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Waywaya and other Short Stories from the Philippines

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WAYWAYA AND OTHER SHORT STORIES FROM THE PHILIPPINES.

By F. Sionil Jose. Hongkong: Heinemann Asia, 1980. 241 pages. P38.00.

F. Sionil Jose continues to be one of the best and most active writers of contemporary Philippine literature in English. His touch with language is rivaled, perhaps, only by N.V.M. Gonzalez or Nick Joaquin among contemporary writers in English in the Philippines, and his stories are moving portraits of Philippine society. He was the winner of the Ramon Magsaysay Award in 1980 for Journalism, Literature and Creative Communication Arts. He has just completed the fifth novel in his series on the Filipino's search for "a moral order and social justice," and is now at work on a sixth novel about Ermita in Manila. Two of the stories in this collection, "Waywaya" and "Arbol de Fuego," won first prizes in the annual Palanca Memorial Awards, and four other stories have been published earlier. Jose is a gifted writer who, despite his earlier successes, is only now, I feel, coming to maturity. *Waywaya and Other Stories from the Philippines*, like most collections, is a mixed bag and is of uneven talent. But it does provide an excellent sample of Jose's work, and is an indication of his considerable literary gifts.

Alfredo Navarro Salanga has pointed out (in *Weekend*, 7 June 1981) that Jose's favorite turf is contemporary middle class Philippine society, and that "Waywaya," the title story in this collection, is the only one of the twelve stories not placed in that setting. It is described as a "bitter-sweet love story from the Philippine past, setting the mood for F. Sionil Jose's perception of today's world." Like much of Jose's fiction, "Waywaya" is an allegory prefiguring the conflicts and class distinctions of the rest of the stories. This story is easily the gem of the collection. It is the story of two tribes at war, and is clearly meant to prefigure the theme of all the rest of the stories — the search for knowledge and truth ("... the river was there, a barrier to knowledge of new things, new sights and perhaps a new life" p. 1), change ("We have to change ... To be where we are, we have to change ..." p. 21), tradition ("The past could also be a prison, Father." p. 21), conflict ("Our roofs are lined with the skulls of our enemies" and "War — that is part of change." pp. 20-21), pointless rivalry ("And now our seed rice is the best in the land. Our water buffaloes are the strongest." p. 21), prejudice and bigotry ("... it was hate ... that made the Taga Daya regard Waywaya ... with derision." p. 18), political satire ("With the years, however, he had also seen the panoply of power and of ceremony that had consumed the Ulo, that for all his avowals of justice he was not beyond the reach of fawning relatives and panderers." p. 12), and the fruitless dream that one day love and a courageous honesty will overcome the barriers of selfishness ("I have asked my father ... that they do not cross the river anymore, that if they do, they bear gifts of life." p. 27).

The remaining eleven stories speak much of conflict and the walls between people – between man and woman in “Arbol de Fuego,” “Pride,” and “Dama de Noche”; between father and son in “Arbol de Fuego” and “Gangrene” and father and daughter in “Hero”; between brothers in “The Wall Between Us”; and between rich and poor in almost all the other stories. There is conflict of culture – Filipino, American and Japanese in “Dama de Noche,” and a rather moving account of Filipino-Chinese cultural conflicts in “Tong.”

If “Waywaya” is the allegory for all the other stories, “Arbol de Fuego” which follows it, is their summary. Fifty-five-year old Arturo de Leon, successful Makati businessman, is the perfect symbol of all that is wrong with society. “The *Arbol de Fuego*,” he says, “is symbolic of vice” (p. 31) and Lorna, his mistress, says: “In my language red is something else. Not flowers. Red is truth, violence, blood. It is also birth, change. I’d like it as that symbol all over the country. With my kind of meaning” (p. 31).

Jose uses sex as a parable in almost all of the stories. Almost always the sexual relationship is between an older man and a much younger girl. Prostitution and impotence are obviously meant as symbols of contemporary Philippine society. None of the marriages really work in the stories, as society itself does not work. The marriages (like the society) are often fictions maintained to conceal the emptiness and the meaninglessness of the relationship. “Sex is the last honest thing left,” one of Jose’s characters says, and Jose makes it clear, in story after story, that even honest sex has disappeared from society. What is left is the meaningless hypocrisy of selfishness and pragmatism. Hypocrisy and insincerity are the cause of impotence (p. 49) and the best cure is “old fashioned love” (p. 44).

The perceptive and knowledgeable reader will find in these stories a rather depressing picture of contemporary Philippine society. It is, in Jose’s stories, a sad and bitter world, a “nation of traitors” (p. 171) and a sick world. “The illness is for all to see . . . it is in the bloated faces of those who are wealthy and powerful” (p. 179). The most poignant comment about that society is, interestingly enough, in the allegorical “Waywaya”: “There is something about an old tree . . . it grows no more. At the same time it is difficult to cut it down. Its roots are deep although it can draw no more sustenance from the earth. Maybe, it is right that new trees should grow . . .” (p. 28). The best expression of Jose’s political criticism is in “Voyage,” and the most harrowing is the story of the arbitrary arrest and torture in “Offertory,” or the account of Philippine bureaucracy and corruption in “Progress.” The tragic irony of this last story is expressed in the approving words of the Government Minister: “You must remember that we are here to serve the people, that we are building a New Society. The bureaucracy has this rare opportunity to prove its worth, to build a progressive nation” (p. 239-40). In this and in many other of the stories it is clear that Jose has little sympathy with the current

Philippine political scene. Salanga speaks in his review of the social responsibility of the writer, and gives Jose high marks for his courage to "speak out the truth that will, sooner or later, set us free." But even without the undertones of political allegory, these are stories of quality and talent. Jose is an author to be reckoned with in contemporary Philippine writing in English.

Joseph A. Galdon, S.J.

THE BIBLE AND LIBERATION. POLITICAL AND SOCIAL HERMENEUTICS. Edited by Norman K. Gottwald. Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1983. xii + 542 pages.

This anthology of biblical essays is a revised and expanded version of a *Radical Religion Reader* published in 1976 under the same title, and with Norman Gottwald as one of two editors. Its purpose, as expressed in the Introduction, is: (1) to bring to light the actual social struggles of our biblical ancestors and to locate the human and religious resources they drew upon, and (2) to tap the biblical and social struggles and religious understandings as important resources for directing us in our social struggles. Liberation is the central theme of this volume, but the articles deal with the broader methodology of sociological analysis and interpretation of the Bible, and with various specific applications in the Old and New Testaments.

In 1976 it was difficult to find a wide range of articles on liberation in English; in this revision at least twenty of the twenty-eight are from English writers. Seventeen authors contributed from North America; three from Latin America, and four from Europe. Asia is represented by only two reviewers of Gottwald's monumental work, *The Tribes of Yahweh*: a European professor of Scripture in India and a Chinese director of a China program for the National Council of Churches in New York. (This meager representation will obviously disappoint Philippine readers. And Africa, it would seem, does not exist at all!) Most of the authors are scholars and academic teachers in the Bible and Religion, prominent in their fields. But other approaches are presented by a pastor, a director and teacher in church schools, a community organizer. Besides two addresses and seven essays from the original *Reader*, there is a score of articles collected from various books and professional journals.

Sociological analysis of the Bible has been spreading in exegetical work and academic research, and should soon be taking its place as a necessary partner with the historical method that involves the familiar scholarly methods of literary and historical analysis. There are now many exegetical articles and books utilizing sociological data, tools, and analysis, but there seems to be no fundamental general work with applications of sociological