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The Manila Hotel: The Heart and Memory of a City

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stories is "Underbrush" which narrates the encounter of a young stranger with the unnamed loneliness of an island in the southern Philippines. The loneliness is in the earth and in the jungle growth, in the ominous beat of the *kalintang* and in the young girl who delivers his meals on the porch and then flees. "It is indigenous to the wild. Inescapable. It stalks and consumes its prey." (p. 67)

In his stories, Aprieto is much obsessed with loneliness and change — Santiago Daguis in the old house in Tondo, "the last of its kind left standing in the congested neighborhood," the old woodcutter who sees his livelihood destroyed by age and the advent of kerosene stoves, the young writer seeking inspiration in memories that no longer exist, and, perhaps autobiographically, Pepeng's inability as an office worker in the Civil Service Commission to return to the tangled web of youthful relationships that had once shaped his life in a Tondo that no longer exists. It is Tondo, in its growing decadence and inevitable change for the worse, which is at the heart of these stories, as it is in Aprieto's other (and better) collection, *Tondo By Two*. The reviewer (and reader) of this collection of early stories cannot help but wonder what Aprieto's vision would be now if he were to write once again after twenty-five years.

Joseph A. Galdon, S.J.

THE MANILA HOTEL: THE HEART AND MEMORY OF A CITY. By Beth Day. Manila: National Media Production Center, 1980. 254 pages.

Perhaps it is inevitable that a book on the most venerable hotel in the country should contain the choicest vignettes about that country's high society. Hence *The Manila Hotel* is the heart and memory of that segment (a very thin one) of a city that is well-coiffed, expensively perfumed and gowned, and very well fed. Page after page speaks of sumptuous buffets and chefs with distinguished names (foreign), of elegant balls and American officials dancing the *rigodon de honor*, of Winter Gardens and Champagne Rooms and MacArthur Penthouses and the Filipino servants that tread obsequiously within.

The truth is, as Miss Day herself records, the Manila Hotel, from its inception, was not meant to be the heart of the city in which it was to stand. On the day of its official opening, set for American Independence Day, 1912, the *Manila Times* headlined on its front page:

"MANILA HOTEL — MONUMENT TO AMERICANISM"

As for the Filipino role, the American manager, Mr. Reynolds, is quoted as saying

that he saw in his Filipino staff "excellent material out of which to evolve servants." He had found them willing and eager to learn the hotel business.

"All they need," he noted, "is proper instruction."

There is a postscript to this, supplied, ironically enough, by the prologue of the book. The time shifts to New Year's Eve of 1976, and the place is a renovated Manila Hotel.

"Were you here for the opening of the hotel in 1912?," a friend asks Ambassador Jose Romero, Assemblyman from Negros Oriental, later the Philippine Ambassador to the Court of St. James.

"No," Romero answers, somewhat testily. "I was still in Negros then. The first time I came to the Manila Hotel was in 1914. I was invited for lunch. I wouldn't set foot in the place again for ten years."

"What happened?"

"My host — he was a rich sugar planter from Negros — he and I were the only Filipinos in the dining room who weren't waiters," recalls Romero. "It was an American hotel then. Filipinos were not welcome" (p. v).

But it is now 1976 and the young Filipinos have different memories. Tere-sita, daughter of the speaker quoted above, remembers spending her wedding night there, and so does Mila Puyat. There were no flights in the evenings in those days and round the world honeymoons were booked for the next day's air trip. Friend Conchitina Veloso nods. This is where Mike and I courted, in 1950, reminisces another socialite. The old Champagne Room was by the pool, another remembers, where the Ilang-Ilang is now. But of course such exchanges are only for the Aranetas, Trinidads, Puyats, Parsons, Romeros, Romulos, Gabaldons, Yuchengcos, Velosos, Sunicos, Lovinas, Rectos, Lagdameos, Madrigals, Yulos, Legardas, Locsins, Vargases, and the like. In fact the captions of the black and white photographs recorded in the book are liberally sprinkled with such names.

For what is the story of the Manila Hotel but the story of the select few who slept in its elegant suites and danced in its gleaming pavilions? It figures in history only insofar as the mightiest of the land (Americans and Japanese, MacArthur, Eisenhower, Nixon, Homma, Tojo) used it as their residence. The fact is it was more of the playground of the rich — where Quezon would ask Nieto to survey the hall and bring the prettiest lady to his boss as the lucky dancing partner for the night, where presidents and industrial giants threw extravagant dinners to proclaim to all that their daughters have come of age, where these same daughters celebrated sundry little gatherings like nuptial and prenuptial parties, and bienvenidas and despedidas, and birthdays and wedding anniversaries. And then there were the grand balls of the elite clubs of the nation: the Kahirup where the wealthy Visayans swept around the Grand Pavilion in temos created by Valera, Moreno, and Marina Antonio (costing four, sometimes even five figures in the 1960s), the Mancomunidad Pampangueña, in which good food and fabulous fashions met to indicate

the life-style of the monied of the Central Plains; the Nucleo Alto where the youth of Manila tried to outdo their elders in tasteful (and sometimes tasteless) display.

Is the book then worth reading in these days of poverty? For one thing there is Miss Day's flowing, journalistic style — quite easy to read and effortless to absorb. For another there is her amazing knowledge (for a foreigner) of Philippine cuisine, ranging from *alamang* to *pirurutong* to *ube* and *saba*. And most of all, where else can ordinary, work-wearied mortals learn, in 236 pages (the recipes at the end of the book complete the 254 pages), about an impossible world where Chito Madrigal as April in the "Bal Diadem" wore a king's ransom in diamonds, where Mrs. Imelda Marcos brought Van Cliburn for a native merienda so often that the arrow-slim pianist gained five pounds in as many days, where Douglas MacArthur, wife Jean and son Arthur had a luxurious, fully air-conditioned penthouse with seven bedrooms, a music room, a shelf-lined study, and reception hall all to themselves (at the cost of about ₱3000 a month to the Philippine government in 1935, when a laborer earned 50 centavos a day!), where dancers who glided in the outdoor pavilion were surrounded with blocks of ice bombarded by the breeze from dozens of whirring electric fans on particularly muggy nights, where the beautiful carnival queen Amparo Caragdag dipped to the tango with President Quezon, where a famous party hostess billeted an Arthur Murray teacher to perfect her guests' Latin steps, the better to clinch her title as the Pearl Mesta of Manila, where it is difficult to tell which dazzled more, the chandeliers or the women's jewels? — a world of unbelievable opulence to the vast number of beating Filipino hearts who — in their ignorance and bliss — helped create it.

Nenita O. Escasa

ANG PILOSOPIYA NG TAO. By Emerita S. Quito and Romualdo E. Abulad. Quezon City: Alemar-Phoenix Publishing House, Inc., 1980. 176 pages.

"You will not learn from me philosophy, but how to philosophize — not thoughts to repeat, but how to think. Think for yourselves, inquire for yourselves, stand on your own feet."

— Immanuel Kant

The title of the book is misleading. *Ang Pilosopiya ng Tao* is not just a textbook on Philosophy of Man (Philosophical Psychology or Anthropology in traditional terminology) but also on Ethics and Philosophy of Religion (Theodicy). Divided into three chapters (Kabanata I — Sikolohiya: Ano ang