

philippine studies

Ateneo de Manila University • Loyola Heights, Quezon City • 1108 Philippines

Some Arrivals, But Mostly Deprtures

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Philippine Studies vol. 32, no. 4 (1984): 511–512

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Fri June 27 13:30:20 2008

writes of "the apparent portent of her words," "flood of ineffable bliss," "unalloyed approbation," and describes characters sad "with eyes involute with unutterable words." This preciousity is sometimes incorporated in ordinary dialogue so that it sounds stilted, as when the painter tells his model, "Stand in front of this *heavy mass of velvet curtain*, please." (Italics added.) However, there are also moments when the vernacular flavor is caught, for example, when the bellringer asks the girl he has fallen in love with: "Tell me, please, if I have hope."

The imagery is consistently of a piece; it is woven of local color—"thoughtless and valueless as bamboo shoots." The symbols are recognizable and uncluttered: magnolias for a fleeting and innocent past, pine trees for strength, flowers for hope, a new moth for resilience.

The story-telling, as Mr. Santos notes, is "at its simplest, without pretense." Artless as these stories may be, they nevertheless ring with authenticity. We sense the writer actually describing himself in the lonely government scholar aboard the ship that will take him to the United States. Only a man lashed by the memories of innumerable typhoons, as a Bicolano is, could describe one so vividly. We feel he has personally known the father of the condemned convict, too cowardly to break the truth to his son. The only story that seems a bit contrived is that of the escaped convict who returns home to his wife and boy, only to give them up in the end. Somehow it recalls too closely a Pilipino movie tearjerker.

Two of the stories in the collection hardly qualify as stories, being much too short. But the rest are a feast for all of us with a "nostalgia for well remembered haunts of the past."

It is a pity that Abelardo S. Albis, who spent forty-six years in teaching and supervisory work, did not include any story of teachers. We hope this will be rectified in his next collection.

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SOME ARRIVALS, BUT MOSTLY DEPARTURES. By Paul Stephen Lim. Quezon City: New Day Publishers, 1982. 132 pages.

For many Filipinos, Paul Stephen Lim's credentials as a writer come chiefly from five Palanca Memorial Awards (1974-1978) and from his play *Con-personas*, which won the best original script competition of the 1976 American College Theater Festival.

Except for one, all the stories in this collection have been published in magazines and journals, especially *Solidarity*. The first and last stories are

entries in the author's diary from 12 July 1968 when, at the age of twenty-two, he flew to the United States for his B.A. in English, to 6 April 1977, seven years after his *balikbayan* visit. The autobiography portion is bubbly, uninhibited. Especially vivid is the account of his mother breaking to him the news of his father's death: "Wing, your father is . . . *no more!*" Hilarious is the telling of his confrontation with the wealthy bejewelled, middle-aged American woman in the S.S. *President Wilson's* screening room. Lim's Chinese parents come out remarkably alive in the diary, as well as in the next story, "Victor and Other Issues." Perhaps they should have a volume to themselves.

The other five stories do not capitalize on Lim's "ethnic background." Lim assumes the viewpoint of an American boy to tell the intriguing tale of two rival sisters in love with the same man. He is Jack O'Grady, Irish-American, writer/illustrator of children's books, deposited by a cabdriver before a duplex near Dublin. He is Dr. John O. Mayer, musicologist from Buffalo, studying a pair of Vermeer paintings at the Rijksmuseum with a charming Dutch girl. In what is probably the most controversial of his stories, the one that won second prize in the Kansas University Literary Competition, "The Third and Final Dream of Samuel Toepffer," he is a Jewish college freshman teacher. Only in "Cliches and Manufactured Goods" is his assumed identity not too clear. He is Henry, who writes television commercials and is married to Elsa, "insensitive bitch." But his movie-going habit and his best friend Scottie make us suspect that he is really the Asian graduate student in Lawrence, Kansas.

These non-ethnic stories are well-crafted. The poignant irony of "The Love Letter" is worthy of a Somerset Maugham. Fascinating is the interweaving of the Orion-Diana mythology with the story's plot in "Malediction." The Samuel Toepffer story is experimental, bold and brash—reminiscent of new campus writing in recent years.

Paul Stephen Lim, the writer, is chameleon in personality and style. He is a writer still searching for his identity. Told by his New York agent how foolish he was for not capitalizing on his "ethnic background," he laughed. He was going to prove himself first as a *writer* before he became an *Asian* writer. A pity—because it is as an Asian writer that he will make his distinct contribution to English literature.

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