what he used to possess in such distressing abundances—time. And time, he discovers too late, can neither be bought nor earned.

Where have all the years gone? The wistful evocation of *ubi sunt* is faintly sounded throughout the narrative, like muted reverberations in a room that is almost empty.

Just as the newspaper attempts to summarize the life of Robert Taylor, the novel tries to distil the essence of the life of Solomon King, from his boyhood in Sulucan to his early years in Chicago, from the pre- to the postwar periods in San Francisco and Washington, D.C. The narrative, however, does not aim at completeness but rather an

impressionistic summation. Over the spare linear action of the present are overlaid, elliptically and contrapuntally, shifting layers of the past. The effect, therefore, is not unlike that produced by certain modernist techniques.

MODERNIST TECHNIQUES IN THE NOVEL

In *Mimesis* (1946), Erich Auerbach identifies several distinctive characteristics of the realistic novel of the first half of the twentieth century: "multipersonal representation of consciousness, time strata, disintegration of the continuity of exterior events, shifting of the narrative viewpoint"² Auerbach pursues these observations, particularly in Virginia Woolf's *To the Lighthouse* (1927) and Marcel Proust's *Remembrances of Things Past* (1918-27), where exterior occurrences, relatively insignificant, release chains of ideas, memories, and associations that range freely from present to past to future to present, not necessarily in any predictable order. The same effects, if not the same means, are approximated in Santos's novel. For instance, the newspaper item on Robert Taylor's death, while certainly not as humdrum as the measuring of the brown stocking in Woolf or the *petite madeleine* dipped in tea in Proust, nonetheless functions in the same way. It is the decisive element that triggers a sequence of events, discrete episodes, reflections, and memories that embody the breadth and depth of a lifetime. The structure of the novel, however, does not have the freedom and the fluidity of the stream-of-consciousness technique. In the course of the novel, the cyclical movement in the substructures of the italicized excursions and the narrative proper becomes not only evident but even predictable. The impression of haphazardness is more a function of the nature of the subthemes and the specific forms of the excursions which are, variously, a snippet of conversation, an exposition on a native burial custom, a children's game, a riddle, a humorous limerick, a philosophical meditation. Because the registering consciousness is not always specified, these excursions give the effect of disjunction and dislocation in point of view as much as in substance, tone, language, and format. Their source can be anybody—the protagonist, the author, other old-timers. But far from being simply disgressive, enigmatic or entertaining, these excursions actually present the initial statement of a subtheme which the subsequent section or chapter then takes up, modifies, elaborates, or expands. In this

2. Erich Auerbach, *Mimesis*, trans. Willard R. Trask (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University, 1953), pp. 432-83.

sense, the arrangement follows the initial half of the sonata form with its introduction of a theme in the first section and its subsequent fuller development in the next.

Thus, the opening query on time in the Philippines leads to Sol's meditation on the shortness of time, its steady plunder of the human body and mind. The bilingual limerick on stone, ship, and love introduces the ill-fated love relationship between Sol and Morningstar. The conversation on Philippine superstitions reiterates the significance of Sol's dreams about his visiting dead relatives.

The excursuses not only present the subthemes, but also provide a tonal contrast to the subsequent sections of the narrative proper. As pointed out earlier, the idea of an old, lonely, and sickly man racing against time is hardly the most cheerful subject for a novel. It tends to be gloomy and, worse, is especially susceptible to sentimental manipulation. Santos partly forestalls this danger by juxtaposing these dark sections with the relatively light-hearted, irreverent, and colorful conversations of Pinoys on sundry matters found in the excursuses. The language in the narrative proper displays linguistic mannerisms, in diction and syntax, which may be considered peculiarly Filipino. But these peculiarities (including the use of slang, misspellings, mispronunciations) become even more pronounced in the conversational exchanges in the excursuses. The resulting material, therefore, is rich in expressiveness and humor. Playfulness, in this case, has become an effective antidote to pompous solemnity. The excursuses also serve to broaden the relevance of Sol's problems as a bachelor old-timer, even as the narrative proper individualizes those conditions.

The alternation of excursuses and narrative sections objectify, structurally, the several important circular movements and themes developed in the novel—between home and alien land, between the vicarious and the actual, between the present and the past, between illusion and reality. The final excursus, which is also the most explicit and the most complete statement of the novel's theme, defines this circularity.

You leave home and country, seek sanctuary in an alien land, refuge in another idiom, but you remain on the outside, you are neither called nor chosen; and you keep running, stumbling along the road over a snag of rocks, a net of thread at the feet, a clouding over in the mind, but it is only the surging forward that is momentarily checked, the motion continues, circular into nowhere; backward to what had been the native land, its warmth, its horrid climate, the farce of its form of government, the kindness of the poor, their hunger, their sentimentality; and forward again into a glut of strangeness that never becomes familiar . . . (p. 152)

This circularity, with its compulsive wide-ranging journey through time and space, its free-flowing unpredictability, renders more aptly the elusive movement of memory which comprises the greater bulk of the novel. Seen in this context, the complex, nonlinear structure is in fact fundamentally appropriate, contrary to what one reviewer has claimed as the novel's essential weakness.³ Moreover, the structure makes an obvious reference to the cinematic cut-and-intercut technique, the quick succession of disparate images, which the structure reflects, in keeping with the central cinematic reference of the novel's theme. The general movement in the novel is less narrative, in the sense of several interconnecting episodes moving logically and casually from point to point, than cinematic, a sequence of images of varying durations and intensities succeeding one another almost impressionistically.

The Filipino old-timers in America have come about as a historical consequence of economic conditions existing in the United States and the Philippines at specific periods of their political relationship. More particularly, it was the need for cheap labor in America's plantations, orchards, and canneries that set off the initial wave of Filipino immigration to Hawaii and the mainland. It was the same reason that first brought the blacks into America—economic expediency. (It is interesting that no comparable phenomenon, i.e., the presence of a large population of Filipino immigrants, exists in Spain.)

In a complex network of mutual support, relatives petition relatives, U.S. residents encourage close friends, loved ones, and professional associates to try their own luck and pursue their own dreams in the land of milk and honey. Despite intermittent outbursts of anti-Americanism and nationalist demonstrations against the evils of American imperialism and capitalism, most ordinary Filipinos still harbor a desire to set foot on American shores, not just as a tourist or student, although that seems to be the most feasible recourse for the majority, but eventually as a permanent resident if not a U.S. citizen. As one American observer notes about the Philippines, "This is a country where the national ambition is to change your nationality."⁴

3. In her review Rimonte says: "As a novel, the book is not structurally satisfying. These are excursions into the lives of other men—whole stories in themselves—for which we are not prepared. Sometimes, Santos even speaks in his own idiom not Sol King's. And what does one make out of the vignettes or snapshots of Philippine life and customs that precede each chapter. These are not worked into the structure nor the texture" (p. 43). Nilda Rimonte. Review of *The Man Who (Thought He) Looked Liked Robert Taylor*, by Bienvenido N. Santos. *Pilipinas* 3, no. 2 (December 1982): 42-44.

4. James Fallows, "A Damaged Culture," *Atlantic Monthly* (November 1987): 49-58.

SOLOMON'S DREAM

The foremost motivation on both sides, for the immigrant and the land of immigration, was initially economic. However, for Solomon King, the reasons (what sociologists term the "push" and the "pull" factors) that led to his leaving the Philippines and then staying on in the States are more than simply economic. True enough, there is poverty in Sulucan. He remembers times of deprivation, when even celebrating a birthday was a luxury his family could ill afford. For this reason he develops a fierce resistance to poverty and an equally fierce determination to overcome it. When he achieves financial independence, there is no more reason to stay. But, in the meantime, his roots in the old country have gradually disintegrated. With both parents dead (tellingly, his father died in the American-owned pineapple plantations in distant Mindanao, while his mother died from the fasting rigors of the Spanish-established Catholic church), he has neither family nor home in the Philippines. There used to be a girl (a first love?) named Luz, but she, too, like the faded photographs which are Sol's only remaining link to the past and the old country, has succumbed to time. If there is nothing to go back to in the remembered country, there is everything to stay on for in the adopted land. For Sol's immigration to America is essentially the pursuit of a Filipino Dream.

The seduction of that dream was cast upon the impressionable younger Solomon King in the classrooms and moviehouses of his hometown, two institutions whose power to expand the mind's horizon has already been suggested by Rizal and Laya. Ibarra's projected gift for San Diego, after all, is a new school building, and Martin's idea of bringing culture to Flores, Pangasinan, is by lending out books and showing movies. It is with the image of America projected through its literature and movies that Sol is infatuated. Miss O'Malley, as well as the other American teachers, has opened Sol's eyes to the beauty of American poetry. This teacher-pupil relationship exemplifies the more benevolent colonial apprenticeship which the colonized invariably undertakes in one form or another under the colonizer's guidance.

Literature, however, even the most politically indifferent, is rarely value-free. While Miss O'Malley sings, innocently, of "the forest primeval" or "the universe of sky and snow," Sol in the simplicity of his young mind is already beginning to erect a construct of artistic ideals and literary geniuses whose names are Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, Edgar Allan Poe, William Cullen Bryant, and John Greenleaf Whittier. Hierarchies, of course, imply a gradation of qualities and achievement, in short, of values. To Sol, the American poet is at the top and the English language is the most beautiful of all. No Filipino

poet is mentioned, and the only Philippine materials in the novel that come closest to poetry in form and imagery are anonymous riddles, limericks, and folk sayings. These are recounted with relish and good humor. But awe and reverence are attitudes properly reserved only for American poetry which, to the naive young man, has the power to open the windows of the world and the imagination. As he achingly puts it: "I thought that as soon as I touched American soil, all I had to do was mention 'Evangeline,' 'Hiawatha,' 'The Raven,' 'Annabel Lee,' 'The Death of the Flowers,' 'Rhodora,' and every door would be open to me" (p. 53). Even the American places that he longs most to see have been inspired by literature—the Monongahela, and the Shadow Mountains.

In Santos, the process of cultural and political supplantation is more or less complete. The children's song about a kid sent out by his parents to buy a *camiseta* and *quezo* but who buys chewing gum instead implies the Filipino preference for all things American. In Rizal's time, the idea of life as a dream might have been interpreted as a reference to Calderon, but to Sol, it can only refer to Longfellow. The poetry that he has been exposed to is nineteenth-century American poetry. His image of America, therefore, partakes of the idealizing tendency of that bygone age. One of his biggest disappointments in America is his discovery that most Americans do not use the language of the poetry that he has come to love. Worse, most of them do not know the poets, much less their poems. "Had he been duped?" (p. 4). Sol's sense of alienation is twofold, and requires a readjustment both in his conception of the real and the literary America. The process would not have been difficult except that Sol's temperament itself is more suited to the nineteenth rather than the twentieth century. Instead of a romantic Arcadia, Sol encounters the raucous industrial reality of Sandburg's Chicago, a city "alive and coarse and strong and cunning." The sense of betrayal is as much a consequence of Sol's naivete and his failure to see literature as a reflection of its times, as his unwillingness to surrender the enchanted image of America, less reconstructed than invented, from his classroom readings.

Paradise, of course, is the archetypal place of happiness, which we lost and still hope to regain. It has been called by countless other names, depending upon one's political and philosophical orientation: Eden, Nirvana, Shangri-la, Utopia, Arcadia. For those in the industrialized West, paradise is sometimes imagined to be located at the periphery of civilization where a state of innocence, noble savagery, and unspoiled nature, still exists. If the Westerner trains his eyes outward in locating his notion of the fabulous country, the islander does the reverse. He looks toward the West. For him, as it is for Solomon

King, paradise is the vast industrialized continent called America. It is only by knowing what America stands for in the heart and imagination of Sol that we really understand the extent of the irony of this lonely old man wandering aimlessly through the cold wintry streets of Chicago, the heartland of his imagined paradise, in search of human warmth.

THE HOLLYWOOD THEME

What literature has kindled, the movies have intensified. It is fitting that the central organizing metaphor for the novel has its source in Hollywood, that huge tireless factory of technicolored dreams, that purveyor of images that are larger than life. *The Man Who (Thought He) Looked Like Robert Taylor* makes an obvious reference to the story of Jose Garcia Villa found in his *Footnote to Youth* (1933). In Villa's story, "The Man Who Looked Like Rizal," an insignificant carpenter, a weakling whose wife has left him and their children, attempts to live up to the greatness and nobility of the hero, whom he resembles, by forgiving the man who has taken his wife away from him. An outside symbol, Rizal, is used by the main character to save himself, psychologically, from insignificance, a painful memory, or a harsh reality. In the Santos novel, Solomon King, by identifying himself with the famous Hollywood actor Robert Taylor, hopes to subvert his marginality and insignificance. Repeatedly, he underscores their deep-fated kinship. They resemble each other, they both have had unhappy tumultuous love histories, they are involved with women named Barbara and Ursula. However, the physical resemblance is only entertained by Sol himself. The other characters in the novel comment on his good looks, even suggest his becoming an actor. But no one, interestingly enough, makes an explicit observation linking the two. The book's title itself, by including a parenthetical qualification, calls into question the literal truth of the assertion. This simple syntactic arrangement again plays on the notion of what is real and what is only illusion, the Hollywood theme which, is one of the novel's subthemes.

At what point does self-understanding become merely self-delusion? When is hope an expression of a possibility? When is it a mirage, a psychosis, an inability to accept the boundaries of the real? Blanche Hardman, the young woman with the baby whom Sol takes home from the bus depot, makes a devastating comment. She says: "You're not Mex. I thought not. But you talk like one. You look like one I could've sworn." And Sol, with great weariness, finally replies: "I don't look like nobody" (p. 140). This is his final coming to terms with the marginality of his life and identity as a Filipino immigrant in

America. He is a nobody. As long as he can believe in his resemblance to Robert Taylor, he can pretend that his life holds beauty, meaning, glamor, infinite possibilities. His deep need to identify with the matinee idol of the thirties and forties can be seen as a desperate attempt to compensate for the drabness of his world. For all his dapper self, his thick black hair parted in the middle, his beautiful hands, his handsome profile, the resemblance is no more than a carefully cultivated illusion. A fake, like the roses, Baguio lilies, and grapes that he and other old-timers are fond of decorating their apartments with. They look real but they are only plastic.

Sol gets to know Robert Taylor through his movies, and it is through his various roles that Sol remembers the actor best, or thinks of him most fondly—as a reformed playboy in *Magnificent Obsession* (1935), as Armand Duval to Greta Garbo's Marguerite Gautier, the star-crossed lovers in *Camille* (1937), as a cocky American athlete in *A Yank at Oxford* (1938), as a tough gangster in *Johnny Eager* (1942). But whether playing an outlaw or a U.S. marshal, a crooked lawyer or an ethical businessman, a Roman officer or a medieval knight, a Navy lieutenant, an Army sergeant, or an Air Force captain, Robert Taylor somehow managed to minimize the handicap of his extreme good looks by playing up his more rugged or even belligerent manliness. As a film reviewer says of his performance in *A Yank at Oxford*: "Robert is beautiful, all right, but he's top man in the virility club, also." To what extent is our perception of the actor an accurate reflection of the man? Is not acting, by definition, mere make-believe?

In his letter to the cancer-ridden actor, Sol makes a point of emphasizing that his is no ordinary fan mail, that it comes from "a manly man like you" (p. 5). He goes on to say: "Bob, there are not too many men left in America, in the whole world, I daresay, and it goes without saying that you are such a man, a beautiful manly man" (p. 5). The idea of manliness, of masculinity, comes up several times in the novel. Robert Taylor, the Ambassador of Romance and the King of Hollywood during his heyday, is, of course, Sol's idea of a real man, the epitome of a "manly man." Sol himself prides himself on his own masculinity. He prefers raincoats to umbrellas because umbrellas, according to him, are only for sissies. Despite his desperate need for employment during his early days in Chicago, he quit his job as assistant mortician simply because the owner, Mr. Swingle, a dark man with tousled graying hair and a peaked nose, had held "Sol's shoulders with a passionate grip that sickened him" (p. 24). Sol has always considered himself something of an old lecher himself, with his ability to attract women and perform tirelessly in bed, presumably like the actor. Yet biographies of Robert Taylor reveal the reverse

about the actor. They show a nice but weak-willed and submissive man whose first marriage to Barbara Stanwyck was basically engineered by MGM, a man whose sex life was clouded over with rampant allegations of homosexuality, a man whose later rugged image as a man's man, was the product of an expensive studio campaign to alter his Pretty Boy reputation.

Just as he is seduced by the literary vision of a romanticized America, Sol is taken in by the glamorized cinematic image of the dashing hero. In a sense then, he has been twice deceived. But, on the other hand, perhaps Sol has survived precisely because illusions and dreams have sustained him in his life of drudgery and self-imposed denials. If that is the case, then his escapist strategies are less a criticism of the individual than that of the environment that makes that action necessary.

The Filipino as rainbow-chasing, dream-making pilgrim in America characterizes not only Solomon King. There are many others like him in the novel. In this sense, the book is as much about Sol in particular, as it is about the Filipino old-timer in general. There is Artemio Banda of Rosario, La Union, who moves from college to college and stays only long enough to buy and send home the school pennants and stationery that mark his education's dubious progress. There is Alipio Palma of San Francisco, originally of the Ilocos, an aging widower who gallantly saves an overstaying tourist, Monica, from impending deportation by marrying her. There is J.P. (Jaime Pardo), also of San Francisco, divorced from his American wife Flora and now living alone in a company warehouse, who finds solace and intellectual companionship in reading the lives of saints and philosophers. (Both J.P. and Alipio are Sol's old friends from his West Coast days, thus justifying, if tenuously, their presence in the book. Indeed, the chapter on Alipio came out initially as a short story entitled "The Immigration Blues.") There is Noli of Lanham, Maryland, also an old friend from before the war who used to work as a window yo-yo demonstrator, now contentedly married to Ruth, a former housemaid. Like Sol, most of the characters are in their sixties (the penultimate scene is appropriately a nursing home). They are men and women whose lives hold an extended past, a foreshortened future, and, in between, a present that is content with less grandiose joys—a vacation, a few fine books, a well-stacked refrigerator, a monthly social security check, a paid up mortgage. Is this, then, the pot of gold at the end of the rainbow? The final pay-off after a lifetime of struggle and sacrifice?

If this is the Filipino Dream reduced to its lowest common denominator, it is a sadly modest dream indeed. Because Sol has achieved a measure of that dream, he deserves neither our pity nor our scorn. Despite his loneliness, his sense of alienation, his marginality, the old-

timer in America hardly qualifies as a tragic figure. Far from it. As Mrs. Antonieta Zafra puts it: "I've been in this country ever since. And no regrets" (pp. 78-79). Material comfort, financial security, by whatever name one decides to call his dream, has its price, and all of the old-timers in the novel have paid it, one way or another.

CONCLUSION

The sad thing about Sol's life is not that he runs out of time before he can fully enjoy the hard-won fruit of his labor, or that he fails to find enduring love and home, or that he dies alone in an alien land without the comfort of wife or children. The sad thing about Sol, the old-timer and the marginal man, is that he leaves no footprints behind, that his life has made no difference to anybody else. It is telling that his life insurance policy indicates no beneficiaries, for he has devoted himself to no other entity than the self. The major characters in other novels are driven, almost compulsively, to justify their lives or to examine their consciences. Their world is forever altered, if only subtly, because of their willingness to make a difference in their society. Compared to them, Solomon betrays an utter lack of civic consciousness or a concern for higher ideals. His possessiveness, his extreme jealousy, and his obsession with his own good looks are symptoms of that self-centeredness. His moving generosity to Blanche and her baby, and his last act of kindness to Barbara are, in a way, an atonement for various sins of omission in the past. Morningstar complains of their one-dimensional relationship which is based mostly on sex, a physical thing without a sense of spiritual nourishment. Barbara remembers, half-jokingly, his tightness with money, which is a reflection of an inner miserliness. Artemio Banda, of course, suffers from his grudging hospitality. "No hard feelings, my dear countryman, but I cannot afford to keep feeding you" (p. 92).

Yet Sol could have given more of himself—with his sensitivity to beauty, his industry, his sense of humor, his basic goodness as a human being. Instead, like most of the old-timers in America, he leaves behind, in the old or in the adopted country, no enduring legacy of human compassion, achievement, or purpose.