Introduction

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When Francisco Sionil José passed away at 97 on Jan. 6, 2022, the Philippines lost its most dominant and prolific pen in English fiction, if not its most eloquent voice in Philippine arts and culture. Through his weekly newspaper column and his regular social-media posts on any issue current and sundry, he was also the country's most active and definitely the angriest (some say crankiest) public intellectual. He never lost his passion for social justice and his novels, as Cebu writer-scholar Hope Sabanpan-Yu points in her tribute essay in this collection, "bring together creativity and history."

José was also a cultural dynamo who founded and managed a well-loved bookstore and cultural hub, set up a publishing house and edited a magazine that scholars now say helped "construct" Southeast Asia and make Southeast Asian studies the vibrant field of study it is now, and held conferences and forums featuring local and foreign writers, artists, and experts to influence Philippine and Asian development directions.

Even his fellow national artist and good friend, the equally prolific Nick Joaquin, conceded that Frankie José was the principal cultural dynamo of the country. "Francisco Sionil José is Asia's white hope (or tan stand?)," Joaquin had written in the Philippines Graphic before his death in 2004. "(He) has been translated into every major language, including the Scandinavian, and is, hands down, the most widely read Filipino author."

This book of tributes published by the Center for Creative Writing and Literary Studies of the University of Santo Tomas, Frankie's alma mater, not only provides a space for Frankie's colleagues and friends in the literary and cultural circles to grieve over his passing while memorializing the moments, joyous or sad, amicable or hateful, that they had spent with him; it also provides a chance to sum up his achievements and define his legacy,

which is very, very substantial, considering he's an internationally acclaimed man of letters and a one-man cultural ministry.

Most of these tributes are really memories of the writer and the man, his engaging fiction and other writings, his visionary cultural leadership, his paternal generosity toward younger writers, his sheer resilience and longevity. Like many of the contributors here, fictionist Maria L. M. "Dada" Fres-Felix had met the writer before the man. After overseas secondment, she came back to the country and read Po-on, which charts the Ilocanos' epic exodus down south in Luzon during the 19th century, nothing less than a fictionalization of how Frankie's Ilocano forefathers ended up in Rosales, Pangasinan. Dada felt it was a fitting homecoming for her. "Between its pages lived people I remembered from my youth: frugal, hardworking, sun-baked Ilocanos who wrestled a living out of an inhospitable land," she writes. "It made me a bit sad too, because though set in the 1880s, a lot of the struggles of Po-on's characters were still too real more than a century later. She found him "down-to-earth, witty, and encouraging to young writers," an observation that will be repeated by other writers of their first impression of Frankie. "Manong Frankie had been called a peregrine, a pilgrim, and a spy among others," Dada writes. "But for me, he will always be Manong, which in Ilocano means older brother, someone who despite his numerous achievements and immense contributions to Philippine Literature supported and encouraged those of us who were younger and not as accomplished as he was."

Author-corporate man Angelo "Sarge" R. Lacuesta gives us an indication of the Ilocano exodus of lore and history in his lovely essay, "A Pilgrimage," in which Frankie takes him and wife Mookie Katigbak to the obligatory tour of the North, the geographical, socio-historical, and moral-spiritual locus of his famous five-novel Rosales Saga. "Obligatory" because no writer or scholar worth her salt could refuse Frankie when he would declare he would take them to the heart and soul of his literary universe. But as Sarge learned, the pilgrimage was not one writer's ego trip. Along the way, he was brought by Frankie to Carlos Bulosan's house in Pangasinan, now with a historical marker paying tribute to the "Internationally known short story writer novelist and poet author of Letter from America, Voice of Bataan, Laughter of My Father, and America is in the Heart." Moreover, their final stop was Bauang, La Union, where Frankie inaugurated a small library in honor of his fellow Ilocano writer, Manuel Arguilla.

Fictionist Geraldine Maayo first met Frankie at his cozy bookshop, Solidaridad, and when he learned she and her friend had just attended the Silliman Writers' Workshop, he invited them to the meeting that weekend of the Philippine PEN, which Frankie had established in 1957. "PEN, I saw as family, especially those first 10 years," she writes "I was an unknown writer who had won a literary award for fiction, and, in a matter of two years, was able to have my first book published. It was absolutely so beyond my dreams as a 21-year old, suffering a boring job and desperate to write." (Jose's generosity toward young writers eager to be published will be echoed by other writers in their tributes in this volume.)

Premier fictionist-essayist Cristina "Jing" Pantoja-Hidalgo's friendship with the Joses went back even earlier. When they would receive their allowance as editors of the Varsitarian of UST in the 1960's, she and Rita Gaddi would go to Frankie's bookshop ("Solidaridad was already Solidaridad") and "scour the shelves for those books we could only find in Soli." Even when Jing left the country when her hubby Tony Hidalgo worked for the UNICEF in various postings around Asia, they kept in touch with Frankie and Tessie; and when they finally went back to Manila to settle here for good in 1990, their friendship deepened. Solidaridad remained a literary salon and, toward the new century when bookstores along with literary titles faded, a literary bastion and a veritable cultural fortress. "In the last decade or so, most bookstores have stopped carrying literary titles, preferring to crowd their shelves with wattpad novels and horror comics," writes Cristina Pantoja-Hidalgo. "Not Solidaridad, though. In these shelves, literature, especially Philippine literature, occupies pride of place. If only for this service, Frankie is owed the gratitude of Filipino writers. And this not even to mention the formidable body of his works."

Jing's friend during her UST days, poet and broadcast journalist Rita Gaddi, writes that she worked with Frankie first in Comment magazine and afterward as proofreader in his Solidaridad Publishing House, proving that Frankie "was signed across the landscape of my life, without erasures or editing." Rita adds: "It is in the remembering of the many years you and I have worked together that, in this brief telling, we may continue to dream our world through your amazing writings."

Poet-translator Ralph Semino Galán likewise speaks of Frankie in a very personal vein as "the writerly grandfather I never had." Encouraged by his mom, an English language teacher, at a very early age to read books,

Ralph became a voracious reader and bibliophile. But this was frowned upon by his businessman-dad who warned him that too much reading would impair his vision. In contrast to his dad, Frankie encouraged him to read and write and make a career out of writing and publishing. "Through the years," Ralph continues, "Manong Frankie and Manang Tessie would continue to shower me with kindness and generosity. I would receive, from time to time, a signed copy of his latest book, with a separate note asking me if I had already finished my Ph.D., what have I been writing lately, as well as pieces of advice when I visited them in Solidaridad. Sometimes, a warm hug or a pat on the back from one of them was the only token I would bring home with me, but which I would realize later on was what I needed the most at that time, to continue in the solitary pursuit of 'my craft or sullen art.'"

Writer-professor Jose Wendell P. Capili writes of his graduate studies at the University of Tokyo in the 1990's when he met Frankie and Tessie Jose. Frankie was working on his novel about Artemio Ricarte's exile in Japan during the American period, and he was staying with the Dominicans in their priory in Shibuya. Somehow the loneliness of being a foreign graduate student in Tokyo was alleviated by the friendship extended to Wendell by the Jose couple, who became his virtual grandparents. Manong Frankie took him to Japanese restaurants, tea shops, and bookstores. Frankie also took him to the famous International House of Japan, where he was introduced to diplomats, writers, artists, intellectuals. "Until then," Wendell writes, "I knew little about Japan and its people. I had the most wonderful teachers and schoolmates in Todai. However, outside my usual engagements in the university, Manong Frankie brought me to the IHJ and places previously inaccessible to Filipinos with modest means, such as myself." Wendell's ending will be repeated by other writers who have benefited from Frankie's generosity: "I remember Manong for his kindness, especially during my student years in Tokyo."

Celebrated Philippine-American fictionist Cecilia Manguera-Brainard recalls that it was at Solidaridad where she launched in 1988 her first two books of fiction, Song of Yvonne (later to be published by Penguin in the US as When the Rainbow Goddess Wept), and Woman with Horns and Other Stories. She describes what these editors would call as the "Upper Room," the social hall on the second floor of Solidaridad, in terms that would be familiar to writers and admirers of Frankie and his bookshop who had been there: "I recall that was the day Mt. Pinatubo had exploded, so the

evening had a strange and memorable quality with fine dust falling outdoors and blanketing streets and cars. Despite the volcanic eruption, the top floor of Solidaridad where the launch was held was packed; events at Solidaridad were always somewhat bohemian, cultured, and exhilarating."

When Cecilia wrote her tribute, Tessie Jose was still around, grieving over the loss of her husband. Many had though she would hold on, but she followed him to the next life exactly nine months later, on Oct. 7, Feast of Our Lady of the Rosary. In a way, Cecilia's tribute, "Frankie and Tessie: Reflections on the Passing of F. Sionil Jose (1924-2022)," was prescient, since ahead of Tessie's sad demise, Cecilia pays tribute to the woman behind the man. She remembers Frankie berating a writer for failing to write his planned novel. "I felt a bit sorry for the writer who appeared embarrassed," Cecilia writes, "and when the writer quieted down, I said in a light voice, 'Frankie, what we all need is a wife like Tessie so we can just write.' He paused, then said something like, "You are correct." And I think he even laughed with the rest of us." Cecilia Manguerra-Brainard adds, "What I said was true of course: Every writer or artist needs a wife like Tessie. She reminds me of the wives of the Russian novelists like Tolstoy and Dostoevsky, women who served as the writers' companions, advisers, and ardent collaborators."

Fictionist Menchu Aquino Sarmiento describes colorfully what goes on in the Upper Room of Solidaridad during PEN meetings and other writers' gatherings there. She describes the open bar: "Row upon row of choice whiskies, wines, vodka, rum, gin, liqueur, cognac, brandy and sake filed several rows deep, with the appropriate glasses close at hand, and served with pulutan too. Those with less adventurous tastes had their familiarly comforting local beer. For teetotalers, there might be the usual iced soft drinks, or even a samovar of brewing Benguet coffee. China cups and saucers were laid out on a tray beside the imposing sculpted, bereted portrait of the National Artist by Julie Lluch."

Baguio-based writer and artist Elizabeth Lolarga writes that Frankie "came at the right moments in my life, saving me from myself and my impulse towards self-destruction." Her tribute reveals a little-known detail of his past life as a pre-Med student at UST: flunking an important subject and frustrated by diminishing prospects of entering medical school, he started having dark thoughts similar to what his tragic character, Antonio Samson, contemplates and eventually does in The Pretenders. But Lolarga writes that an English professor, according to Frankie's account, intervened just in time

to advise him to junk his dream of becoming a neurosurgeon and become a writer instead because that was where his gift lay. (Obviously the advice came from his mentor, Paz Latorena.) The rest was history. Frankie himself played some sort of a spiritual guide to Babeth Lolarga. At the least, he soothed her frayed nerves and reaffirmed her talent. "You are a brilliant writer, Babeth," he enthused in one e-mail that came at a crucial moment of her life.

Poet and former Philippines Graphic literary editor Alma Anonas-Carpio also extols the Joses' generosity and remembers Frankie ribbing her that her bagnet salad (an Ilocano dish combining greens with strewings of pork belly that had been boiled then fried to crispy finish), which she had shared with them, had more salad than bagnet. Alma remembers Tessie chiding Frankie to follow the doctor's advice for him to diet. Alma rues her falling out with Frankie over his controversial political opinions in his final years. "Whatever else he may be, Manong Frankie loved this country," Alma writes, "and that was what I reminded him of, too, in my disagreements with him: you love this country, in its entirety, and stand for what is best for her, no less."

Writer Alma Cruz Miclat remembers Frankie consoling her when scholar-fictionist Mario Miclat died in April 2021: he even wrote a tribute to the latter in his newspaper column. Previously he had contributed an essay to a festschrift to honor Mario on his 65th birthday. Alma repeats the praise of other writers on Frankie and Tessie's generosity toward and support of other writers. For all the accolades heaped upon him now by a grateful nation," Alma writes, "our family will most remember and appreciate his being true to himself, his heartfelt kindness and love, and his being down-to-earth, as exemplified in his epitaph: "He wrote stories and he believed in them."

Historian and columnist Ambeth Ocampo makes a case for Frankie as the angriest if not the grumpiest man in Philippine letters. "I asked him once why, in his twilight, he was always angry," Ambeth writes. "He replied that his biggest frustration was that the world did not turn out the way he wanted or imagined it to be." Toward the end of his life his anger became shriller as his opinions did not quite dovetail with those of the general literati. "F. Sionil José is not one whose legacy rests on the recent tweets and retweets of quotes that incite anger and derision," declares Ambeth Ocampo. "If he is to be remembered at all it is for a body of work, a bookshop, and a long life well-lived. I knew him almost as a grandfather and I can tell you that his opinions may be sharp, but what he said was never mean or bad-spirited."

Ambeth's fellow Inquirer columnist, Manuel Quezon III, seems to take a contrarian's point of view, asserting that Frankie's bold opinioniating showed he could not be ignored. "To my mind," he writes, "what set him apart weren't his novels (though this is what he took the greatest pride in, perhaps) but his opinions, and in particular, his vigorously demonstrating the role of opinion-making (and writing) in a society like ours: as provoker, confronter, and explorer."

Former senator Francisco "Kit" S. Tatad is perhaps one of those writers who have known Frankie from way back, having been an emergent star journalist (a diplomatic reporter no less) in the 1960's when Frankie, already an established journalist and editor, was starting his career shift to publishing and cultural entrepreneurship. Both too were likewise alumni of UST and editors of the Varsitarian, although their respective stints there were separated by more than a dozen years. Frankie hated Ferdinand E. Marcos and martial law, but he remained friends with Kit. "My friendship with Frankie allowed him to see beyond his critical view of Marcos in judging my ten-year Cabinet service," Tatad writes. Although Frankie confessed occasionally that he was an agnostic who sometimes doubted the existence of a loving God, Kit believes "I have no doubt that his work and all the good things he did for his country, his family and friends, and the poorest of his brethren will live as long as memory lives, and I hope and pray that God in his infinite wisdom and mercy will see that every little thing he ever did for love, he ultimately did for his unseen God." (In his tribute, Singapore poet laureate Edwin Thumboo, a Christian, has a similar view of Frankie as, for want of a better phrase, an "agnostic Christian.")

Mindanao writer-academic Christine F. Godinez Ortega writes that Frankie made an effort to travel around the country to connect with his readers. Although a denizen of Imperial Manila, he reached out to writers and readers from Mindanao and other regions. "It has always been a learning experience to witness writers converse with his readers," Christine writes. "Not many writers and readers have such privilege. Like many writers and perhaps, any human being, Manong Frankie wanted to learn if he was 'getting through' from his readers even at the height of his body of works, his awards both in the country and abroad and his other accomplishments."

Premier poet in English Ricardo "Ricky" M. de Ungria, a former chancellor of the University of the Philippines-Mindanao, remembers his high-school days in Manila in the 1960s and visiting art galleries and

bookshops, foremost of which was Solidaridad. "The bookstore was small but roomier, and it felt lived-in by books!" he gushes. Later on of course, Ricky developed friendship with Frankie and Tessie and became a member of the Philippine PEN. Since Solidaridad was also the home of the PEN, it became the hub of writers, local and international. "The bookshop was a special place for me also because it was there where I saw and heard famous writers speak, like Nick Joaquin, Greg Brillantes, Wole Soyinka, Mario Vargas Llosa, Gunther Grass, and Norman Mailer, among many others," Ricky adds.

Aside from remembrances, this book of tributes also includes criticism and scholarly papers analyzing Frankie's massive literary oeuvre, particularly his fiction. Jaime An Lim, multi-awarded poet-fictionist-critic and former dean of arts and sciences of the Far Eastern University, where Frankie went to high school, analyzes Po-on, the first in historical chronology of Frankie's monumental pentalogy of socio-historico-political novels, Rosales Saga, but the last to be published (1984). In "Po-on: From Darkness to Darkness," An Lim takes note of the rather dizzying forward-backward motion that contrasts the chronology of the novels' publication with the chronology of the historical periods that they depict: While the first to be published, The Pretenders (1962) tackles the pre-martial law period and should therefore be the second to the last in historical chronology. The second novel to be published, Tree (1978), goes back to an earlier event, the American period in which the cadastral survey ordered conducted by the new colonizers enabled the elite to grab lands from the peasants that resulted in the land tenancy problem not much later, as depicted in the third to be published, My Brother, My Executioner (1979), which is set during the Hukbalahap uprising in the postwar period. Popular discontent and political unrest peaked during the Marcos regime and resulted in the declaration of martial law, as depicted in Mass, whose Dutch translation was published in Amsterdam and Brussels in 1982 and became a best seller in Europe, ahead of the original English version, which was published in 1983. Po-on, which depicts the last decades of Spanish colonial rule and the bloody transition to American hegemony and is, therefore, the last in historical chronology, was published the following year. An Lim observes: "Though last of the Rosales quintet to be written, F. Sionil Jose's Po-on (1984) constitutes the chronological beginning of the saga. This sequential ordering, seemingly haphazard, is in fact very appropriate, for it reflects the widespread tendency among Filipino writers to search for roots, to explore themes, events, and

personages from the past in their attempt to illuminate the present." In short, the haphazard publication of the novels that comprise the Rosales Saga somehow reflects the Filipino's agonizing search for national identity.

In "F. Sionil Jose and His Women Characters," Loreta L. Fajardo discusses the representation of women through the female characters that populate Jose's prolific fictional oeuvre. Fajardo concludes that Jose "strikes a balance" between the traditional depiction of women as suffering creatures and self-possessed and strong women who battle oppression and discrimination. "If he has women portrayed as sufferers, victims of people and events," she explains, "he also has women whose strength and resilience countered life's difficulties."

Tackling for her part My Brother, My Executioner, perhaps "the most heart-rending" of the pentalogy of novels because she's experienced her students weeping over its most moving passages. Shirley Lua relates the childhood trauma experienced by its hero Luis Asperri over his mother slapping him for mentioning what to her was his father's hateful name, to the "national trauma" and the country's "larger history of violence." Lua concludes: "In writing a narrative of pain, F. Sionil José performs a historical act, and My Brother, My Executioner serves as a witness to the wounds of our history."

In "Answerable Only to Ourselves: F. Sionil Jose's Mass and National Amnesia," Cebu Studies Center director and University of San Carlos professor Hope Sabanpan-Yu analyzes Mass, "a novel that has stayed in the depths of my consciousness ever since I first read it as a college student." She explains the power of the novel that continues to fascinate her. Inevitably she reaches the same conclusion as Frankie: For whom does one write? "Jose's novel remains a masterpiece because it challenges one to go to the heart of scholarship," Hope writes. "Why, and for whom, do we read, research, and write? How do we ferry across ideas and to what audience? How can we share the passion and imagination to others to love those ideas? And how can we make our words alive and dangerous so that they go on making new worlds in many minds, long after the readers have read the last page?

In "Unmasking the Polite and the Perfumed: F. Sionil Jose's *The Feet of Juan Bacnang* as Allegory of an Ailing Nation," Amado Cabus Guinto, Jr. makes a study of what is probably Jose's most important novel in the last phase of his career. Juan Bacnag's deformed feet become metaphor for the corruption of the nation by the elite and the oligarchy. "(T)he novel exposes

the ugliness of those considered to be the polite and the perfumed of the Filipino society," Guinto writes, "It also renders a scathing commentary on the way these same people—from which the so-called brains of the nation emanate—are complicit in preventing the Philippines from rising as a nation."

Since Jose's fiction is required reading in our schools, teachers have developed pedagogical approaches to deepen their appreciation in the classroom. Writer-author-teacher John Jack Wigley, chair of the Department of Literature and Humanities of the University of Santo Tomas, discusses in his familiar essay, "Pinoy Ako, Pinoy Tayo: Fashioning the Fragmentary Filipino Identity," his experience in teaching "The God Stealer," probably Jose's most anthologized short story. Wigley writes that he uses the conflict in the story as a springboard for discussion on Filipino identity. "What is wrong with a fragmentary identity?" he asks. "… The problem lies in the obsession of people that identity is whole, pure and untarnished. This is a grand narrative. There is no such thing as pure culture or perfect identity." His students may not agree with him, but the point is to interest them about the issues raised by a short but not exactly too simple a story. "As I end the discussion," Wigley concludes, "I would feel that I was able to pique the interest of the students as they engage in a very lively discussion about Filipinoness."

Until his death, Frankie was the modern Philippine man of letters with the most global renown, so it wasn't surprising his death elicited shock and outpouring of grief from acclaimed writers from other countries.

In his tribute, Singapore's elder statesman of letters, poet Edwin Thumboo, proclaims Frankie as "the first true ASEAN," in reference to Frankie as the writer-intellectual in the region who first imagined the vision of a Southeast Asian community of nations. This was embodied in Frankie founding the Solidarity international journal of Southeast Asian studies; his bookshop also featured Asian books while his short-lived Solidaridad Art Gallery featured Asian artists. Frankie was the first true ASEAN citizen," Thumboo writes. "He saw us as region well before most politicians. That is something I have not forgotten. He always thought of ASEAN as a singularity, wanting a commonness that we shared but at the same time fully aware of our differences, some of which were virtually impossible to reconcile. The sadness of Burma is one example of the kind of problems we face."

Singaporean writer, playwright-poet-novelist-memoirist Robert Yeo writes about coming here in Manila in 1981 to attend the Asian conference of the International PEN hosted of course by the Philippine PEN center

led by Frankie. He recalls important Asian pen-pushers who attended the conference—"… Mochtar Lubis from Indonesia, Sulak Sivaraksa from Thailand, Ismail Hussein and Cecil Rajendra from Malaysia, Thomas Polin from Asiaweek, and from Singapore, Dudley de Souza, Wong Meng Voon, Goh Poh Seng, Kirpal Singh …" "As our host," Yeo adds, "Frankie was very kind to my wife and me. Both his wife Tessie and he always said we were welcome to his home whenever we visited Manila."

James Fallows, US National Book Award-winning journalist and author and the youngest chief presidential speechwriter (to President James Carter) in US history, said he was "heartbroken" to learn of the passing of someone who had always exhibited "joyful indulgence in life." It was Fallows who wrote in the late 1980's when he was editor at large of Atlantic Monthly (now The Atlantic) of Frankie and his famous trenchant observation of the Filipinos' "damaged culture." Very familiar with Frankie's fiction, Fallows says the first novel by Frankie he had read was "The Pretenders." "The book's plot and tensions are specific to the Philippines," writes Fallows. "But just as Faulkner was not writing only about Mississippi, nor Dickens only about England, Frankie Jose was not writing only about his home islands. His work is rich, broadly human, and beyond borders."