

BOOKS PHILIPPINES

FILIPINO AUTHORS'
CATALOG
FOR TRANSLATION

The imagination peoples the air
PHILIPPINES GUEST OF HONOUR
FRANKFURT BOOK FAIR 2025



THE PHILIPPINES AT A GLANCE



Declared as the world's center of marine biodiversity, the Philippines is known for its scenic islands and legendary diving spots. Beyond the natural resources, the wealth of this archipelago nation lies in its people, who inhabit its 7,641 islands and belong to over 110 ethnolinguistic groups. Filipinos are renowned for their contributions to the creative industries, logistics, and service.

Philippine literature is as rich as its histories, animated by its epics, myths, and stories surviving and thriving after three and a half centuries of colonization, passed from generation to generation, orally and in print. Reflected in our culture and the stories we tell is a uniquely Filipino flavor of cultures melding together: our indigenous and Southeast Asian roots, influences of the European old world, American education, and the clear, resolute voice of the emergent and the contemporary.

To say we have a wealth of stories to tell would be an understatement. The Filipino experience is both distinctive and diverse, with a huge diasporic population—one-fifth of the population live and work abroad. The vibrant local culture is mirrored in the rich narratives of each region. It could be said that one sun rises over the islands, but the light and shadows cast are never the same.

The content produced by the Philippines is in Filipino, English and a variety of Philippine languages. Publications are further translated into European and Asian languages for global consumption. Through the years, the Philippine publishing industry has flourished with publishers, writers, and illustrators making their indelible mark in the international scene.

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Translate, and enter into a new heartland where *imagination peoples the air*.

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TRANSLATION SUBSIDY PROGRAM

TRANSLATION SUBSIDY PROGRAM FOR FOREIGN PUBLISHERS

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TRANSLATION SUBSIDY PROGRAM

TRANSLATION SUBSIDY PROGRAM FOR FOREIGN PUBLISHERS

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HAVE COME, WE ARE HERE

Kristian Sendon Cordero

We are delighted to present some of our Filipino contemporary writers and scholars animating the literary landscapes of our archipelago. They are writers of the long form: the novels, short stories, personal, journalistic, and critical essays. All these writers are present here at the 77th edition of the Frankfurter Buchmesse to register with the world our stories of struggles, survivals, and solidarities. In a time that is now heavily shaped by discord, diseases and disinformation, we pin the Filipino aspirations to create new ecologies of engagements blessed by peacemakers, storytellers, environmental advocates, and fashioners of a noble future.

Citing *imagination*, *people*, and *the air*, these keywords that shaped our theme is, lifted from Jose Rizal's first revolutionary novel, *Noli Me Tangere* (1887), inviting us to incarnate and inhabit this air, which is borderless and boundless, personal and communal, composing and compositing. For this is the air that we breathe, the air that we pass on, the air that envelops us, this same invisible and creative energy that gives our literature its pulses and purposes. We must therefore ensure that this lifeline continues through the works of translation.

Translation calls us to build new worlds where the strangers and the inexplicable are accepted, and those who have been condemned to unforgiving silence, gasps and gaps, are now given another opportunity.

We call on publishers, editors, translators, literary agents and publicists and to all lovers of good writings, to heed our invitation to have these Filipino writers and scholars translated and published in your own homelands.

In coming up with this special volume, we affirm the annunciation made by another Filipino poet upon the publication of his poetry book in the United States in 1943. A vagabond like his namesake Rizal, Jose Garcia Villa declared, "Have Come, Am Here," for indeed, here we are here, precise with our poetic presciences. This is an assured arrival of a legion coming from faraway shores, now saying, 'Behold, someone is holding us up, *'like a burning poem, waving us all over the world.'*

Filomeno V. Aguilar Jr.



Filomeno V. Aguilar Jr. is Professor of History and currently the Assistant Vice President for Research, Creative Work, and Innovation at the Ateneo de Manila University. He was conferred the Grant Goodman Prize in Philippine Historical Studies by the Association for Asian Studies in March 2025. His research areas encompass the history of nationalism, political culture, citizenship, global migrations, colonial sugar production, rice cultivation, and peripheral histories.

His most recent book is *José Rizal, Nationhood, and the Anticolonial Imagination* (Ateneo de Manila University Press, 2025). His other historical works include *Peripheries: Histories of Anti-marginality* (Ateneo de Naga University Press, 2018), a finalist in the National Book Awards in 2019, and *Clash of Spirits: The History of Power and Sugar Planter Hegemony on a Visayan Island* (University of Hawai'i Press and Ateneo de Manila University Press, 1998), which is based on "Phantoms of Capitalism," his doctoral dissertation that was awarded the 1992 Lauriston Sharp Prize by the Southeast Asia Program at Cornell University.

Aguilar's two books on global migration studies are *Migration Revolution: Philippine Nationhood and Class Relations in a Globalized Age* (Kyoto University Press, NUS Press, and Ateneo de Manila University Press, 2014) and *Maahvang Buhay: Family, Overseas Migration, and Cultures of Relatedness in Barangay Paraiso* (Ateneo de Manila University Press, 2009) which received an Outstanding Book Award from the National Academy of Science and Technology (NAST) in 2014. He was Chief Editor of *Philippine Studies: Historical and Ethnographic Viewpoints* for eighteen years from 2003 to 2021. Prior to repatriating to the Philippines in 2003, he taught at the National University of Singapore and James Cook University in Queensland, Australia.

From JOSÉ RIZAL, NATIONHOOD, AND THE ANTICOLONIAL IMAGINATION

By Filomeno V. Aguilar, Jr.

According to a legend recorded in Cebu in the twentieth century, recounted by Resil Mojares (2018, 26), “the reason for the Spanish expeditions was that Queen Isabella of Spain was told by a seer that there is a place called Filipinas where a miraculous object can be found.” The legend stated “that Jesus Christ, before he died, had left behind this object for people to venerate so they will not forget him after his death”. When the conquistador Miguel López de Legazpi reached Cebu in 1565, “he treated the natives well to get them to tell him where this wondrous thing was, and they did”. As a result, Legazpi found “a piece of wood that had assumed the form of a child” . This miraculous object ensured the islanders’ sustenance “by attracting fish and keeping animals away from their grains.”

In this folk-historic narrative, the present tense is important: “there is a place,” suggesting that this place has always been there and has always been called Filipinas. The legend also insinuates that, in times past, the Philippines was not some unknown location but a definite destination, bounded and distinguishable from other places by its exact emplacement on the earth’s surface. The legend alludes to Isabella I of Castile, who died in 1504, so it would appear that the timeframe of this story took place long before the expedition of Ferdinand Magellan set sail from Spain in 1519. Antedating the dawn of the sixteenth century and the circumnavigation of the world, “there is a place called Filipinas.” However, despite their divine right to rule, the Spanish monarchy had no access to the otherworldly knowledge about the existence of the Philippines because this knowledge required the special conduit of a seer. That the Philippines had long existed, we might say over 2,000 years ago, was implied in the detail that Christ supposedly designated this “place” as the repository for the miraculous object. This precious object, in turn, was emblematic of the indigenization of a Catholic icon that, in the indigenous worldview, sprang out magically from “a piece of wood.” Long before the arrival of the Spanish, the native inhabitants were supposed to have revered the Santo Niño who, in return, blessed their sustenance. This folk-historic narrative underscored the notion that, not only did the islands exist, but that the idea of “the Philippines” had endured since time immemorial.

Interestingly also, the legend portrays the meeting between the natives and Legazpi as amicable, suggestive of the postcolonial airbrushing of the Spanish colonial past. After all, the country of Las Islas Filipinas deserves respect; the nation demands that its dignity be acknowledged. Given this nationalist desire on the part of the storyteller, the legend makes it only proper that Legazpi “treated the natives well” in order for him to attain his goal of finding the “miraculous object.” Resorting to fair treatment as an opportunistic tool to attain one’s presumably noble objective is given approval in this folk narrative, which is totally set apart from the historic sacking of Cebu as the context for the discovery of the Santo Niño.

This legend brings out several themes in nationalist consciousness, such as the need for respect and fair treatment, the ability to localize external influences, and above all, the premise of a preexisting nation. Indeed, this folk narrative goes against the academic consensus that nations are made. Most academics are of the view that nations have a history of coming into existence. The Philippines, which emerged out of Spanish imperialism, shares this common predicament of a historically grounded and constructed nationhood. However, despite their relative recency and modernity, nations are perceived and felt by its members to have been in existence in the remote past, expressed not just in folkloric legends but also in modern narratives.

**An excerpt from *José Rizal, Nationhood, and the Anticolonial Imagination* (2025)
published by Ateneo de Manila University Press.**

Dean Francis R. Alfar



Dean is an author, playwright, and advocate of speculative fiction. His books include the novel *Salamanca*; *The Kite of Stars and Other Stories*, *How to Traverse Terra Incognita*, *A Field Guide to the Roads of Manila and Other Stories*, *Stars in Jars*, and *Moon Sun Stars: Selected Stories*.

He is the founder of the Philippine Speculative Fiction annuals, and the editor of *Fantasy: Filipino Fiction for Young Adults*, *Horror: Filipino Fiction for Young Adults*, *Science Fiction: Filipino Fiction for Young Adults*, *Maximum Volume: Best New Philippine Fiction 1 & 2*, and *Ang Manggagaway at iba pang Kathang-Agham at Pantasya mula sa Gitnang Europa at Pilipinas*, and *New Philippine Speculative Fiction*.

Dean is also the Chair of the Filipino Critics Circle.

His upcoming books include his fourth collection of fiction, as well as a volume of stories from his first 25 years of speculative fiction.

From THE KITE OF STARS AND OTHER STORIES

By Dean Alfaro

The night when she thought she would finally be a star, Maria Isabella du'l Cielo struggled to calm the trembling of her hands, reached over to cut the tether that tied her to the ground, and thought of that morning many years before when she'd first caught a glimpse of Lorenzo du Vicenzio ei Salvatore: tall, thick-browed and handsome, his eyes closed, oblivious to the cacophony of the accident waiting to occur around him.

Maria Isabella had just turned sixteen then, and each set of her padrinos had given her (along with the sequined brida du caballo, the dresses of rare tulle, organza, and seda, and the diadema floral du'l dama – the requisite floral circlet of young womanhood) a purse filled with coins to spend on anything she wanted. And so she'd gone past the Calle du Leones (where sleek cats of various pedigrees sometimes allowed themselves to be purchased, though if so, only until they tired of their new owners), walked through the Avenida du'l Conquistadores (where the statues of the conquerors of Ciudad Meiora lined the entirety of the broad promenade) and made her way to the Encantu lu Caminata (that maze-like series of interconnected streets, each leading to some wonder or marvel for sale), where little musical conch shells from the islets near Palao'an could be found. Those she liked very much.

In the vicinity of the Plaza Emperyal, she saw a young man dressed in a coat embroidered with stars walk almost surely to his death. In that instant, Maria Isabella knew two things with the conviction reserved only for the very young: first, that she almost certainly loved this reckless man; and second, that if she simply stepped on a dog's tail -- the very dog watching the same scene unfold right next to her -- she could avert the man's seemingly senseless death.

These were the elements of the accident-waiting-to-happen: an ill-tempered horse hitched to some noble's qalesa; an equally ill-tempered qalesa driver with a whip; a whistling panadero with a tray of plump pan du sal perched on his head; two puddles of fresh rainwater brought about by a brief downpour earlier that day; a sheet of stained glass en route to its final delivery destination at the house of the Most Excellent Primo Orador; a broken bottle of wine; and, of course, the young man who walked with his eyes closed.

Without a moment's further thought, Maria Isabella stepped on the tail of the dog that was resting near her. The poor animal yelped in pain; which in turn startled the horse, making it stop temporarily; which in turn angered the qalesa driver even more, making him curse the horse; which in turn upset the delicate melody that the panadero was whistling; which in turn made the panadero miss stepping into the two puddles of rainwater; which in turn gave the men delivering the sheet of stained glass belonging to the Most Excellent Primo Orador an uninterrupted path; which in turn gave the young man enough room to cross the street without so much as missing a beat or stepping onto the broken wine bottle; which in turn would never give him the infection that had been destined to result in the loss of his right leg and, ultimately, his life.

Everyone and everything continued to move on their own inexorable paths, and the dog she had stepped on growled once at her and then twisted around to nurse its sore tail. But Maria Isabella's eyes were on the young man in the star-embroidered coat, whose life she had just saved. She decided she would find out who he was.

The first twenty people she asked did not know him. It was a butcher's boy who told her who he was, as she rested near the butcher's shop along the Rotonda du'l Vendedores.

"His name is Lorenzo du Vicenzio," the butcher's boy said. "I know him because he shops here with his father once every sen-night. My master saves some of the choicest cuts for their family. They're rather famous, you know. Maestro Vicenzio, the father, names stars."

"Stars?" Maria Isabella asked. "And would you know why he walks with his eyes closed? The son, I mean."

"Well, Lorenzo certainly isn't blind," the butcher's boy replied. "I think he keeps his eyes closed to preserve his vision for his stargazing at night. He mentioned he had some sort of telescope he uses at night."

"How can I meet him?" she asked, all thoughts of musical conch shells gone from her mind.

"You? What makes you think he will even see you? Listen," the butcher's boy whispered to her, "he only has eyes for the stars."

"Then I'll make him see me," she whispered back, and as she straightened up, her mind began to make plan upon plan upon plan, rejecting possibilities, making conjectures; assessing what she knew, whom she knew, and how much she dared. It was a lot for anyone to perform in the span of time it took to set her shoulders, look at the butcher's boy, and say, "Take me to the best Kitemaker."

The butcher's boy, who at fourteen was easily impressed by young ladies of a certain disposition, immediately doffed his white cap, bowed to Maria Isabella, gestured to the street filled with people outside, and led her to the house of Melchor Antevadez, famed throughout Ciudad Meiora and environs as the Master Builder of aquilones, cometas, sarangola, and other artefactos voladores.

They waited seven hours to see him (for such was his well-deserved fame that orders from all over the realms came directly to him -- for festivals, celebrations, consecrations, funerals, regatta launches, and such) and did not speak to each other. Maria Isabella was thinking hard about the little plan in her head and the butcher's boy was thinking of how he had just lost his job for the dubious pleasure of a silent young woman's company.

He spent most of the time looking surreptitiously at her shod feet and oddly wondering whether she, like the young ladies that figured in his fantasies, painted her toes blue, in the manner of the circus artistas.

When it was finally their turn (for such was the nature of Melchor Antevadez that he made time to speak to anyone and everyone who visited him, being of humble origin himself), Maria Isabella explained what she wanted to the artisan.

"What I need," she began, "is a kite large enough to strap me onto. Then I must fly high enough to be among the stars themselves, so that anyone looking at the stars will see me among them, and I must be able to wave at least one hand to that person."

"What you need," Melchor Antevadez replied with a smile, "is a balloon. Or someone else to love."

**An excerpt from *The Kite of Stars and Other Stories* (2008)
published by Anvil Publishing, Inc.**

Stephanie Marie R. Coo



Stephanie Marie R. Coo is a Filipino Chinese author of the acclaimed book, *Clothing the Colony: Nineteenth-Century Philippine Sartorial Culture, 1820-1896* (Ateneo de Manila University Press, 2019), which won the 39th National Book Award and the John C. Kaw Prize for Best Book in History (2022) and the prestigious IAS-ICAS International Book Prize for Best Book in Humanities (2021), conferred biennially by a consortium of universities led by Leiden University, Netherlands. After earning her PhD in History, mention très honourable avec les félicitations du jury à l'unanimité, from Université Nice Sophia Antipolis in France, Dr. Coo was awarded a Marie Skłodowska-Curie Postdoctoral Fellowship at the Universidad de Granada in Spain [EU Horizon 2020 - Athenea3i grant agreement no. 754446] and Ruhr-Universität Bochum in Germany.

Currently, she holds an associate professorship at the Ateneo de Manila University and conducts research with Centro de Humanidades, Faculdade de Ciências Sociais e Humanas (CHAM NOVA-FCSH), Universidade Nova de Lisboa in Portugal, with funding from Fundação para a Ciência e Tecnologia [2022.05581.CEECIND/CP1725/CT0031]. Her second book, *Seams of Sedition: Sartorial Symbols in José Rizal's Noli Me Tángere* (Ateneo de Naga University Press, 2025) – made possible through the support of Ateneo de Manila University's Institute of Philippine Culture (IPC), the Office of Senator Loren Legarda, and the Philippine Embassy in Portugal – was, and will be, presented at the Leipzig (March 2025) and Frankfurt Book Fair (October 2025), where the Philippines is the Guest of Honour Nation.

From SEAMS OF SEDITION: SARTORIAL SYMBOLS IN JOSÉ RIZAL'S NOLI ME TÁNGERE

By **Stepahnie Marie R. Co**

Over a century after *Noli me Tángere* (*Noli*) was written, there has been enough distance to re-evaluate the sartorial contours of the work: clothing as an integral part of the development of characters, its subtle and visible position in understanding the world and the culture in which Rizal and many others became reformers; and its deliberate use to enhance dramatic content and ironic form. Those who know the novel well will hopefully find new meanings in this sartorial reading; and those who do not will be introduced to a world where a culture of poseurs in a self-conscious society during a conservative and tensed colonial era is explored alongside pain and loss, with both literary subtlety and exaggeration.

The present requires new readings of the way in which Rizal hoped to generate patriotic fervor or confronted the problem of depicting his own people and culture while outside the Philippines. Moreover, the welling interest in interdisciplinary interpretations has opened new opportunities of looking at nineteenth-century clothing culture, which was previously excluded from the purview of respectable historical or academic research. This open-minded reading exemplifies the manifold possibilities of examining well-known works.

As a “social novel,” it is not surprising that the imagined scenes and dressed characters paralleled many of the happenings and clothed people in real life. Writing from Madrid on 26 September 1886, Evaristo Aguirre noted that the value of Rizal’s work was enhanced by the fact that the novel’s characters were all based on real people and the circumstances depicted were based on true events. The portrayal of social life in the archipelago also resonated with numerous reformists, who either associated with or recognized the personalities, some of whom were composites of multiple individuals they knew. Certainly, amidst the absurdity and interlocking web of characters in the *Noli*, there existed complex characters that were intended to evoke a range of emotions and were thus not easily identifiable.

It is also important to highlight that Rizal and his peers understood the work as a satire of the lamentable state of the Philippines during a period when the “Castilas” (Castilians) considered themselves – in Rizal’s words – as “semidioses” (demigods).¹⁶⁶ According to Aristotle (cited in Cook 1963, 112-115), words and languages always bear imprints of our thoughts. Fantasy and imagination are mental experiences that often involves constructing images, picturing objects, configuring relationships or establishing patterns and combinations that may not exist on occasions that may never have occurred (Silveira Dias and Loução 2020, 205). It is, therefore, important to be mindful of the exaggerations and half-truths Rizal employed alongside other literary devices and symbols generally accepted in propaganda writing. For example, a minor character, Andong, a dim-witted coconut pruner and servant, was taken to the capital and executed by the Guardia Civil, merely because he had a new pair of underwear (“nuevos calzones”). Capitana Tinchang, the timorous wife of Capitán Tinong, voiced apprehension over the possibility of being arrested for her possession of *The Times*, which she claimed was solely used to “wrap up soaps and old clothes.” This implies that irrespective of their political and social affiliations, both rich and poor Filipinos were not spared from the fear and arbitrary arrests that Rizal sought to highlight by exaggerating death or detainments carried out simply because of a new pair of intimate apparel or possession of something as trivial as a mainstream European newspaper.

Aware of extant censorship, Rizal’s correspondences with his contemporaries revealed that he composed his literary masterpieces with future scenarios in mind, expressing his optimism for a “rising generation that will surpass the past and the future.” He confessed to José Ma. Basa that despite the current generation’s reluctance to read his work out of fear (“por temor”), he would persist in writing for the people of tomorrow. In one encounter with Ibarra in the Noli, Don Anastacio or Filósofo Tasio is writing in hieroglyphics, “so that it cannot be read now. I am not writing for this generation, but for other ages. If this generation had the ability to read, it would destroy my books, my life’s work,” Tasio explained to a perplexed Ibarra. Through Tasio, who is depicted as either a lunatic or a sage, Rizal likewise expressed his hope that forthcoming generations who will read and decipher the characters would be wiser. In Michel Foucault’s (1994, 26-27) “The Order of Things,” hieroglyphics were classified together with cyphers, enigmas, symbols, emblems, and other forms of written signs that require decryption. This suggests a deliberate intention on Rizal’s part to make the figures’ qualities, possessions, and clothes cryptic in order to protect his work from potential misinterpretation – to ensure his novel is not misconstrued by those not yet fully equipped to grasp its depth and meaning.

Similar to the concept of time capsules, cryptic messages are suspended; at that juncture in time, some meanings were held in amber for later reflection. It is worth noting that the ambiguity inherent in the Noli assumes some details were far beyond the understanding of current thinkers, allowing the story to resonate with readers from different timelines, leaving room for contemplation about the varied ways colonial novels can be analyzed or experienced. Even as the context surrounding the work changes over time, the Noli remains relevant, thought-provoking – a catalyst for conversations on evolving societal perspectives and attitudes – offering also a lesson for our time. This is particularly valuable when dealing with the complex and often contentious legacies of colonialism through the prism of fiction.

This study, therefore, necessitated not only a close sartorial reading of a fictional work and its English translation (particularly by Charles Derbyshire), but also an inquiry into the historical context in which the author wrote. This prompts and even demands analyzing Rizal's values and views as reflected in his letters written during the 1880s to the 1890s. In so doing, clues were found regarding the surrounding incidents and situations that could help explain the discussions, behaviors, and wardrobe choices of specific Noli characters. His dissection of a colonial society's malaise was apparent in the way he depicted both artificiality and superficiality, as he commented on things, homes, clothes, and appearances in the novel. His literary works challenge readers to deduce attributes from the characters' thoughts, actions, and physical attributes (such as skin tone and attire), as well as their conversations, responses, and their interactions with one another.

An excerpt from *Seams of Sedition: Sartorial Symbols in José Rizal's Noli Me Tángere* (2025) published by Ateneo de Naga University Press.

Flor Marie S.R. Cruz



Flor Marie "Neni" Sta. Romana Cruz is an award-winning writer, an accomplished educator, a noted children's book critic, a reading advocate and freelance journalist. Prior to her appointment to the NBDB as the Chairperson, Sta. Romana-Cruz chaired the Philippine Board on Books for Young People (PBBY) and was likewise a board member of the "Sa Aklat Sisikat" Foundation, an organization which promotes book reading and lifelong learning. Some of the award-winning books she authored were the following: *Why the Piña has a Hundred Eyes and Other Classic Philippine Folk Tales About Fruits*, which won the 1993 National Book Award for Children's Literature and a biography of *Gabriela Silang*, which received a National Book Award citation for excellence in 1992.

Sta. Romana-Cruz graduated cum laude from St. Scholastica's College and holds a master's degree in English Literature from the Ateneo de Manila University. She has also taken courses in children's literature from Michigan State University. Neni taught writing to talented elementary school students at International School-Manila, where she headed the Children's Media Center.

Presently, she co-heads the Translation Committee for the Philippine Guest of Honour in the 77th edition of Frankfurter Buchmesse.

STRANGE AIR IN BEL-AIR

By **Neni Sta. Romana-Cruz**

Blending with the streamlined look of Makati village homes, this house in Bel-Air frustrates one's expectations of a haunted house. The atmosphere is much too friendly and the house much too cozy and lived-in. What with the bustling lifestyles of its eight family members and three household help. But despite its look of contemporaneity, this house has found itself reckoning with a series of happenings that its occupants are finding harder and harder to attribute merely to a restless imagination.

Soon after this large family moved into the two-story house 13 years ago, their household help reported hearing footsteps coming from the bedrooms right on top of the kitchen even when the bedrooms were empty. They also wondered about electric fans being mysteriously turned on in the living room and spoke of that stereotype lady-in-white at four in the morning. These no one felt compelled to pay any attention to, especially since the occurrences did not persist.

The 18-year old daughter of the house underwent a similarly perplexing experience. Described by her mother as the brave, no-nonsense one among her children, she easily gained some degree of credibility with her recounting.

While putting on make-up in the dressing room, Vicky heard an infant crying from the adjoining bedroom she shared with three other sisters. Knowing that the “borrowed” infant her mother reared the past year had been turned over to a foster home, she was certain that it was just one of her brothers teasing her. She shouted out to her brother to stop the joke and continued on with her make-up ritual. The crying grew even louder. Peeking through the curtain that divided the bedroom from the dressing room, she was amazed to find the bedroom empty.

On subsequent days, while in bed or studying at night, she would hear her collection of Curious mysteriously fall from the shelves. Not brave enough to find out what was really happening, she would wait until morning to go to the dressing room – only to see all the Curious lined neatly in place. Again these stray incidents were all ignored because they did not repeat themselves.

But in 1973, the lady of the house, Mrs. S., previously concerned about setting a good example to her children by maintaining a courageous and uncaring stance about the previous happenings, was herself a “victim.”

She was recuperating from a fractured leg that was kept in a cast for several months, when one day, with her three maids out on various errands and all the other family members either at school or at work, she heard a loud commotion coming from the landing upstairs where her large brood has a family-sized shoe rack, good for more than thirty-odd pairs of shoes. Someone was having a heyday throwing pairs and pairs on the floor. Then moving towards the boys' room, sitting down in such a way that the bed quaked, then trying out a pair and throwing it on the floor, after each trying. The footsteps moved towards the shoe rack again and seemed to be getting closer to the stairway.

It only stopped when she shouted out in fear, "Who are you? Whoever you are, will you stop it right now?"

Because she could not walk, it was only when one maid arrived shortly after that she was able to investigate what disorder the mysterious prankster left upstairs. All the maid saw was just one pair of shoes on the floor by the shoe rack.

At this point both husband and wife decided to get St. Benedict medals to hang in every part of the house, including the garage. St. Benedict is known to be a power foil against evil spirits. That was five years ago and the medals, still hanging around the house, did bring peace to the house. No further disturbances have occurred since St. Benedict was implored, not even when both father and mother went abroad.

But 1978 has been such an eventful season again. And what bothers Mrs. S. are two things – "I am now afraid like I have never been before. I grew up in a haunted house in the Visayas and the bizarre happenings there never bothered me. So, why should these trivia be so disturbing? And also I am a bit anxious now because the sounds are getting closer and closer and have now invaded our bedrooms."

Mrs. S. hears the footsteps around her bed and her 15-year-old daughter for the past month has had such troubled sleep. She awakens in the middle of the night because of the footsteps and swears she sees a head peeking behind the curtains. While watching TV a few feet away from her room two weeks ago, she was frightened by a sudden continuous metallic sound coming from her nephew's empty bedroom. She yelled out to her mother who came with her holy water. "I feel like a priest with all the blessings and all the 'Jesus protect us' incantations I have been engaged in lately." The rustling sound stopped only when mother and daughter came close to the door of the little boy's bedroom. On the day of TJ's visit, Mrs. S. realized it was the sound of her nephew's matchbox cars being struck together. But who was in there then?

The two younger sons have also witnessed such perplexing happenings within the month. One was reading till midnight facing his bedroom door, when he heard footsteps from the girls' room to his and saw his door opening. Neither his sister nor his mother came anywhere near his room, he soon found out. The other son, a karate and judo expert, was up till morning doing his term paper when the same door opened slightly and he heard a voice gasping, trying to say something, but it seemed choked or simply muffled.

Despite all these, this family has never entertained the idea of moving out. The children and the help remained a fearless lot, but only too eager to allow all logic, reasoning, and psychic powers to unravel these mysteries. The mere idea of leaving this house is a heart-rending one for them – the house is theirs, so why give anyone the satisfaction of taking over? Abandoning the house is to them an act of cowardice!

The plea for anonymity is understandable. The children say “We do not want our friends to stop coming. Besides, we would rather be on friendly terms with these spirits.”

**An excerpt from *The Uninvited Guests From Bikol: Gothic Tales* (2022)
published by Ateneo de Naga University Press.**

Alexandra Madrigal Eduque



The founder and chairperson of the MovEd Foundation—a non-stock, non-profit organization that brings early childhood care, education, and development programs to underserved areas around the Philippines. She graduated from Barnard College of Columbia University in New York City in 2013 with a degree in urban studies, concentrating on political science. Alex hones her passion for writing through her weekly column under the Opinions and Editorials section of Manila Bulletin, and came out with her first published work in 2020: *Chito Madrigal*, under the *Bikolnon Biography Series*. This year, Alex authors Consuelo: *Stories of Hope* in the hopes not only of continuing the storytelling of the legacy of her late grandaunt, Consuelo Madrigal, through the eyes of those she has helped, but also to inspire others to live life while creating their own legacies. After briefly living in Mexico City, Alex has moved back home to Manila and chooses to spend her spare time creating memories with her family and fur babies.

From CONSUELO: STORIES OF HOPE

By Alexandra Madrigal Eduque

Finding your purpose keeps you driven and clearly lays out your goal. However, alone, it is insufficient in sustaining one's dream. Hard work and some sacrifice is key in turning your vision into a reality and providing fruition to your purpose. Paul Andrew Orpiada, a CCMF scholar who graduated in 2011, started Karaw Crafts as a school project because it was part of the course requirement to put up an income-generating enterprise. As mentioned earlier, Karaw Crafts worked with Naga City women inmates in order to create plush toys, souvenirs, and shirts. Wanting an art-related business, he found a modern way of doing crafts by means of upcycled souvenirs and then later on ventured into T-shirt printing. During their school years, they were generating a lot of projects and likewise income, which allowed them to earn whilst studying. As the years went by, they transitioned their school project into a social enterprise, where they joined competitions in the hopes of being able to expand by getting funding from outside sources and other organizations. Post-graduation, only Paul continued Karaw, while the rest of his group mates changed direction. Today, Karaw is running on its twelfth year.

When asked how being a scholar impacted his life, Paul immediately shared that it did not only help his family financially, it enriched him as a person: "Being a scholar drove me to pursue social entrepreneurship and development despite the fact that setting up an enterprise is very challenging. The desire did not disappear, and it made all the sacrifices worth it. I chose to transform my school project into a social enterprise and continue on even alone because it is also my own way of giving back and paying it forward so that others can benefit from it as well.

Today, Paul also works full time at a financial technology enterprise, and when asked what he does when he encounters challenges, he is quick to respond: 'I always go back to my why. Why am I doing these things? The market has evolved, and we are able to respond to the needs of the market. Keep on doing what you do. Continue to pursue your passion and turn that into a viable venture. Originally, I did not like my course because I was into the arts. Eventually, I was able to incorporate my passion with my course and fuse both in order to transform it into something economically viable. So if at first you are challenged by the career you want to pursue, try to explore and see for yourself if it is something that will work. Try to be creative and resourceful because this will create long-lasting impacts.'

In my course of conversation with Paul, I was reminded that sometimes our passion has to take a step back to give way to reality and practicality. In his case, generating income. But

when we find our purpose and work with our priorities, we get our ducks in a row, and ultimately, there is a way to involve your passion with your non-negotiable pursuits. Paul is an example of someone who never gave up on his dream, and so, if at first you are challenged by the career you want to pursue, try to explore and see for yourself if it is something that will work. Try to be creative and resourceful, as this will create ripples of change. Life will never be easy, but that is why it makes living it all the more worthwhile. For as long as we do not get badly influenced or detoured—for as long as we continue in the right direction and know our “why”—then Consuelo will follow as our reward. Do not be afraid to start somewhere. We all need a beginning. Eventually, things will grow and bear fruit. There will certainly be challenges, but as Tita Chito always taught us, for as long as you stay true to your core and your principles and always go back to your “why” —your greater purpose—you will overcome, and your Consuelo will be right around the corner.

From *Consuelo: Stories of Hope* (2025), published by Ateneo de Naga University Press in partnership with the Consuelo "Chito" Madrigal Foundation-Bikol.

Mina V. Esguerra



Mina V. Esguerra writes and publishes English-language romance and contemporary fiction. Her contemporary romance novellas have won Filipino Readers' Choice Awards, and have been featured on NPR, Buzzfeed, the Seattle Review of Books, and more. She is an advocate for Filipino authors and readers, and delivers lectures regularly on topics such as writing, publishing, guiding creative communities, and making the romance genre more inclusive. She founded RomanceClass, a community of Filipino authors who write romance in English, and since 2013 has helped over 100 authors write and publish their romance books, now read in 52 countries worldwide. She is also a media adaptation agent, working with LA-based Bold MP to develop romance media by Filipino creatives for an international audience.

From BETTER AT WEDDINGS THAN YOU

By Mina V. Esguerra

It was nine-fifteen p.m. on Christmas Eve, and Daphne Cardenas was tipsy and full. She'd just had really good sushi, a few glasses of red wine, and the best strawberry tart in the city. But she was at a Christmas buffet in the best hotel in the city, and that meant she wouldn't be settling for only one of the tarts. She stood up from her table, where she was currently the fifth wheel among couple friends, and headed to the dessert spread to consider her next indulgence.

The guy was looking at her. She felt it, and it was why she looked up from admiring the pavlova. He was not scanning the pastries, no chance. That look of intensity, that hint of recognition, that was meant for her. Or for a stray cat that wound up inside this guy's car and scratched up the interior. It wasn't hostile, but it wasn't the warmest look either.

Great, Daphne thought. Where did I meet this guy, and what did I do to him?

She would need a moment or seven to figure this one out. Daphne was completely aware that there were people who hated her guts, for a variety of reasons. But this guy?

He was handsome. No, hot. No, scorching hot. He seemed to be about her age. Did she meet him at work? Was he, oh no, a former client? Did she leave any grooms unhappy with how she managed their wedding days?

She would remember though. She would remember if she ever oversaw the ceremony of a guy like this one. She would have thought for a second about how she helped send another guy off the market. She'd jokingly mourn. Point was, she'd remember. So, probably not a former client.

Was he a former setup? At her age, Daphne had gone on more well-intentioned setup-style dates than she could count. They came at her from all sides of her life, and when she was younger she was too polite and nice that she didn't say no to any of them. This went on until she decided to stop caring if she hurt feelings, so she said no to blind dates, but not before ending up on a date with someone she'd already seen, and not called. ("Oh God," she said to one of them. "I guess I've confirmed that I have met ALL THE MEN and I've cycled back to the beginning!") Yeah, that got her a new batch of people who would glare at her as she picked a dessert.

were couple-friends with Tamara and Pete, and then there was Daphne and the last empty seat. Helen had quickly jumped out of hers to hug this guy. Daphne tried to look deep into her panna cotta shot glass but she could feel his eyes on her, past his hug.

She kicked Greg under the table. Her friend was a jerk, but she wasn't sure how this time. But there was obviously something fishy and it wasn't the grilled tuna.

"Hello again," the guy said to her. He didn't sound fake-friendly or fake-warm. He was civil. Friendly. Warm.

Is this a date? Damn it. That would have been the quickest that she ruined a setup. He didn't even get to sit down, before she completely did the wrong thing.

Greg looked pleased with himself. Helen looked...it seemed like a complicated look right there. It was a look of being in on it, though.

"Daphne Cardenas, this is Aaron Trinidad," Greg said.

Aaron slid into his thick, puffy, overly upholstered seat, bounced a little bit on it like a big little kid. The vibration that immediately coursed through her body made her realize that their chairs were touching, and damn how intimate.

"Hello again," she said to him, game face on.

"So glad you had time to meet us here, Aaron," Greg went on to say. "I hope we didn't take you away from anything. But I figured a bachelor like you won't have anything planned for Christmas Eve, right? I know what that was like."

She winced at that, and was taken aback that a subtler version of the same expression touched his face. Maybe he also hated Greg's guts. Plus points for him, despite the strangeness at the dessert station.

"You know I show up when it's work," he said, voice not as bouncy as earlier body language. "Because I'm a professional."

"Well that's up for debate, isn't it? Not like you're certified or anything."

Oh my God. And then Daphne was keenly aware of how rigid her back had become, and probably his too, conveniently hidden by their puffy chairs.

“So, what’s good to eat here?” Aaron asked, already pushing himself up again.

“The lobster,” Helen said, and Daphne saw the pity.

“Anyway,” Greg said, never mind that Aaron was already halfway out of earshot. “Aaron used to be our wedding planner. We invited you both here tonight so he can turn over his work for the last few weeks to you. And now you’ve met. Enjoying dinner, Daphne?”

**An excerpt from *Better At Weddings Than You* (2017)
published by Bright Girl Books.**

Rowena P. Festin



Rowena P. Festin is a poet, fictionist, translator and editor. She is the author of the book of poetry *Banayad*, which won the National Book Award in 2017 and *Ang Buang ng Bayan*, which won the National Book Award in 2024. She was also the recipient of the 2023 Gawad SWF for her poems published in *Agos* Journal, a publication of UP Sentro ng Wikang Filipino. She translated into Filipino the novel *Great Expectations*. She is also the co-translator of the novel *Little Women* by Louisa May Alcott. Her poems, short stories and essays on Philippine literature and culture have been published in journals and anthologies. She is a professor of Filipino and Sociology courses in University of the Philippines - Pampanga.

From THE MADWOMAN OF THE TOWN

By Rowena Festin

People fear the house near our house in San Roque. It was three houses away from ours, right across San Roque 2 Elementary School. It was a very large square house. The upper floor is made of wide wooden boards while the ground floor was built of stone and adobe. Although it looked very different from the usual stone houses—since there were no stone houses in San Jose—it had big windows upstairs made of dark wood and capiz shells. Moss was already creeping up its walls. Whenever we children pass by the house, it felt as if a legion of demons were chasing us as we would suddenly run very fast just to quickly past the house. We had no choice but to pass there, because there was no alternative road. There were only two roads leading to and out of San Roque: one that go directly to San Roque and the sea, and the other road that leads to Bagong Sikat behind the school.

The elders said that during pistaym, they were able to enter the big house for the 18th birthday of the old woman by the window. When you entered the hall, your eyes will meet a great many smiling saints with outstretched palms, as if welcoming everyone. From the ceiling hung a radiant chandelier. In each of the four corners of the living room stood a small kamagong table, on which rested candelabras with large dragon candles. The entire house polished with isis leaves shimmered like diamonds reflecting thousands of lights, dispersing thousands of tiny rainbows across the glasses and porcelain plates stacked in the platera. Throughout the hall, the murmur of conversations and soft laughter mingled with the music from the gramophone. The people of San Roque in their finest clothes — garments that smelled of mothballs and kakawate leaves from being stored in trunks for so long, grateful for the chance to breathe fresh air again. After all, why would they wear them often when most of their days are spent in the fields and the sea. It was fortunate that the moths and rats despise the smell of mothballs and kakawate, so the clothes are still in good condition and usable. But those are not important. What matters is that they were there, invited and celebrating with the daughter of the richest family in San Roque. They are inside the grand house, leaving behind their lives in the field and the sea, lives with the hay and fish, for one night of luxury.

Maria Josefa's clan is the wealthiest in all of Pandurucan. They were among the co-owners of Central run by the friars. They shared profits from the trains that transport sugarcane and sugar from Central to Caminawi every day, bound for America and Spain. Their clan was once the sole owner of the vast rice and corn fields, which were later turned into sugarcane plantations when the Spaniards came. When the Augustinians arrived, they were forced to sell more than half of their land because they were told that to be in paradise, they had to let go of earthly possessions, as these weighed down the soul and could lead to the fires of hell. The friars declared La Hacienda de San Jose as their property, though it once belonged to Maria Josefa's family. Still, they remained the wealthiest, for in gratitude for their humility and piety, the friars made them co-owners of La Hacienda de San Jose, by partnering with the Augustinians, they secured their place in heaven. But this too was lost when the Americans came. The friars sold the hacienda to the Americans, and the Americans renamed it Mindoro Sugar Central. The clan lost their rights to the hacienda. It was the Americans who exported thousand tons of sugar to America."

Maria Josefa's clan lived inside the Central, at the Mill Site, when they became the co-owners of the azucarera. This is where the elite, the wealthy, live. Meanwhile, the employees and workers of the Central live in Transportacion. They even had their own swimming pool like the elites, but when an American official decided to keep a Mindoro crocodile as pet, he placed it there, forcing the Transportacion residents to bathe in the irrigation canals or the sea.

Everyone fell silent when Maria Josefa descended. As she did, she greeted all the guests. The young women envied her luxurious dress, while the wives busied themselves stepping on their husbands' feet who had stopped dancing, open-mouthed as they stared at the descending Maria Josefa. She went straight to the door, as if looking for someone, and slipped away into the dark. That was the last night the people of San Roque saw Maria Josefa. The following day's stories said she eloped with her lover, they went to another province using the marooned along the shores of Bubog.

After the war, the townsfolk began to see a woman sitting by the half-open window of the big house. Her face remained elusive, always hidden beneath a black veil. She sat in the same spot every day, her chin resting on her hands, until dusk.

Unbothered by those passersby who stole quick glances at her before looking again towards the road to the market or turning back towards the sea, as if remembering something left behind that needed to be retrieved. And the children would scamper away in fear, no longer dared to carry out the daily plan to pick cashew, kamatsile, sineguelas, or guava fruits in the once-luxurious garden now overgrown with kakawate trees and grass.

Parts of the house's adobe walls had already crumbled, and it was said that many of the saints disappeared since the family left — after Josefa's father and brother joined the guerrillas. No one dared to enter the house except for the old caretaker who seems as old and frail as the house. An old woman, her pale skin peeling like dried fish forgotten under the sun after a long day of exposure. Flaking scales, like daing steeped too long in salt.

It is now a common knowledge in the entire town that Maria Josefa's father, Pidong, is the feared butcher of the guerrillas. Anyone caught visiting the house risked being suspected as collaborator. Pidong was the fiercest enemy of the Japanese. According to stories, after torturing captured Japanese soldiers, he would behead them and hang their heads on coconut trees. They called him Pidong Singgarong because of the long machete that he uses for beheading. His blade was very long that the Japanese could never figure out how to avoid it. It was said that when Pidong encounters Japanese soldiers, it seems they are playing the children's game singgarong, with Pidong as the chaser. The Japanese had to be very good at dodging his blade, or his head will surely separate from his body.

**An excerpt from *The Madwoman of the Town* (2022) originally written in Filipino
translated to English by the Author and published
by the University of the Philippines Press.**

Tara Claudine S. Frejas



Tara Frejas has been writing and self-publishing romance books since 2015, and now has a total of 16 books. From 2020 to 2022, she has written for, directed, and produced a number of online events for #RomanceClass, including #RCReadathon2020 and Kilig Cafe. She also directed a mini web series called *Hello, Ever After*.

In 2024, she became part of the translation team for Tepai Pascual's *Duty Ka Ba?* (Vol. 1). She also shared valuable knowledge about writing and developing romance work as a panelist for the 21st Ateneo National Writers Workshop in October 2024.

In the same year, Komiket's romance fiction imprint Blush Books acquired Tara's book *Scandalized* for its Philippine print edition, and as of this writing, she is working with BoldMP in Los Angeles for its screen adaptation.

From WAITING IN THE WINGS

By Tara Frejas

Laughter and music filled the air during Hiraya and Jericho's surprise engagement party at the Teatro Lakambini roof deck. Kai and Mark did a fantastic job refurbishing props and putting them together with borrowed items to transform the otherwise boring space into a posh rooftop lounge. Fairy lights, small paper lanterns, and paper cranes decorated the potted plants they kept on the deck, as well as the metal railings, adding magic to the ambiance.

Ramon got compliments for the food ("Couldn't have done it without Erin!"), and Chinee threw in a pretty cake with the liquor she promised to bring. The others prepared small gifts for the couple, which included a rather comical musical re-enactment of Hiraya and Jericho's love story.

As the night wore on, Jericho started an impromptu jam session which got everyone singing pop songs and showtunes alike. Even Ramon wasn't spared.

But as he crooned to Maghihintay Sa 'Yo with Jericho on guitar, Ramon spotted Erin walking toward the far end of the roof deck. Back and forth she paced, phone pressed to her ear. She remained standing there—leaning against the railings and looking down at the street—when he finished his song and let Hiraya take the stage.

"You okay over there?" Ramon asked as he approached Erin, a glass of soda in each hand.

Erin looked over her shoulder and smiled when she saw him. "Hey."

"Hey."

He heard his breath catch seeing light dance in her eyes, and everything else around him seemed to fade away. Even the thoughts in his head and the words he wanted to say fizzled at the tip of his tongue. At this moment in time, only Erin existed.

"Is that for me?" she asked, eyeing the drink in his hand.

"Oh, uh. Yeah, here." Ramon handed the glass to her, and she gladly accepted. "Thought you might be thirsty. You know...with all the pacing around you've been doing."

She made a face that told him she felt embarrassed. "Thanks, friend."

They leaned against the railing. Erin first, then him. But neither of them said another word for a while, until he threw her a sideways glance and found her sulking while staring at her half-consumed soda.

"Is there anything I can do to make you feel better?"

“I’m fine, thanks.”

“You know you can be honest with me, Erin.”

A soft breeze blew past, bringing to Ramon’s attention the heavenly smell of Erin’s shampoo. It didn’t help that she inched closer and leaned against his arm, her silent way of seeking comfort. He put an arm over her shoulder in response.

When she finally spoke up, she said, “I’m not sure I want this thing with Pio,” in a voice so soft, Ramon almost felt like she didn’t want him to hear it.

But he did, and his heart suddenly hiccuped.

“What? Why not?”

Damn it. He couldn’t have made an effort to sound less excited?

“I don’t know. He’s a great guy and we have a lot of fun when we’re together, but it just feels so weird having to sneak around.”

“Why are you sneaking around?”

“He can’t be seen with another girl. Just loveteam things.”

“Oh, I see.”

Erin groaned and shook her head. “It hasn’t been long since we’ve started this dating thing, and I already want more of his time. More of everything, actually. I feel so selfish right now.”

“No, Erin. Don’t say that.”

“Ramon, do you have someone you like?”

The question made his throat dry up all of a sudden. “Uh—yeah? Sure.”

“Do you spend a lot of time with her?”

“I...guess?”

“What—you’re not sure?”

“I mean, yeah, I spend time with her all right—but it’s time that’s not mine alone.” The words tasted bitter as he uttered them. “She’s pretty awesome, and a lot of people are drawn to her...so I just kinda share her time with everyone else.”

“And you’re okay with that?”

“Sure. It’s that or nothing at all.”

Erin snuggled close to him, as though returning the comfort he gave her. “Don’t you want more?”

“Of course I do. I just try to make as much of what I’m given. You don’t simply stop liking a person just because they can’t give you the same amount of affection—that’s selfish.”

“But don’t you get tired of that?”

“Maybe I will. Maybe then I can move on. But for now—” He looked at her and smiled despite the painful lump in his throat. “For now, my heart knows no one else.”

“Awww.” Erin’s lips bore a sympathetic little smile when she looked up at him again. “That’s sweet.”

A dry laugh escaped him. “Right?” he sighed, lifting a hand to her face and tucking a stray lock of hair behind her ear. In the background, Jericho began playing the opening chords to 90’s OPM classic Nandito Ako, and Ramon wondered if their musical director knew he was scoring this scene perfectly.

Make as much of what you’re given, he reminded himself. Now, then...

“Dance with me?” Ramon ventured to ask, and Erin’s eyes lit up like he offered her the stars. Victory, he thought, as he wrapped his fingers around her wrist and pulled her close.

It was amazing how they fell into step with each other so naturally, how they sort of knew where their hands should be—a pair clasped together, her free hand on his chest, and his on the small of her back—and how even their breathing seemed to match. As he swayed her gently to the sad love song he thought hit a little too close to home, Ramon let the song’s refrain escape his lips, low and whispery like he was letting Erin in on a secret. His secret.

There was a curious gleam in her eyes when their gazes met again, and her lips parted like she intended to ask him something. But before Erin could say anything, Ramon pressed a soft kiss on her hair.

Cheers erupted behind them, prompting them both to turn, surprised at the sudden spike in enthusiasm. As it turned out, Pio had arrived, bringing with him some wine and pizza.

“Well...what do you know,” Ramon mumbled and glanced at Erin. “He made it, after all.”

“Y-yeah.”

The distance between them grew by the second, but neither of them seemed eager to let go. Ramon’s pulse stuttered when she looked deep into his eyes, as if trying to coax his concealed feelings out of their cage.

She pulled away first, and he lost his chance once again.

“Thanks for keeping me company,” she said, using her hands now to smooth her hair down.

“Anytime,” he said, and she was off.

Ramon let out a huge exhale as he watched Erin skip toward Pio, welcoming him to the party with a hug and a kiss on the cheek. Unwilling to watch any more of their interactions, he returned to the ledge and their abandoned glasses of soda.

Something ice-cold touched his arm, making him flinch. A quick glance over his shoulder and he saw a bottle of beer, which Mark held out to him.

The stage manager looked concerned.

“Here, take it,” Mark said, flashing him a faint, knowing smile. “Soda’s not going to numb the pain.”

Ramon stared at the bottle of beer and took it, downing a huge swig without so much as a prelude. The cold, bitter brew wasn’t going to numb his heartache, but it might just help overpower the bitterness that simmered in his chest.

**An excerpt from *Waiting in the Wings* (2017)
published by CreateSpace Independent Publishing.**

Angelo R. Lacuesta



Angelo “Sarge” R. Lacuesta is a fictionist, essayist, and filmmaker. He has written more than ten books and written and produced two films, and has won many awards for his writing. He is the current president of the Philippine Centre of PEN (Poets, Essayists, Novelists) International.

His novel *JOY* was published by Penguin Random House SEA in 2022. His novel *IRÓ* (2025) was selected as part of “*Books at Berlinale*” at the Berlin Film Festival in 2024. In the same year, he wrote and produced the film “*An Errand*” for the Cinemalaya Film Festival. It was selected as part of the International Film Festival Rotterdam (IFFR). In 2025, “*Song of the Fireflies*,” a film he also wrote and produced, had its international premiere at the Manila International Film Festival in Los Angeles.

From CORAL COVE AND OTHER STORIES

By Angelo R. Lacuesta

You know what the hardest part was? It wasn't the coding and development, or hooking up with Google or Apple, or all the idiotic compliance we needed to go through with the SEC and the DTI. It was figuring out the prizes. The good ones and the bad ones. We must have gone through dozens of drinking sessions just trying to come up with the prizes. There were three of us on the board: myself, Wacky and Peter. Peter was the son of a mayor and grandson of a governor, and it turned out, a high school batchmate of mine, but I didn't know him personally. He was friend of a friend of Wacky on Facebook, though, and that was enough for Wacky to work on. That was how good this kid was. And that was how good I was at putting people together and getting them to do things for me. It's who you know and who they know. That's what entrepreneurship is all about in this country.

We huddled at Peter's favorite Quezon Avenue club and we always had his girls at the table. He called them "inspiration." But it was all serious. We had our laptops out. We had excel sheets. We were taking down notes, making lists, trying to top each other with the prizes. "Load!" "Kotse!" "Mediterranean Cruise!"

We encouraged the girls to play. "Around the world tour!" they said. "A condo unit!" "House and lot!" Shrieks of laughter. Peter was on a totally different level. He had the power to go all the way to the top. He knew people at every possible brand partner: PGA Cars, Princess Cruises, Ayala Land. "Let's talk to Andy, to Andy," he kept saying. He can give us a condo, a house and lot, no big deal. We just need to put his brand name somewhere." It took a little while before we realized he was talking about Andres Antonio, himself, who happened to be his motorcycle club buddy. The conversation took a brief detour into how it took them a scandalous three hours to take their Ducatis from Puerto Princesa to El Nido.

It got tough when we started thinking of the bad prizes. We were already stuck to the customers—through their mobile devices. By pricing the app at 99 cents, we demolished his pain points. We needed to put on our marketing hats: we needed to *stick to the customer*, *explore his pain points*, *exploit his fears*, and *dimensionalize the big idea*. We needed to drink more. Nothing scared Peter or kept him up at night more than missing out. This fear would shortly dimensionalize itself into a massively distributed raffle that delivered a thrill that the SEC, the ASC, the DTI and the KBP could not touch: the thrill of the unknown.

We set a parameter: one bad prize for every one thousand draws. Somewhere along the discussion we upped it to one million. We realized we needed to put it on the level of an urban legend, a chance so faint that users would actually doubt that the bad prize even existed.

“Let’s think of the legalities,” Paul said. Like a good politician, he was backing up, maybe looking for a way out.

“What legalities?” Wacky said. “Things are different now. Apps are global. Servers are outside jurisdiction. You can’t issue a subpoena against a server in Romania, or Russia.” No one at the table could argue against his facts. Instead, he told Paul, as though he’d taken a Ducati of his own to the meeting instead of the Camry he had purchased from his meth-addicted cousin for a song, what we should be thinking about is feasibility: “What is the critical mass?” “What are the data points?”

Wacky was already thumbing his phone, on chat mode with Marvin. He read out his response. “Phone number. Apple or Google account. Facebook details.” And then he added, with a quick groan that delivered nominal concern: “Postal address.”

I knew he was just reeling our sole investor back in. Ownership was a big word among startups.

“What if we cross it against those recently leaked voting records?” I asked. Wacky looked at me warmly; I had begun to live for his approval.

Peter lit up. I knew he was all-too familiar with election-related stuff. “We could. But what if they didn’t register?”

We turned quiet. By this time the girls had turned into bored children fiddling with their phones, touching up their makeup, the din of their voices rising as they discussed celebrities and teleseryes, and other girls. They spoke across us as though we had stopped existing and the pretext of them existing for us had disappeared. One of them spoke about a husband in Doha who didn’t know what she did for a living. What if he had the app and had won a prize? How would we serve him?

I saw them lapse into girlish sisterhood, their cellphones lighting up the same makeup and the same faces underneath, the sad eyes, the distrustful mouths. They’d even given themselves the same sort of names—Mina, Nika, Leica. I wondered who they really were and where they lived.

They probably roomed together in one of those cheap boarding houses at the edge of one of those slum areas. We only really saw how much poverty there was when your flight was landing—it was all the dark parts of the city, even in daytime, unreachable by the clogged streets.

“GPS?” I said. “Location services?”

“We could,” Wacky said, not taking his thumb off his phone as he looked at me and saw that I was looking at the girls, their faces lit up by their screens. “But we’d get a temporary location. We can’t act that fast. Besides, how many people turn their GPS on?” He was typing it in the chat with Marvin as he was saying it.

“Eventually,” Peter said. “Eventually.”

Wacky and I locked eyes. The user would eventually turn her GPS on—every selfie demanded a geotag. Even if she changed handsets, even if she changed payment plans or carriers, the GPS would show her up. And the app would know. If she won a good prize, she they would be notified as soon as she pressed the button: Congratulations, Ms. Porfiria Bongatog, a.k.a. Leical! Come to the head office to claim your baller wristband/umbrella/trucker cap. If they won a bad prize, they would get what everybody got—a cheery confirmation on the notifications bar: Thank you for your roll! The red button would go dark, and then, nothing. No feedback, no flash, no sound, no response. But it would quietly send out a signal if the GPS was on. If it was off, it would send the signal once it was turned on again. Hours later, weeks later, years later.

If the user restarted the app and attempted to roll again, he got the same thank you note. But he’d won already—he could delete the app and it would make no difference. By that time, the app would already be on tracking mode.

The network had infinite patience so it didn’t matter how long it needed to wait. In fact, it wasn’t even considered waiting. But we’d have a person on standby, waiting for the signals to come in. He’d be ready to serve the bad prize: a pail of water dumped on the head, a giftwrapped box that contained a dead animal, or fake news about the death of a loved one. It was slapstick, the stuff of noontime shows on TV. It was the kind of stuff people would pay to have done to their mother-in-law or their ex-spouse. When we thought of that angle the skies opened. Our imagination ran wild. We were suddenly in speculative territory.

Death was an ultimate bad prize, of course, and it was a useful benchmark and made for productive thought experiments. We imagined ourselves mercenaries so we could work out the mechanics behind it. It had become a sensational template, a joke that had a million punchlines, a wistful fantasy of power, all part of the spirit of the brainstorming session. “What’s the worst thing you could do to someone?” we asked ourselves. Murder. By then the word had turned abstract, like the word potential. It was easy to hire someone to kill someone—that was Peter again. Wacky and I had quickly learned to let him work out the last mile. Ownership. You didn’t even need to talk to them, he said. You could do it online. There was Tor and the darknet, where they traded drugs and child porn. There was the Philippine National Police.

**An excerpt from *Coral Cove and Other Stories* (2017)
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Angelo Miguel Mangubat



Angelo Miguel “Lio” Mangubat is the editor-in-chief of Summit Books. Under his leadership, Summit Books has expanded its lineup into graphic novels, LGBTQ+ fiction, self-help, business, prestige box sets, and coffee table books. Before working in the book industry, Lio edited numerous print and digital publications, including Spot.ph, Spin.ph, K-Zone, and Men’s Health Philippines. Lio is also the author of Straits Times bestseller *Silk, Silver, Spices, Slaves: Lost Tales from the Philippine Colonial Period, 1565-1946*, an anthology of historical essays. He also founded *The Colonial Dept.*, a narrative history podcast.

BASEBALL COUNTRY

By Lio Mangubat

The list of indignations heaped onto the Filipinos in the 1904 St. Louis World's Fair is a long and painful one. Three years after President Emilio Aguinaldo's surrender in the Philippine-American War, the War Department of the United States gathered more than a thousand Filipinos from across the archipelago and herded them into what could only be called a human zoo. One thousand two hundred Filipinos were packed into nineteen hectares of land in Missouri called the Philippine Reservation. The humans on display were grouped by exhibitors into living dioramas, and categorized according to "least civilized," "semi-civilized", and "civilized and cultured". In the center was a fake Manila, with a replica of a cathedral and displays of captured weapons. Ringed around this ersatz capital were four themed villages: Negrito, Igorot, Moro, and Visayan.

For half a year, from the start of summer all the way to the dead of winter, the various Filipinos on display showed off native dances, shot bows and arrows, posed for photographs, or cooked dogs. In August, there was one other little sideshow that some of the Filipinos also had to do: an athletic competition.

They called this competition Anthropology Days. Organizers wanted to test the athletic abilities of the different peoples on display, and judge the physical prowess of different racial groups. The Filipinos had the largest exhibition in the fair, but there were people from other places there as well. And so the Americans got curious. Who could run faster: an American Indian or a Sama from Mindanao? Who could lift heavier weights: a Syrian, a Patagonian, or an Igorot?

Eighteen events were organized over two days. These included running, jumping, archery, and many more. The referee was a man named Luther Gulick, a famed PE teacher who counted James Naismith, the inventor of basketball, as one of his students. Gulick, of course, could only holler instructions to the different athletes in English. For many of the participants, this would be their first encounter with American-style athletics.

As you can imagine, the event was no Olympics. It could even be kindly called a mess. Sprinters would take off at speed, then wait for friends to catch up. No one knew what to do with the baton in a relay race. The swimming event had to be canceled when only the Sama signed up. Some participants were more interested in hamming it up for the photographers than in winning the competitions.

But there was at least one sport that was successfully finished to completion: the fifty-foot pole climb. The winner was an Igorot named Basilio, with a time of just twenty seconds — ten seconds faster than the Native American in second place. Was this the first-ever recorded international first-place finish by a Filipino in sports?

It's not that Filipinos had never heard of sports before the Americans came. National hero Dr. Jose Rizal was a ridiculously talented athlete, skilled in fencing, shooting, and weightlifting. Sipa was played well before the Spanish times, and if popular arnis history is to be believed, the Pinoy martial arts continued to be developed right under the Spanish noses.

But the modern idea of competitive sports, as we recognize it today, came aboard American steamships. On their decks, mingling with the soldiers, were secretaries of the Young Men's Christian Association—decades too early for the famous Village People dance choreo, but just as eager to use the rigor and discipline of sports to “civilize” and “Christianize”. During the early years of the occupation, US soldiers were also given one day a month to play sports, like baseball, track...and boxing. That last one became immensely popular in the archipelago. It is said that a Black soldier who left the US armed forces and joined the Philippine side in the war brought with him a pair of boxing gloves. Another origin story said that Filipinos had actually learned the sweet science around ten years earlier, as US prisoners of war, or while serving in American merchant ships.

Whatever the origin story of Pinoy boxing, it became popular enough that by 1909, Frank Churchill decided to set up the Olympic Club in what was once a cockfighting pit. The first Filipino boxer to publicly strap on gloves and step into the ring was said to be Frank Churchill's driver, Leoncio Bernabe. He made his debut in 1916 at the Olympic Club on a Wednesday night—the one day in a week that the club allowed local amateurs. Soon after, a legend was born in that ring: a man named Francisco Guilledo, who later took on the name Pancho Villa. After losing only three fights in the Philippines, Churchill took him to the States, where he became one of the greatest flyweights in the history of the sport.

But if boxing was the raucous, rowdy, violent favorite, baseball was the crowd-pleasing, family-friendly pastime that got a nice, shiny colonial stamp of approval. It arrived, like boxing did, aboard American military ships. The first baseball match in the Philippines was fought between sailors and marines in May 1898, right after the Battle of Manila Bay. Fresh from sinking the pitiful Spanish armada that defended the city, sailors aboard Commodore George Dewey's flagship broke out the gloves and bats in a Cavite field to wallop the army team. The ground forces would not take this insult sitting down; by 1899, the batters of the 24th Infantry—composed entirely of Blacks—were regularly trouncing the marine teams in the military leagues.

The colonial authorities were eager to evangelize this sport to the newly conquered Filipinos. Plowing through enthusiastic letters of the time, it seemed to be the secret sauce that would solve all of the Philippines' social ills. Dean Worcester—Philippine Secretary of the Interior from 1901 to 1913—once said of Filipino students, "Baseball is one of the really important things which the Bureau of Education has taught the boys. It brightens them up and increases their activity and alertness." Even Manuel L. Quezon, in a speech in Boston in 1912, was moved to say, "Nothing less than a miracle could bring freedom to the Filipinos so quickly as a race of men trained early on the athlete fields with the game of baseball."

For the Filipinos, there was no escaping the newfangled game. In occupied towns, soldiers commandeered fields and church plazas and turned them into baseball fields. At school, students, boys and girls alike, were handed a stitched, hide-covered rubber ball and told, "Batter up." In 1902, the first quality ballpark was constructed in Paco Field. By 1903, four Manila academies were fielding their own teams in inter-school competition. As US soldiers and schools took over the islands, the sport quickly spread far and wide—to Cebu, to Tacloban, to Jolo, and even to the Igorots of Benguet, who played the occupier's sport in caps, jerseys, and loincloths. The Americans called them the "G-Srring Baseball Team."

Within ten years, the Director of Education proclaimed that baseball was "nearer to being the national sport of the Philippines than of the United States."

With leagues sprouting up all over the country, Filipinos were caught in a contagious, irrepressible baseball fever. In 1912, a Japanese team from Waseda University challenged the team from Cebu, and a thousand fans in the stands screamed themselves hoarse and nearly rioted in glee as the Cebuanos coolly dismantled the visitors, 3-1. When the Waseda team headed to the capital city for a showmatch at the Manila Carnival, five thousand spectators watched breathlessly as the home team squeaked by the Japanese with 3-2 on the scoreboards.

The biggest semi-professional circuit of the day was the Manila League, originally set up in 1909. It was made up of four clubs: an All-Army team, a Marines team, a civilian Manila club made up of college kids and minor leaguers, and an All-Filipino team that was nicknamed the Brownies.

In the Manila League, earnings from the games were split among the players, and you could earn a salary of forty-five to sixty dollars a month. It was a steady gig—in comparison, an average factory worker back in the States could expect to bring in around ten dollars a week.

And as the capital city's biggest league, players could count on very energetic fans. Nozaleda Park was an outdoor field finished in time for a December 1913 exhibition game of Major League All-Stars, culled from the New York Giants and the Chicago White Sox.

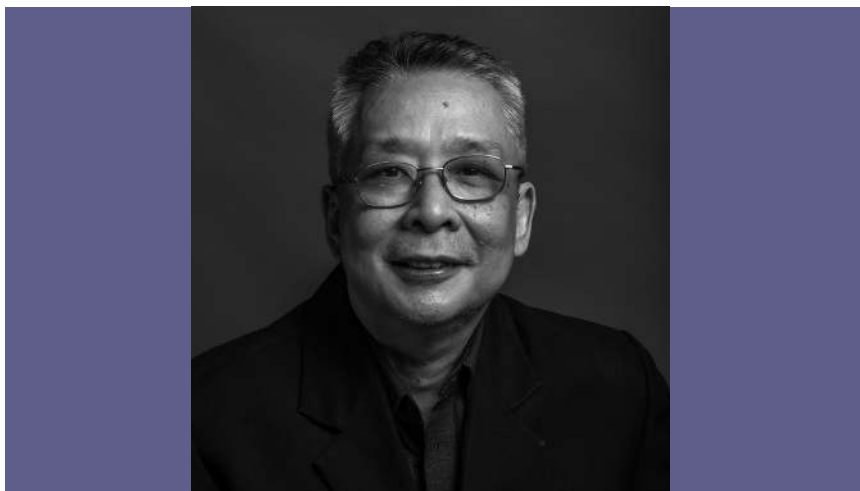
Spectators paid seven dollars for a seat. When the game was done, it was turned over to the Manila League. At max capacity, Nozaleda Park could seat three thousand baseball-hungry fans.

However, one of the best American baseball teams in the country—the squad of the 24th Infantry, the same team who'd beaten the Marine batters back in 1899—could not join the Manila League. Why? The American teams did not accept Blacks.

Meanwhile, the All-Filipino team in the Manila League was holding their own. They were called the Brownies, probably as an insult, but the players wore their nickname with pride. As in boxing matches, Filipino fans eagerly packed the baseball stands. For many, the pain of war and occupation was still a fresh wound, and sports, as historian Gerald Gems wrote, provided a legal avenue for Filipinos to get one over their colonizers—or as he described it, "a means of subdued retaliation against the Americans." In other words, they couldn't go to war again, but they could sure kick their butts in a game of baseball. Inside the Manila League, the Brownies had a win rate of over sixty percent.

An excerpt from *Silk, Silver, Spices, Slaves* | *Lost Tales from the Philippine Colonial Period, 1565-1964* (2024) published by Faction Press Singapore.

Charlson L. Ong



Charlson L. Ong has published four collections of short fiction *Men of the East and Other Stories*, *Woman of Amkaw and Other Stories*, *Conversion and Other Fictions*, and *Of that Other Country* we now speak as well as five novels *An Embarrassment of Riches*, *Banyaga: A Song of War*, *Blue Angel/White Shadow and White Lady Black Christ*, *The Arbat Son*. His short fiction has been compiled in *Sojourner, Settler, Seer* (MILFLORES, 2024).

He has won the Carlos Palanca Memorial Awards for Short Story in English, the PH National Book Award for both short fiction and the novel. He has also won a Filipino Academy of Motion Picture Arts (FAMAS) Award for Best Adapted Screenplay for *TANABATA'S WIFE* that he wrote, co-produced and co-directed.

He is a board member of the Philippine Chapter of the International PEN.

RAIN

By **Charlson L. Ong**

It had finally rained. Heavy, harsh, unrelenting like sheets of broken glass crashing the earth. Not the odious, spineless showers of late May unleashing the packed heat of streets as streams of dragon's breath but as a deafening downpour ominous of floods. The kind of rain that in some drunken midnight you'd bet your sanity would draw blood from the weak-skinned. And that was in fact the first thing I looked for in Cornelia, her pale rouge gentle scars upon those luminous cheeks, rushing in from the rain, dripping wet, smelling of June; her breasts clinging to soggy yellow cotton like peaches in season. "Are you hurt?" I asked.

"Cut that out, Ah Beng!" Father barked. He's taken to snarls and frowns after his dentist extracted the last remaining incisor from his nicotined gums. My father's teeth aren't meant for smiling. They're mostly for those melon seeds he chews on endlessly. I screamed out in exuberance at the freshness of the season. He glared at me almost out of pity and turned away in disgust. He never finds anything worthwhile in the changing of seasons—his whole life had been rained out. I can't figure out why he bothers tearing his calendar religiously every morning much less why he's been in this business of selling umbrellas for the last forty of his seventy five years.

"It's raining saints and angels!" I quipped, finding it rather witty. Father disagreed, he smirked and chewed on a dumpy seed. He thinks I'm mad. I inherited my streak of looniness from those of Mother's side who were traveling acrobats back in Amoy, China. "Dry up!" He yelped at Cornelia in his Chinaman's Tagalog. The woman, not quite at ease for her fourth day at work, had gone ahead to brush clean the umbrellas while, herself, was soaking wet. The irony struck home and she was all the more imbued with a rustic aura. I began whistling "Stardust." Father slammed his Englishman's pipe upon the counter and strode upstairs to his room. Cornelia looked at me, bothered and bewildered. I shrugged and she went on dusting our umbrellas.

Cornelia was supposed to be the replacement for old Luisa. For twenty years the Visayan—she claimed descent from Lapu-Lapu—served as house help, saleslady, and Father's personal secretary until a sister in the US sent for her. With our sales down to a high of ten umbrellas on a good month, I really doubted the need for any replacement. In fact, I couldn't see the point for any of us to be counting roaches inside that den of ancient nylon and rank-smelling canvas. Some of our decade-old stock had become nests for spiders and insects. Once I suggested donating the whole lot to anti-riot policemen for cover against rock-throwing rallyists and turning our store into a video shop instead. That convinced Father to give up on me.

Father's inner life ended when Mother died. It took the cancer less than a month to finish off her uterus seven years ago, and the lingering power of death has since replaced mother's verve as the vital presence in our lives. What remained of the old man's sense of redemption flew away with my elder brother Ah Jou—he prefers Edwin—to Johns Hopkins University for his training in thoracic surgery. He swore on Mother's altar to come home in two years but it's been five since we've heard from him and Father's given up on him too. Edwin was his favorite. Father always said that Mother would still be around if the cancer had waited long enough for Edwin to acquire his M.D. Father hoped for all of us to become doctors. My sister Agnes opted for Economics. Unfortunate but harmless—"She's a woman, after all," Ph.D or no Ph.D. She did get married right after graduation and bore a pair of bubbly twins Mother missed seeing by five months. For a while his grandtwins—"Lan Ping and Yung Jun"—he called them, Blue Apple and Brave Gentleman, brought forth what remained of Father's good nature. But my brother-in-law, Jerry, who named the kids Xerxes and Antipordia after God knows who, and was bent on making English their first language to Father's dismay, hied off his family to Canada with his Ford auto dealership in Toronto and investor's visa.

Father was stuck with me. A sick joke of fate. "English and Comparative Literature?! What the hell is that?! Can you raise a family on that?! You think I'm a billionaire? You think you can live off me for the rest of your useless life?! What do you want to be? Some sick beggar stalking wedding receptions for free meals?"

"I want to be a writer."

"What on earth can you write about?"

"You!"

"Don't you dare."

Of course he isn't really daring. My father doesn't dare, he threatens. Not that he cares to read any of my stuff but threatening me exercises his pent-up aggressiveness rundown by competition from high-rise department stores and a million other umbrella outlets across the city. Umbrellas seem to have gone out of fashion with Imelda Marcos. Between proletariats and their fellow travelers choosing to withstand the elements during their intermittent street rallies and the incorrigible air-conditioned elite, the dependable middle ground of aging clerks and housewives preferring even token protection against fickle weather appear thinning out.

"Umbrellas," I explained to Father, "used to be restricted to queens and emperors but these days they've somehow become mascots of accommodation unacceptable to a radicalized generation." His blank stare twitched slightly but remained empty. He no longer cared to feel

disgusted over me; he's had far greater losses in life for my "insanity" to constitute a mournable tragedy.

Lim tek yung & sons umbrellas had seen its glory days. One of the last remaining stores in the sidestreet at the old Binondo area known as "umbrella alley" during pre-war days; it used to enjoy a bustling retail trade and a lucrative wholesale business across the country. It had built for Father a modest fortune, which he wisely invested in stocks and bonds. Lim had seen the good times coming to a close long before his sales actually dipped. Father had inherited the store from his uncle who had arranged for Father's coming over to Manila from Amoy to help run the business. My grandaunt, left behind in the mainland, had remained childless, and granduncle was too prudish to take a huanna wife. He died of pneumonia during the War and Father took over the store. He married Mother after Liberation.

During those days most of the merchandise were imported from the US. Then, umbrellas were less of an appendage than a necessity. People didn't mind lugging them around and leaving them behind in coffee shops and moviehouses. Despite, as Father insists, the fact that the sun was less torrid then and rainstorms quite rare. In the late fifties, Japanese umbrellas began finding their way into the market. Not long later, they would flood out the rest of the competition as their makers created their post-war economic miracle. It was a miracle Father refused to acknowledge; he thought it a gruesome historical injustice. Father hated Japanese umbrellas, and everything else from the Rising Sun, as much as the imperial bayonet men who massacred two-thirds of our kin in Amoy, including my grandparents. He kept a picture of the Japanese officer who visited the umbrella store at odd hours during the war and hounded my granduncle to death inside the bathroom, and regularly pissed on it. When the picture turned yellow, he even had the thing retouched by a portraitist. Why on earth Capt. Endo ever gave him a personal picture was one of those inexplicable sidelights of war. Small wonder then that Father wouldn't touch Japanese umbrellas even as his rivals were dumping them all over the islands. Forty years after the war, and not a shadow of Sony or Mitsubishi inside our home. We still drive around in the gas-guzzling eight-cylinder '78 Mustang. In the 70's Taiwanese umbrellas replaced the relatively expensive Japanese makes, but we were too far behind to even dream of a comeback. When I suggested shifting to Japanese electronics, Father gave me a look that'd scare away any lingering kamikaze ghost. What right did this old man have calling me a madman? If there was any stain of insanity in me, it was definitely spilled over from him. I'd once wanted to say this to him point-blank, but copped out at the last instant. Anyway, I've more or less given up on him.

Father never hoped for any of us to take over the business. Businessmen were only a bunk over beggars who scraped bottom in his distinctive social pile. They existed only to father doctors, accountants, generals, and prime ministers. I, who'd given up on becoming any of those, had realized that learning to sell umbrellas was the only way I could afford burying my nose in Dr. Zhivago half the time and eventually getting anything of my own published. "If I'm taking over the business someday, then I must begin having a say about how things are run," I faced up to him once. He glared at me as though seeing some alien futuristic creature or a ghost from his past—"I'm not dead yet."

**An excerpt from *Sojourner, Seeker, Settler* (2024)
published by Milflores Publishing, Inc.**

Chuckberry J. Pascual



Chuckberry J. Pascual is a novelist, short story writer, and translator. He is the author of the novels *Mars, Watch Out for Zombies!*, *Mars, Watch Out for more Zombies!*, and *The Vanishing Village* and the short story collections *A Country of Corpses* and *The Vanished*. He has also authored books on ethnography, literary criticism, and literary history such as *Entering the Scene: The Movie Theater in Philippine Literature and a Study of Selected Movie Theaters in Recto, What is Most Important*, and *The Outsider in Literature*. He translated into Filipino four short story collections by Cristina Pantoja Hidalgo and Miguel Syjuco's Man Asian winning novel, *Ilustrado*. Most of his works have been finalists and winners at the National Book Awards, Gintong Aklat Awards, and National Children's Book Awards.

From THE RUNAWAY RING

By Chuckberry J. Pascual

Everything began after the final mass last Sunday. Bree was finishing off the last drop of the sauce from her sweet beef stew at Blesilda's diner, and was preparing to pay the bill, when she overheard the conversation of two young people sitting at the next table.

"I thought we would all be searched on our way out of the church," said the guy with the baseball cap. His cap was askew, as if he didn't check himself in the mirror before leaving the house.

The other one guffawed. "Really no strategy! If someone really stole that, it won't be in the church anymore. It would be at a pawnshop." The guy wore a sleeveless undershirt. Bree couldn't help but watch him scratch the side of his left armpit.

Bree stood up and walked towards Blesilda. "Here's my payment, Aling Bles."

"Don't stare too hard. He might turn into stone," the vendor whispered.

"Oh stop, you," Bree answered while combing her shoulder-length hair with her left hand. She would do this whenever she felt embarrassed. She had forgotten how sharp the old woman's eyes could be.

"Hey, Brigido, he's still a boy, remember." The vendor took the payment.

"No, I just heard what they were talking about. Do you know what happened in the—"

"That's what I'm telling you. You keep staring at things too much you're missing the news. Everyone's been talking about it."

There was only a table between their conversation and the young men, so she pulled the old woman out of their earshot. "So what exactly happened at—"

"Why don't you let go of me," the vendor said, pulling away.

"Doña Mary Juliet's ring is missing."

If Blesilda uttered any other name, she would be wondering why the disappearance of a small piece of jewelry could be such big news. But she grew up in Talong Punay. She knew that the family of Doña Mary Juliet Montojo was the spine of the barangay. The late old Montojo, Don Recaredo, gave the biggest donations each year when the feast day of San Antonio de Padua, the patron saint of the barangay, came around. His wife, in turn, would always be the Hermana Mayor during the parade of the Holy Cross. Every year, the family mansion of the Montojos would bear witness to the preparation of young women changing into their gowns for the parade. Participants in the parade never ran out of candles and sparklers, because even those were donated by the family. For every tarpaulin announcing the barangay's latest projects, such as the renovation of the basketball court or the installation of a new waiting shed, there would always be, under the barangay captain's face, the words "with the generous help of the Montojo Family."

There had been many attempts to convince any of the Montojos to run for barangay captain, for councilor of their district in Malabon, and even for mayor during the last election, but the family remained obstinate in their refusal. It was enough for them that they had power beyond votes. They may not have positions, but politicians still went to them for help. No barangay captain, councilor or mayor had won without their family's support. In whatever opportunity, such as whenever they would hand out prizes for basketball leagues or crown the new Miss Barangay Talong Punay, they would receive more adoration from the crowd than whichever official was present.

Despite all of these, no one in Barangay Talong Punay could be sure as to how the Montojo Family got that rich. They all just woke up one day to the fact that the family had become the royal blood of the barangay. The elders were of no help to this mystery, because they would just say that there already were Montojos in Malabon even prior to the arrival of the tram. (Which didn't last anyway, but the family and their riches remained.) And of course, their recurring rumor about Don Recaredo's great-great-grandfather was that he was the first Spaniard to settle in Malabon.

According to elders who already knew how to wash their own bums when the Japanese came, this was what their elders told them: during the Spanish era, Talong Punay was nothing but grassland. No one dared to settle in the area except for a handful of fishermen who built their dwellings there. This was because Talong Punay was close to the Malabon River. The Montojos' great-great-grandfather was the only one who risked to buy a land smothered by tall grass, and established a fishing business. This Spaniard was a peculiar one, because he only had business on his mind. There had not been any trace of political or power-hungry schemes in the Montojo family. Not one of their forebears had even been a

cabeza or gobernadorcillo. (There were conjectures that theirs must have been mixed with Chinese blood. This was allegedly the source of the business acumen of their descendants. This suspicion had no credible basis, though it remained a possibility because of their skin complexion.) Of course, Talong Punay was also affected by the arrival of the Americans and the Japanese, but for some reason, the family always bounced back. They always had an enterprise behind them.

Especially in the present. The Montojos own almost half of all the market stalls in the city of Malabon. They also had a grocery, a restaurant, a fish sauce factory, and a mini-mall filled with clothing kiosks, cellphone repair shops and internet cafes. But the most enduring and biggest source of their income is the consignment, the fishing brokerage, near the river at the boundary of Malabon and Navotas.

Doña Mary Juliet, the spinster daughter of the late Don Recaredo, had become the admiral of their business fleet. In other words, she owned Talong Punay. And her ring is missing.

It was no surprise to Bree that Blesilda heard the news from her patron at the market (“It was Elsie, granddaughter of Aling Tala, the mackerel vendor whose weighing scale was never rigged,” boasted Blesilda). It had been all the whispers at the consignment. The sort of whispers that had nothing to do with haggling for fish “But why was it included in the mass?” Bree asked.

“When was the last time you went to church? Haven’t they been asking for donations all the time after communion? They don’t want people to leave until they’ve given coin for the chapel’s renovation,” Blesilda answered.

An excerpt from *The Vanished* (2017)
translated to English by Ned Parfan and published by 19th Avenida Publishing.

Analyn Salvador-Amores



Analyn Salvador-Amores, DPhil (Oxon) is Professor of Anthropology and former Director of the Museo Kordilyera, the ethnographic museum of the University of the Philippines Baguio. She has published extensively on Cordillera material culture and the Indigenous peoples of Northern Luzon. A graduate of social and cultural anthropology at the University of the Philippines and the University of Oxford. Her research interests include anthropology of the body, non-Western aesthetics, material culture, endangered cultures, ethnographic museums, Indigenous Peoples, and colonial photography in the Cordillera region. Her current project in collaboration with German museums is *Hunting for Artifacts: 19th Century German Travelers in the Luzon Cordillera* (2025), edited by Professor Emeritus Delfin Tolentino, Jr., and published by the Cordillera Studies Center, UP Baguio.

From HUNTING FOR ARTIFACTS: 19th CENTURY GERMAN EXPLORERS IN THE LUZON CORDILLERA

The essays that make up this volume are the logical offshoot of a project called Understanding Igorot Life-World from the Ethnographic Collections of the Early German Travelers in the Cordillera. Conceptualized and spearheaded by UP Baguio anthropology professor Analyn Salvador-Amores, the project drew its primary inspiration from the travel accounts of German explorers who visited the Northern Luzon Cordillera in the late 19th century. These explorers not only recorded the unfamiliar practices they witnessed in the villages they visited but they also collected and documented objects of everyday life. What happened to the Igorot artifacts collected and brought to Europe by these German visitors?

This migration of objects is a curious tale of how varies items from sedentary societies transformed into mobile artifacts with the rise of new epistemological projects in the 19th century, when Europe, animated by its discoveries, sought to understand its difference from the far-flung societies it had colonized. Though the “primitive” artifacts gathered through collecting expeditions had significant contribution to the establishment of ethnology departments in various museums in Europe, the collections have not been seriously examined because the concerned museums lack experts on Philippine culture, particularly on the material culture of Northern Luzon.

In 2019 together with Eliza Consul, a Baguio-based professional photographer, Salvador-Amores surveyed and documented the collections of Cordillera artifacts in five major museums in Germany and Vienna: Berlin Ethnologisches Museum in Berlin, the Staatliche Ethnographische Sammlungen Sachsen Museum für Völkerkunde Dresden in Dresden; the GRASSI Museum für Völkerkunde zu Leipzig in Leipzig; the Weltkulturen Museum in Frankfurt; and Weltmuseum Wien in Vienna. These museums were chosen because of their significant holdings, their connection to the German traveller-collectors who did work in the Cordillera, and the role they played in the development of German museum collections. Each of these museums and their Cordillera holdings are featured in the essays that make up the present volume. Together with accompanying catalog of objects, they provide a comprehensive survey of Cordillera artifacts in major European museums.

**Synopsis of *Hunting for Artifacts: 19th Century German Explorers in the Luzon Cordillera*
edited by Delfin Tolentino, Jr.**

and published by Cordillera Studies Center, University of the Philippines Baguio (2025).

Robin Jason A. Sebolino



Robin Jason A. Sebolino is currently an instructor at the University of Asia and the Pacific. He obtained his undergraduate degree in Literature from De La Salle University-Manila and his master's in Writing and Performing and Publishing at the University of Leeds. He is a novelist and a publisher.

He currently leads Plaza Books in fulfilling a project to publish and promote manuscripts that advocate traditional Philippine values. In reference to such values, the organization specifically refers to the country's multicultural heritage, in which Hispanic, Chinese, and Austronesian cultures have merged—and continue to merge—in shaping Philippine society.

From VASSALS OF THE VALLEY

By **Robin A. Sebolino**

This story of an ex-pirate happened in the late 16th century, in an archipelago southeast of the Asian continent, on the island of Luzon, east of the Hoang Sa Archipelago. It began as the other flame of the sunset fled before the spreading darkness while a choir of crickets sang from the trees. Their harmony sailed down the valley, past the shadow of great mountains, vanishing into the reeds, palms, and the grand river that fed a mangrove forest. The river answered back with its rush and flow. Small barrios, barangays holding hundreds of families by the river's banks, also spoke with their bright torchlights and zithers. Their music reached the heights of the western mountain range, touching a small camp where the ex-pirate, Kalag, told his sister that they could enjoy the faint celebratory sounds later. He had to explain why it might be wise for her to join him.

He laughed and explained an important point while rubbing his rounded belly underneath his blue silken shirt. He proposed that they travel southwards or to the western pueblos. Then he mentioned the northern kingdoms in an almost solemn voice. Although promising, he judged the eastward journey to be out of the question unless they found a ship big enough to cross the Pacific. They could be anywhere but in the mountains. No civilization had much of a future in the mountains.

“So you have made up your mind to abandon the land?” replied Tala. Like her brother, she had a stout build and a brown complexion. She maintained a beautiful face, as one might insist that her brother had a pair of handsome, charcoal eyes.

“Why not? We throw away rubbish. I think it's no different from moving away from a garbage pile.”

“Rubbish? Garbage pile?”

“I am joking.”

“Are you sure you know what you're talking about?” “I have seen many places, and I like to think that I'm quite good at adapting to them, wherever they might be.” He paused and thought about mentioning that it might be hopeless for them to wait for their lost sister. He dismissed the idea.

She was still their sister. “I understand that the most important things are the land and the people we can rely on and all that. Good weather helps too. But I think we’ll have these elsewhere if we make the effort to secure them.” Kalag reined in his impulse to say more.

“I thought pirates were used to hardship.” “We are.”

“But you are still always after comfort. Don’t know real, honest work. Always running away if not coercing or stealing”

Kalag laughed.

“You belong to this land, and we have much to do here. Look at yourself. You’re getting old fast.” “Doesn’t matter.”

“Have you even thought of starting a family?” Tala spoke in a calm voice. “You’ll ask me. Where is my own family? Well, I’ll get there. It’s in my plans. But let’s get back to you, because we want a big brother we can look up to, not someone we’ll be ashamed of.

There’s always something wrong when people abandon the land. Do you see what I mean? We aren’t going to see eye-to-eye on this subject.”

“No.”

“Well, maybe living away from society will do you some good.”

“Okay, okay. Time will tell. Tala, please think about what I told you. Nevertheless, I’m prepared to go alone.” Kalag leaned on the wall of his hut. Outside the window, fireflies blinked their luminescent abdomens. No such creatures existed on the oceans, and he wondered whether Manila had them.

“And you, think about finding a woman, having children, and then teaching them how to live a life.” Tala got up from the soft rug covering the bamboo floor. “Understand? In the next few days, for our sake, please don’t bring up any suggestions about going away. I appreciate that you’re honest with me, but I can neither support nor take part in it. Never. Good evening.” She left her brother’s hut and walked quickly away, under the cold and dark drizzle, towards the festive music.

In the middle of the mountain camp, small droplets of rain sizzled over a large bonfire. Datu Mactal, chieftain of the now landless barrio, gathered the families and their slaves and peons. The dancing, singing, and the flowing zither orchestra stopped as he called everyone's attention and gave an elaborate speech on the unforgivable fault of treachery.

From a distance, Kalag watched the chieftain, dressed in yellow silken garb, with a dagger clipped to his sash.

Eleven captives stood in front of the bonfire. The men only had loincloths on them, and they shivered in the cold. Completely naked, the women crouched with arms covering their chests.

**An excerpt from the *Vassals of the Valley* (2023)
published by Plaza Books.**

Beverly Siy



Beverly “Bebang” Siy is a Filipino writer and translator. Her well-loved book, *It’s a Mens World*, is a collection of “humorous yet poignant” personal essays about coming-of-age right in the very heart of the red-light district in Ermita, Manila. It marked her contribution to Philippine women writing. She has authored eleven books.

Siy is an active participant in various literary organizations and publications, championing Filipino literature and copyright awareness. To further her cause, together with her husband, she founded, Isang Balangay Media Productions, an independent publishing house dedicated in enriching local communities’ literary wealth and resources.

From RABBIT LOVE

By Beverly Siy

So she's still your girlfriend.

Do you remember the last time we've met years ago? You said you had a girlfriend then. "Let me take a look at her." I said. I wanted to see the face of the girl who captivated your finicky heart. I wanted to know what she has that I don't. The me who's been trying to catch your attention for so long. Even from way, way back when loneliness was devastating you and you were crawling in the dark.

You showed me her picture. "She's really pretty." I said.

Truthfully though, she has an ordinary face: not ugly, not pretty. She's just lucky she's moneyed. Sometimes a girl becomes pretty if her complexion and her clothes are good. She looks upper-class, sophisticated. That is why other people call her pretty. Pretty is what they call those types of girls.

You told me that time that you were on a cool-off period. Because she was still seeing her ex-BF. Her ex-BF was even her companion one Christmas and you didn't like that so you called it off.

Poor you, I thought in the back of my mind. Why didn't you pick me? My heart suggested. But of course we stayed quiet - Me and my heart. But you know what? The hope that you'd fall for me burst aflame all the more. Maybe you were telling me this story to hint that it could be us now, later, or maybe even tomorrow.

When I was in high-school, a woman visited our classroom. She lectured us on studying. How are we going to be better students? What are effective study habits? What tips can you use while taking exams? Etcetera.

Her advice to average students like me: Observe your classmates, pick one, and turn them into your rabbit. Your rabbit should be one of the more excellent students in class. No one should know they are your rabbit save yourself. The next thing you ought to do is to chase their grades. If they score 20 in more than a 25 item quiz, you should score 20 or 21 in the next test. If they garnered a score of 87 on a science project, you should get 87 or 88 in the next one yourself.

I followed this advice and chose Jessie, one of the brightest know-it-alls in class. I made it a point to investigate what his quiz scores and test results were. And just as expected, mine were always lower than his so I poured in a little more midnight oil. The operative word was “little” to avoid short-circuiting my mother’s brain if I changed all of a sudden. It didn’t take long for my scores to go as high as Jessie’s and even a little bit more.

Yes!

My report card celebrated. Party time!

Jessie graduated with honors. I didn’t but at least I wasn’t among the laggards in class. My grades weren’t super high but they weren’t as low as my previous grades. One more thing, I was able to pass the entrance exam of my dream university. Not bad. If I didn’t have a rabbit, I would’ve been removed from our section during 4th year high school, nor would have I been able to step into my dream university. Good thing I had one.

From the time I first knew you, I started making better and better things out of my life. Everything I have ever done was for you. So you’d fall for me.

I beautified our house, put in a few appliances which models were in the same millenium as us, and had curtains installed so it won’t be that embarrassing should you come over in these parts. I persevered in schooling plus I am saving as much as I can while working. A day off? Who needs it? It’s go time even if it’s a Sunday. Hustle whenever I can hustle. I have been making plans because of you, for you. After I graduate, I’ll apply for office work while working on a side job so I can pile up those savings fast. Isn’t it that these days it’s not just the groom who spends for their wedding? What’s a good side job? Writing’s okay - I know something about it at least. Or tutoring English. Every Saturdays and Sundays, I can teach Koreans. They’ve spread everywhere here now. I can also do hosting jobs. Birthdays, baptisms, children’s parties. It would be such a waste not to – it’s for you, I am game.

I kept chasing and chasing you. It came to my mind to pursue someone else. But then you’ve started putting an all out charm offensive. To me.

You see, you also want to be pursued.

No problem. Even if the pursuit takes my entire life, it’s okay by me.

But you know what, I promise, if I ever catch up to you, I will never let you go. I will embrace you, kiss you all over your body, until my lips get really fatigued. Then I will lock you up in my long awaiting palms. I will let my fingers savor every strand of your hair. I will keep stroking and petting you. Afterwards, I will slowly twist your neck. Twist it and twist it until your breath cuts off. With full fury I will declare to the world: you're one dastardly bunny.

An animal.

**An excerpt from *It's Raining Mens* (2014),
originally written in Filipino, translated to English by Ken Ishikawa
and published by Anvil Publishing, Inc.**

Yvette Natalie U. Tan



Yvette Tan is one of the Philippines' most celebrated horror writers. Aside from short fiction collections in English and Tagalog, she's written a feature film that received nationwide release and co-written a libretto for a ballet that was performed by Ballet Philippines on the main stage of the Cultural Center of the Philippines. She was the official scribe of the Manila Biennale in 2018 and her story was the companion piece to the artwork that adorned the Philippine pavilion in the 2021 Frankfurt Book Fair. She co-hosted "Trese After Dark," the behind-the-scenes companion to the Netflix hit anime "Trese." She was a creative consultant for a Filipino game inspired by the country's mythical creatures and the collection *Seek Ye Whore and Other Stories* was nominated for the 41st National Book Awards. Her works have been translated into Spanish, Czech, Hungarian, and French.

From HORROR VACUI

By Yvette Tan

Joshua looked up at his grandmother's house. It had been years since he last visited; more than a decade since his family had migrated and his summer visits had stopped.

The house looked very different from the last time he was there, so much so that he did a double take at the sight of it. He wondered if it had indeed changed over time or if his memories were colored by childhood.

In his mind, his lola's house was a mansion. A beautiful structure filled with expensive furniture and exciting secrets, hidden nooks and crannies that became entrances to different worlds in the mind of a lonely but imaginative child.

His mother had sometimes referred to her childhood home as a dump and now, looking at it through adult eyes, he could see why.

It was a midcentury bungalow built in what was then an affluent neighborhood that over time had degenerated into lower middle class. His maternal grandparent's house had once been the street's jewel, and it was obvious to this day, despite being in what could kindly be called a state of disrepair. Parts of it needed patching up and all of it needed a paint job.

The front lawn, immaculately trimmed in his memories, was overgrown with weeds that were tangled with debris. Small trees that had fallen over in one typhoon or another lay gently rotting, waiting to be cleared.

Joshua's lola lived alone, but she wasn't helpless. Much of their extended family still lived in town. It would have been easy—and not unexpected—for her to call a relative to help with the maintenance. Even if there was no one to help, Joshua's mom would have gladly paid for a helper or a handyman, but it was always, “No, I'm fine, I'd rather you come home and help me.”

Even at a young age, Joshua understood it as a form of emotional blackmail, even if he couldn't articulate it as such. He pitied his mom, who was constantly being guilted about being unable to care for a stubborn, aging parent because she had moved away to give her family a better life, and couldn't visit for “health reasons.” The “reasons” were numerous and varied, easier to keep under the nebulous yet clinical term.

Joshua's visit had been the middle ground. He had just graduated from college from a course he was lukewarm about but would at least probably—maybe—offer financial stability, and his parents thought a trip to the Philippines would make a good graduation present because it would help him rediscover his roots and appease his grandmother.

Joshua had not objected.

Now, staring at the house he had built up so much in his head, he wondered if he had made the right choice.

He rang the doorbell, now hidden under an overgrowth of vines. He had found it from memory, and had prematurely flinched as he pressed it just in case he accidentally got electrocuted, then laughed at himself for assuming that the electricals would be faulty just because the house was in a bit of disrepair.

He heard the bell chime inside, then waited. He could have just called his lola and told her that he was outside, but he was feeling nostalgic. As a child, he had demanded that he be the one to press the doorbell even before he could reach it.

It was a while before the front door opened and his lola stepped out. The sight of her took him aback. She seemed smaller, somehow. Frail and slow. She smiled when she saw him, letting out a shout of delight as she walked as fast as she could to let him in.

"Tjo!" she said as he entered.

"Kumusta po?" he asked, leaning down to kiss her proffered cheek. The smell of powder on her skin brought him back to all the summers spent being doted on while his parents enjoyed a respite from the city. For a second, he was a little boy again, reaching up to greet his grandmother.

"I wish your mother was here," she said, looking him up and down. "But I'm glad you made it. Look how you've grown! Binata na!"

This was a script he heard from every Filipino relative, so he knew to nod and make noises of shy agreement. He was ushered inside the gate and escorted into the house. They passed the lawn, Joshua eyeing the overgrowth and the random junk left among the slowly rotting plants to be disintegrated by the elements.

His lola entered the front door, talking about dinner as she did so. Joshua followed her inside and paused. The house's interior was dim and tight, darker and smaller than he remembered it, its numerous windows obstructed by the amount of items that cluttered the house. There were boxes, old furniture, piles of magazines. It was as if his grandmother spent the last decade buying things and never throwing them out.

"Watch your step," his grandmother said. "Do you remember where your mom's old room is?"

"Yes, lola," Joshua said.

"Go freshen up. I'll let you know when it's time for dinner."

Joshua found the three steps that led to the door that opened to the hallway that led to the rooms. He had never understood why the house was so compartmentalized: doors led to hallways that contained more doors. Even here, things leaned against the walls, making the already narrow hallway even more troublesome to cross. Dust gathered on the piles and a viscous liquid oozed out from under some of them, staining the wooden floor.

The clutter also trapped moisture, warping the wooden floors and walls and making them smell musty. Only the spaces around the three doors that lined one side of the hallway were free. He entered the last one, his mother's old room, and was surprised to find that compared to the rest of the house, it was relatively junk-free.

His mother's room was a time capsule. There was a desktop computer that used what his mother had explained were mini discs, the item pictured in the "save" icon. Her bookshelf was filled with teen romance novels and notebooks adorned with photos of actors who were teen heartthrobs in the '90s, but who Joshua recognized as parents who starred in advertisements for laundry soap and milk formula. Posters of those same actors were still taped to the walls.

There were stuffed toys, shoes, handbags, colorful accessories, and schoolbooks. Joshua's parents had slept in the twin bed while Joshua slept on a mattress on the floor whenever they visited, so he was familiar with his mother's childhood room, but seeing it again after a decade and through the eyes of an adult made him wonder what his mother was like growing up. What was she like to other people? How did this girl who did regular girl things grow up to become a nurse who married, had a son, and moved abroad?

He pulled out his phone.

“I’m here,” he texted his mom. “Your room hasn’t changed.”

He waited for what seemed like an eternity for the message to send, cursing the country’s famously slow internet.

**An excerpt from the *Insect Hag and Other Stories* (2025)
published by Anvil Publishing, Inc.**

Rosario I. Tañedo



Rosario “Rochit” I. Tañedo: A reproductive health and rights advocate, her book, *“Come Back To Me” (Mothers Lost in RH Delay)* with a grant from the National Book Development Board. In May 2024, she received a Nick Joaquin Literary Award for her poem: *“Maternity Ward Woes”*. She produced and brought to seven countries the works of Philippines’ recognized artists in a travelling exhibit titled: *“Who Owns Women's Bodies? (WOWB)”*. She made documentaries, wrote for magazines, radio and television; including a musical on HIV & AIDS titled *“Palipat-lipat; Pasalin-Salin”* for United Nations International Children’s Emergency Fund. In 1987, she received an EMMY Award for Individual Achievement (Programs) for her production work on the documentary: *“The Philippines: Life, Death and Revolution”* aired on *“Today Show”* on NBC. She is a member of Women Writers in Media Now (WOMEN) organized in 1981.

From COME BACK TO ME: MOTHERS LOST IN REPRODUCTIVE HEALTH DELAY

By **Rosario I. Tañedo**

When El Nino hit Central Mindanao in early 2015, it caught the indigenous tribal communities very much unprepared.

“Famine was widespread. The children were getting sicker by the day,” tearfully recalls Marlinda who was then pregnant for the tenth time.

“I joined the other mothers so that we ourselves could be there to receive the Calamity Fund promised to us by City Hall.” A total of 3,500 marchers from eleven barangays participated.

When City Hall was finally in sight, the marchers saw trucks lined sideways, with soldiers to block their path.

“Sir, please give us rice,” Marlinda pleaded with the soldiers. “My children and I cannot go home if we don’t bring rice back.”

After some time, the mayor’s coordinators arrived with disappointing news. “The funds have not yet arrived!”

Quite tired from the long walk, Marlinda began to lean on the side of a truck of the National Food Authority (NFA) in front of her. Seeing this, a soldier grabbed her arm, twisted it and pried her hand away from the truck and pushed her. Marlinda fell to the ground. The marchers, quite alarmed, helped Marlinda to her feet.

“I bled through the night and I was already quite nervous,” she said. By morning the bleeding had gotten worse. She suffered a miscarriage and was given a dilatation and curetage or D&C.

It was also her first time to ever set foot in a hospital, having given birth to her nine children inside her home and assisted only by a traditional healer.

**An excerpt from *Come Back to Me: Mothers Lost in Reproductive Health Delay* (2023)
published by Ateneo de Naga University Press.**

Claudio S. Tayag



Claudio “Claude” Tayag is a painter, wood sculptor, furniture designer, handy chef, author, columnist for the Philippine Star, and an erstwhile TV host. He and his wife Mary Ann Quioc opened their home Balé Dutung as a private-dining destination in 2000, and has become a food destination in Pampanga.

Tayag has written *FOOD TOUR* (Anvil Publishing, 2007,) his so called 3-in-1 book, wherein he compiled the best of his food essays, wrote recipes and made drawings to illustrate his food and travel essays. *LINAMNAM – Eating One’s Way Around the Philippines* (Anvil Publishing, 2011,) was co-authored with his wife Mary Ann Quioc.

He was one of six chefs who co-authored *KULINARYA – A Guidebook to Philippine Cuisine* (Anvil Publishing, 2008) and was also its food stylist.

In 2019, he hosted Chasing Flavors in the Metro Channel. The show was given the Gawad Tagapuring mga Akademisyang Aninong Gumagalaw Jury Award that year for Cultural Development and Sustainability. In 2021, his restaurant Balé Dutung was included in Asia’s 50 Best Restaurants’s Essence of Asia.

His latest tome is the *Ultimate Filipino Adobo Book* (Foreign Service Institute, 2022,) which was launched at the Frankfurt Buchmesse 2023. The following year, *The Ultimate Filipino Adobo 2nd Edition* book was launched at the National Book Fair in Manila.

From THE ULTIMATE FILIPINO ADOBO

By **Claudio Tayag**

"How can a dish made with no more than 6 ingredients be so hard to execute? The aroma was so particular, very pointed, specific. I still haven't seen anything so simple yet creates such emotions. What I realized was adobo is not a recipe, it's a feeling, it's a moment in time." - Chef Charles Olalia

Chef Charles Olalia of the famed Ma'am Sir and Ricebar restaurants in L.A., California, had his culinary path in a somewhat circuitous way. His parents wanted him to become a doctor just like them, but his heart was eyeing something else. After finishing his undergrad in Manila, he asked to take a year off before he took medicine proper. Unbeknownst to his parents, he enrolled in a culinary school to pursue his "secret" love – cooking. Once he got his certificate, he left for the US for an extension of his vacation. He landed a job at Restaurant Guy Savoy in Las Vegas, and two years later at the French Laundry in California.

Charles replied to my email interview from Dallas, Texas, where he is now based. He's currently the culinary director of Makeready Experience, overseeing all of the company's US properties, including the historic Adolphus Hotel.

"Adobo to me is what our heart is to our bodies. Its function is so essential, so automatic, that sometimes we almost forget how important it is. It pumps life. But when our heart fails, a lot of complications happen. Just like when I don't get to eat adobo, the Filipino in me slowly dies.

"Growing up in Bacolor, Pampanga, adobo was on the table every week. Just like a heartbeat, it was constant, rhythmic, automatic.

"However, all this changed when I moved to America. I initially lived with my grandmother. She was an amazing cook. She took her time, always made delicious food. It was a slice of home. But her adobo was so different from what we made at home. I started to miss it. I would call home, ask for details and started learning. How can a dish made with no more than 6 ingredients be so hard to execute? The aroma was so particular, very pointed, specific. But as a Filipino, I always just brushed it off simply as – adobo. As I moved on in my career, living in different cities, being exposed to different cuisines and cultures, I still haven't seen anything so simple yet creates such emotions.

"I remember coming home from long trips and adobo will be on the table. I remember family trips to beaches. My aunts would unload bandejados of food from their cars. Great memories for sure.

“What I realized was adobo is not a recipe, it’s a feeling, it’s a moment in time. When I was asked why I didn’t have adobo on the menu at Ricebar, I was being selfish to share a feeling that I treasured most. I was holding on to what I truly believed was mine.

“Fast forward many years, I’ve got my own family, I can finally make an adobo that evokes our own feelings. When my son smells the aroma, he can’t stop but yell, ‘You’re making adobo!’

“Here’s my chicken adobo recipe: The chicken is marinated for 24 hours in toyo, suka, garlic, black pepper. Next day, simmer very slowly for 1 hour and 30 minutes. I like my chicken not to be falling apart. Then I pull the chicken off the braise, and air it for a bit. Reduce the sauce, fortify with grilled and mashed chicken liver to thicken.

“On a separate pot, I make garlic oil by slowly frying garlic with toasted bay leaves and Thai chili. I add the chicken back, baste a bit, finish with the oil and a flurry of fresh cracked black pepper.”

**An excerpt from *The Ultimate Filipino Adobo: 2nd Edition* (2024)
published by Anvil Publishing, Inc.**

Fr. Wilmer Joseph S. Tria



Fr. Wilmer Joseph S. Tria is a Catholic priest of the Archdiocese of Caceres. A known public intellectual he has published numerous books on philosophy, language studies, translation, decolonization and spirituality. As a respected authority on the Bikol language, he has written the guide to contemporary Bikol orthography and translated classical literary texts to Bikol which includes Antoine de Saint Exupery's *The Little Prince*, Carlos Collodi's *Pinocchio*, Kahlil Gibran's *The Prophet* and Tomas a Kempis' *The Imitation of Christ*. He was honored with a lifetime achievement award for his contribution to Bikol language and translation from the Komisyon sa Wikang Filipino and the Unyon ng mga Manunulat sa Pilipinas in 2019. He is the parish priest of Saint Anthony of Padua Parish in Iriga City; the President of Colegio de San Rafael, and is the chief executive officer of the Consuelo 'Chito' Madrigal Foundation in Bikol.

COCONUT: THE BUDDY OF SEAFARERS AND ISLANDERS

By **Fr. Wilmer Joseph S. Tria**

Our country hits the jackpot when it comes to producing and exporting coconuts—second only to Indonesia! We have a superstar tree that loves long walks on the beach, sunbathing in the heat, and dipping its roots in salty water. Naturally, it feels right at home here!

The coconut's resume is impressive—it is the "tree of life," after all. This leafy champion protects the environment, guards our coastlines, and can even hang out with the likes of cacao and coffee plants. The fruit is a culinary chameleon: cream, milk, oil, and even trendy drinks like buko juice. Need a snack? Just crack one open and munch away! Not to mention, it got you covered from head to toe with everything from cooking oil to lip balm.

But wait, there is more! Coconut shells are the ultimate upcyclers, transforming into charcoal, crafts, and kitchen utensils. And the coir is perfect for ropes, brushes, and garden goodies. Need a broom or a nifty basket? Just grab some leaves. The trunk moonlights as furniture or a construction heavyweight, and even the roots get in on the action as dye, mouthwash, and toothbrush. The heart of the palm is not shy either—it stars in delicious dishes like lumpiang ubod – fresh or fried.

Before we get caught up in coconut dreams, here is some food for thought: Do we teach about this amazing tree in schools? Have coconut lullabies stolen the spotlight next to "Bahay Kubo?" At least Ryan Cayabyab gave it a shout-out with "Da Coconut Tree" in the 1990s, highlighting its superstar potential.

Now, let us time-travel a bit! The coconut's history sways all the way back to Southeast Asia, spread across the Pacific by the original seafarers, the Austronesians—think early explorers with coconut-packed lunches. Coconuts are like the ultimate travel buddies for the Austronesians! During their epic migration adventures, these tropical fruits were always along for the ride—like the ultimate sidekick you never want to leave behind. Sailors load up their boats with coconuts, humming along to their own tune, "It ain't heavy; he's my brother!"

Not only do these fruity companions add a splash of fun to the journey, but they also help keep the boats afloat. So, while the sailors were sailing off to new horizons, their trusty coconuts helped prove that you can take it all with you—because let us be honest, who would not want a little coconut magic on their adventure?

Even Antonio Pigafetta, Magellan's travel buddy, was impressed, noting how a couple of these palm trees could power a family of ten for a hundred years!

All aboard! Whether it is called 'niu,' 'niyog,' or 'nyiur,' the coconut tree definitely deserves a spotlight in our educational system. Getting the word out can turn its potential into a major economic wave for us all!

**An excerpt from *Pinoy or Finoy: Funny and Punny Stories on Decolonization* (2025)
published by Rex Publishing House.**

John Jack G. Wigley



John Jack G. Wigley is a Filipino author, translator, memoirist, and literature professor based at the University of Santo Tomas (UST) in Manila. He earned a BA in English from Holy Angel University, followed by an MA (2004) and a PhD (2012, cum laude) in Literature from UST. In June 2010, he joined UST Publishing House—eventually serving as officer-in-charge, deputy director, and Director—and currently teaches literature and creative writing in the Faculty of Arts & Letters and the Graduate School.

From FALLING INTO THE MANHOLE

By John Jack G. Wigley

Our country hits the jackpot when it comes to producing and exporting coconuts—second only to Indonesia! We have a superstar tree that loves long walks on the beach, sunbathing in the heat, and dipping its roots in salty water. Naturally, it feels right at home here!

The coconut's resume is impressive—it is the "tree of life," after all. This leafy champion protects the environment, guards our coastlines, and can even hang out with the likes of cacao and coffee plants. The fruit is a culinary chameleon: cream, milk, oil, and even trendy drinks like buko juice. Need a snack? Just crack one open and munch away! Not to mention, it got you covered from head to toe with everything from cooking oil to lip balm.

But wait, there is more! Coconut shells are the ultimate upcyclers, transforming into charcoal, crafts, and kitchen utensils. And the coir is perfect for ropes, brushes, and garden goodies. Need a broom or a nifty basket? Just grab some leaves. The trunk moonlights as furniture or a construction heavyweight, and even the roots get in on the action as dye, mouthwash, and toothbrush. The heart of the palm is not shy either—it stars in delicious dishes like lumpiang ubod – fresh or fried.

Before we get caught up in coconut dreams, here is some food for thought: Do we teach about this amazing tree in schools? Have coconut lullabies stolen the spotlight next to "Bahay Kubo?" At least Ryan Cayabyab gave it a shout-out with "Da Coconut Tree" in the 1990s, highlighting its superstar potential.

Now, let us time-travel a bit! The coconut's history sways all the way back to Southeast Asia, spread across the Pacific by the original seafarers, the Austronesians—think early explorers with coconut-packed lunches. Coconuts are like the ultimate travel buddies for the Austronesians! During their epic migration adventures, these tropical fruits were always along for the ride—like the ultimate sidekick you never want to leave behind. Sailors load up their boats with coconuts, humming along to their own tune, "It ain't heavy; he's my brother!"

Not only do these fruity companions add a splash of fun to the journey, but they also help keep the boats afloat. So, while the sailors were sailing off to new horizons, their trusty coconuts helped prove that you can take it all with you—because let us be honest, who would not want a little coconut magic on their adventure?

**An excerpt from *Falling Into The Manhole: A Memoir* (2012)
published by the University of Santo Tomas Publishing House.**

Ferdinand-Benedict G. Tan



Ferdinand-Benedict “Budjette” Tan supposedly grew up in a haunted house and was told to sleep early because there were aswang monsters outside their bedroom window. Who would’ve known that these stories would later influence and inspire him to write the comic book *Trese*, co-created with artist Kajo Baldesimo.

Their comic book is a three-time winner of Best Graphic Literature of the Year in the Philippine National Book Awards. In 2021, Netflix launched the anime adaptation of *Trese* and was in their Top 10 shows for a month.

He now works in Denmark as one of the creative leads in the LEGO Agency. He lives there with his wife and son, far away from any aswang – or so they think!

★ *PRESS THE GREEN BUTTON* ★



"I will write my suicide note in my dad's unused Moleskin," Jacob thought as he took the last bite of his Bavarian Cream Donut. "And I will use my dad's favorite Parker pen."

He was all alone in the 24-hour donut shop. The clerk behind the counter had already nodded off to sleep.

Jacob felt a strange sense of relief to have arrived at that decision so quickly. It took him several weeks to decide on how he would end his life. He had prepared for everything else, except for how he would execute his farewell letter.

The next day, he set off to find his dad's collection of unused journals. The family had moved all of those items to their grandparent's house in Pateros after their father died of cancer last year.

IN THE GUEST BEDROOM, WHICH WAS CONVERTED INTO A STORAGE ROOM FILLED WITH RECYCLED BALIHAYAN BOXES.



JACOB RUMMAGED THROUGH THE EIGHTH BOX, EVEN THOUGH HE WAS SURE HE WAS GOING TO FIND THE MOLESKIN IN THE NINTH BOX.



BUT IT WAS IN THE EIGHTH BOX WHERE HE FOUND HIS FAVORITE TOY.



THE WOODEN TOY PHONE FELT WARM IN HIS PALM.

In the guest bedroom, which was converted into a storage room filled with recycled balikbayan boxes, Jacob rummaged through the eighth box, even though he was sure he was going to find the Moleskin in the ninth box.

But it was in the eighth box where he found his favorite toy. The wooden toy phone felt warm in his palm.

When Jacob was six years old, he used to have a bad case of night terrors. One time, after a week of nightly nightmares, his father joined him on his bed and handed him this toy phone.

"This is a TeleDreamPhone," his dad explained. "You can bring this along when you sleep and dream. So, whether you end up in a beautiful dream or a scary nightmare, you can always call us."

His dad then pointed to the five buttons. "If you ever feel scared or lonely or lost, press the green button to call home. Press the blue button to call me and the red button to call your mom. Press the orange button to call for kittens – because cats and kittens will always make you feel good – and press the yellow button to send your heart out to the world, because someone out there always needs a hug."

Strangely enough, Jacob stopped having nightmares that week. While he never really had a dream where he ever used the phone, he always kept it by his bedside while he slept. He lost track of the phone when he moved out to go to college.

He stared at the five buttons that always reminded him of chocolate candies.

His thumb gently slid on the yellow button, then the orange button, and down to the blue button. If he did call his dad, what would he say? He knew his dad would get angry once he found out Jacob was planning to kill himself. Calling his mom would only result in more hysterics. He could already hear his mother's shrill voice.

So, he pressed the green button because he was curious about who would be at their old house at this time of day.

Then the phone started to ring.

He almost dropped the vibrating phone but quickly caught it with both hands. He flipped it around, just to check and confirm what he already knew -- that it was an old, wooden toy phone -- with no batteries, no electronic components, but somehow it was now ringing and connecting a call.

"Hello, this is the Ramirez residence. Jacob speaking! Who's on the line, please?" said a boy, who sounded like he had memorized that line and rushed to say it too quickly to find out who was calling him.

"Ummm... this is Jacob."

"Hi Jacob! I'm Jacob, too! Wow! How about that?" said the boy.

"I'm talking to someone using a toy phone. This isn't possible!"

The boy laughed, "I'm using a toy phone, too! So, I guess this thing does work! But you don't sound all too happy that I answered the phone. Do you just want to hang up and call someone else?"

“Ummm... no. Wait! Wait! I don’t have anyone to talk to right now,” the older Jacob pleaded. .

The boy sighed. “I don’t really have anyone to play with right now. My mommy and daddy are both at work. Can you stay and talk with me for a while?”

“Ummm... sure. But what... what should we talk about?” Jacob said as he shook his head.

“So, what made you feel super today?” asked the boy.

“Excuse me? What do you mean?”

“I dunno... my teacher always asks us that question. She makes us think about what happened to us yesterday and think of one thing that made us feel really super, like we were on an all-time high. And then we get to draw that one thing on the blackboard. We’d all rush to the front of the class and get to use different colored chalk and when everyone’s done, we’d go back to our seats and look at the blackboard filled with all sorts of crazy and fun stuff! Some would draw their favorite cat or dog. Most kids would draw their new toy. One of the other kids drew his family at a picnic. Jenny May drew a skull because she got her pirate costume! Franco drew a flower, because he saw one growing right outside his window! Stanley drew a five peso coin, which he found on the street and used it to buy candy for this girl that he really likes!”

“What did you draw?” the older Jacob asked.

“I drew a picture of my dad with coffee coming out of his nose! I told a joke over breakfast and he laughed so hard--coffee came spraying out of his nostrils!”

Jacob and Jacob laughed loud and hard, as if it was the funniest joke they had ever heard.

The little boy stopped laughing and said,
“Oh no! My dad is here! I gotta go!”



“Wait! Wait! Wait! Do you think I can talk to you dad?”

“My dad always told me not to talk to strangers. I think he’d get very angry if he found out I was talking to a stranger on my toy phone.”

AND THEY LAUGHED AGAIN. AND THEIR LAUGHTER FILLED THE ROOM
THAT WAS FILLED WITH OLD BOXES AND FORGOTTEN THINGS.

And they laughed again. And their laughter filled the room that was filled with old boxes and forgotten things.

“Can you do me a favor?” Jacob asked. “Can you tell your dad that you love him?”

“That is so corny, Mr. Jacob! I give him a big bear hug



whenever he comes home and then we do our special slap-clap-high-five-fist-bump handshake!”

Jacob suddenly remembered the day his dad taught him that special handshake.

The little boy then whispered, “But if I can tell you one secret ... every time my dad falls asleep on his LazyBoy, I sneak up, give him a hug and whisper in his ear, ‘I love you dad!’ So, I’m sure he knows that I love him and the message gets to him in his dreams.” The boy sighed and then blurted out, “I really have to go Mr. Jacob! It was really nice talking to you! Try to call again!”

Jacob held the phone in his hands and pressed the other buttons, but the phone remained silent.

He went back to searching the other boxes and finally found his dad’s Moleskin. He opened to the first blank page and began to scribble.

It was a little after lunch when Jacob’s grandmother found him on the floor.

Jacob was lying on his stomach, feet up in the air and he whistled while he drew on the journal with his dad’s Parker pen.

His grandmother looked at the walls of the room and it was filled with pages ripped from the Moleskin, each one had a crude yet cute drawing.

“Jacob Rex! What are you doing here? And what are you doing with dad’s journal?!”

Jacob smiled, “I’m drawing something super.”

ABOUT THE NATIONAL BOOK DEVELOPMENT BOARD PHILIPPINES

The National Book Development Board (NBDB) is the book authority of the Philippines, dedicated to creating a vibrant, diverse, and equitable book publishing ecosystem. As a bridge to the country's rich creative community, we connect the Philippines to the global market, offering access to a growing network of Philippine creatives and publishers.

We provide incentives, publication, and translation grants, and conduct crucial policy work and industry research, keeping a finger on the pulse of the national reading culture and the Philippine book industry. Believing that Philippine books and content are among the best in the world, we underscore the country's role as the emerging content capital of Southeast Asia, with the young, multicultural voice reclaiming its narratives from a colonial past.

Under the leadership of Executive Director Charisse Aquino-Tugade, the agency has pivoted to solutions-based programming and streamlined its industry development efforts both domestically and internationally. With Aquino-Tugade at the helm, the NBDB launched two flagship initiatives: the Philippine Book Festival—the country's largest all-Filipino book fair—and the Book Nook Project, which establishes storytelling spaces across the Philippines. Through these programs, the NBDB works to fill the market with Philippine-authored books and improve accessibility for all, ensuring that readers and stories find each other in every corner of the country.

ABOUT THE NATIONAL COMMISSION FOR CULTURE AND THE ARTS

The National Commission for Culture and the Arts (NCCA), Philippines is the overall policy-making body, coordinating, and grants-giving agency for the preservation, development, and promotion of Philippine arts and culture; an executing agency for the policies it formulates; and task to administering the National Endowment Fund for Culture and the Arts (NEFCA)—fund exclusively for the implementation of culture and arts programs and projects.

The government's support for cultural development is particularly highlighted by the passage of R.A. 7356 which created the NCCA. The coordination among the cultural agencies was strengthened by virtue of Executive Order No. 80, which placed the Cultural Center of the Philippines, the National Historical Institute (now, the National Historical Commission of the Philippines), the National Museum of the Philippines, The National Library (now, The National Library of the Philippines), and the Records, Management, and Archives Office (now, the National Archives of the Philippines) under the NCCA umbrella. Further, through Republic Act No. 9155, administratively attached the earlier aforementioned five cultural agencies to the NCCA, including now the Komisyon sa Wikang Filipino (Commission on the Filipino Language). Thus, the NCCA is responsible for culture and the arts in the Philippines—and, if not in the name, the *de facto* Ministry of Culture.

The Commission together with the six cultural agencies works with the principle of partnership, collaboration, and shared responsibility in achieving effectively and efficiently the implementation of cultural programs as well as maximizing resources.

The NCCA was created to serve as the presidential inter-agency commission to coordinate cultural policies and programs.

ABOUT THE OFFICE OF SENATOR LOREN LEGARDA

Senator Loren Legarda is the visionary and project principal of the participation of the Philippines as Guest of Honour country in the Frankfurt Book Fair in 2025. Since 2016, Legarda has pushed for this distinction as Guest of Honor at the world's oldest and most prestigious book fair. It was late in 2015 when Karina Bolasco, then NBDB Governing Board Member and Director of the Ateneo de Manila University Press, presented the idea to support the Fair, and Legarda has done so ever since.

Legarda has long been an advocate of cultural preservation. Through her vision and leadership, the Philippines is now actively participating in the Venice Biennale, returning after 51 years to the 2015 Art Biennale and joining for the first time in the Architecture Biennale in 2016.

The four-term Senator is currently the chairperson of the Senate Committee on Culture and the Arts. She has legislated several measures, including RA 11961 or the Cultural Mapping Law, which mandates the creation of an inventory of our cultural wealth. She has also promoted our country's cultural discourse with universities abroad through the Philippine Studies Program, under the Department of Foreign Affairs.

In appreciation for her lifelong advocacy to protect and preserve our culture, heritage, and the arts, Senator Legarda was conferred the Dangal ng Haraya by the National Commission for Culture and the Arts. Through her efforts to strengthen bilateral relations with other countries, the Senator was bestowed with the title of Knight in the French National Order of the Legion of Honor, Knight in the Order of Merit of the Italian Republic, the Commendatore to the Order of Merit of the Italian Republic, and the Award of Distinction by the European Union.

LET'S COLLABORATE!

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