TOMÁS

Special Issue on F. Sionil José

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Introduction

Joselito B. Zulueta

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."

REMINISCENCES


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Diyos ti Agngina, Manong: A Tribute to F. Sionil Jose

Maria L. M. Fres-Felix

I had just returned from several years of working on overseas secondment when I read *Po-on*. The novel made me feel that I had truly come home. Between its pages lived people I remembered from my youth: frugal, hardworking, sun-baked Ilocanos who wrestled a living out of an inhospitable land. 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.

When I met the author F. Sionil Jose a few years after, I was understandably nervous and fan-girling a bit (okay, a lot). But who wouldn't be? He was a National Artist for Literature, founder of the Philippine PEN, and the most widely translated Filipino author. Yet to my surprise, he turned out to be down-to-earth, witty, and encouraging to young writers. In my case, I was young only in terms of creative writing because by then, I was on early retirement from a corporate job. As a bonus, we both spoke Ilocano, so I was saved from getting a nose bleed as we talked.

I joined PEN and discovered why Manong Frankie's novels were so transporting. He was a natural storyteller. He spoke with zeal when he talked about literature and our country, and with amused nostalgia when recalling his younger days.

Once, I asked him about the time he was tagged as a US spy. He chuckled at the memory. He said that the incident happened right after he returned from a trip to Russia. He was quite worried that the accusation would lead to the bankruptcy of La Solidaridad, which he considered his bread and butter. To his amazement, people flocked to the bookstore instead.

The Russian posters that he brought home were snapped up faster than he could say *Dos Vedanya*. To top it all, he won a libel suit against the local columnist who had labeled him a spy.

Of course, as a writer, Manong Frankie could not help but practice one of a spy's skills—that of keen observation. He admitted though that he would not make a good spy because he was afraid of pain. "Prick my skin and I will tell you everything! But I will not remember who gave me the information. They can kill me and still, I could not reveal the name," he said. I can still recall him clapping his thigh with a guffaw.

On a more serious note, he believed that one of the greatest responsibilities of a Filipino writer is to make Filipinos remember. He wrote for us his countrymen so that we would remember. For as he said, "Memory continues to be our strongest and firmest anchor to Filipinas."

Like Jose Rizal before him, Manong Frankie placed his hope in the youth to bring the country out of what he perceived to be a quagmire of corruption and injustice.

I also enjoyed hearing about Manong's love story. It had so many "kilig" moments that it was like listening to a romantic audiobook. He fell in love at first sight with a *colegiala*, the lovely Teresita Jovellanos, whose lineage could be traced back to one of Jose Rizal's Ateneo friends. Their first encounter was one of those "meet-cute" incidents when they almost missed getting introduced, because the female lead was leaving a party just as the male lead arrived, rushing from a writing assignment. That near- miss and the wide social divide between the barrio lad and the *colegiala*, plus their subsequent elopement, were the hallmarks of a romantic movie. Of course, Manong Frankie told it so much better than I ever could.

Their love story continued to their ripe old age. Manang Tessie was his first reader, sometimes reading over his shoulder as he typed his manuscript. He described her as a very strong and caring woman who supported and fought for him. Sometimes she would upbraid him for not being diplomatic enough.

If diplomacy was not Manong Frankie's strong suit, generosity with time, talent, and treasure certainly was. This generosity was shared by Manang Tessie. I feel so privileged that he took time out of his packed schedule to read my short story collections and in keeping with his name, offered frank comments. He also encouraged me to write a longer piece

of work. He attended my book launches even if it meant battling Manila's traffic. He did these for other writers too, attesting to a heart brimming with kindness and generosity.

It is fitting that the boy who spent his days astride a *carabao* in the fields of Cabugawan had become a National Artist, and garner numerous awards, including the Ramon Magsaysay Award for Literature, Journalism, and Creative Communication, as well as the Pablo Neruda Centennial Award. He had also been decorated by the Emperor of Japan, the French Government, and the European Union. In 2019, he was elected as International Vice President of PEN International, a much deserved recognition of his years spent promoting literature and defending freedom of speech. His work had been praised nationally and internationally for its searing social realism. He credited his experience of growing up in poverty for the authenticity of his work.

Manong Frankie had been called a peregrine, a pilgrim, and a spy among others. 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.

Dios ti agngina, Manong.

A Pilgrimage

Angelo R. Lacuesta

In 2014, out of the blue, Mang Cesar called me to relay Manong Frankie's invitation to Mookie and me for a trip out to the North. We had never been much to the North, apart from the most basic of tourist destinations, and by that time we had shared a couple of meals and conversations with Manong, so a large part of us was excited for the trip.

The other part of us was a little bit unsure. We had never sat down with him for more than an hour or two, and the idea of sitting in a car for an unknown length of time toward a vague destination was kind of unsettling.

What would we talk about? What thoughts did I have on his work? At that time, I had only ever read his short story "The God Stealer," introduced to me be a large fan of his that regarded it as one of his all-time favorite stories. That was a big thing to say, especially considering the fact that my friend was very well-read.

I really liked "The God Stealer." I should say that in fact I loved it. It was complex, it was tight, and it captured its times well. I imagined that I could talk about it at length if he asked me what I thought of his work. Knowing Manong, and having known enough about him before that, that was well within our expectations. I had heard him complain, not just twice, about his work not being taught enough at schools.

\As a writer, I understood his concern. In fact, I saw it as a form of childlike honesty, a kind of surly impatience, rather than some kind of blustering, egotistic statement. Well, as a writer, too, I could see that it could have easily been both at the same time. But why, indeed, had his books not been taught to me in high school or at my humanities classes at university?

It quickly dawned on me that he might ask me why I hadn't read any of his other books, especially those he was most known for, that had been

translated into several languages, and that had most probably cemented his literary reputation here and abroad. The trip was just a few days away—we would meet up at the McDonald's on the corner of North and Congressional Avenues and be sitting in the same car for at least a few hours.

I felt my quiet desperation grow as I checked my work schedule over the next few days: it was packed, as usual, with corporate cadence meetings and executive briefings and the like. And then there was an evening event on the night before the trip. I couldn't avoid it because we were running that event. There would be no time to read a book, much less the five novels that made up the complete *Rosales Saga*—six if you counted *Viajero*.

I then devoted my time to working out a strategy. My other career, in the corporate world of marketing and advertising, necessitated the employment of a driver. This is because I regularly had upwards of five or seven meetings in a day, often in different parts of Makati, with some even as far as Quezon City or San Juan. Having a driver to take care of the shuttling and the parking relieved me of a lot of stress and wasted time, and also allowed me to pack more meetings into my working days.

I decided that we would meet up with Manong, and to avoid the double embarrassment of that prospective book discussion, we would take our own car and head out with him in a convoy. It would be awkward trying to set that up, but that other scenario would even be more awkward.

The dawn of that day finally came, and we rushed to our meeting place. I was bleary-eyed and my head was foggy because of that event just the night before, but I wanted to make sure we arrived ahead of Manong so I would have time to compose myself and deliver my plan.

Manong arrived a minute or two after I did, his slow, Hitchcockesque presence cutting an odd figure in the early breakfast crowd of young professionals and go-getters.

"Manang is in the van. You guys ride with us. Just tell your driver to follow us," was the first thing he said, and that was that.

He took his seat beside the driver and I sat directly behind him, and I spent the next three hours or so looking at the back of his head as we threw our voices at each other in conversation. On the first long stretch of the journey we drove through Tarlac, and then through Pangasinan, right

into the town of Rosales, where his chain of celebrated novels takes place. I gripped the seat out of dread as he began to talk about his novels—how they had taken place here and why he thought to write them.

I unconsciously bowed my head down a bit to put myself in the brace position as I prepared to dodge questions and deliver vague answers. But the questions never came. Neither appeared the presumption that I had read any of the *Rosales* novels. Manong wrapped up his short commentary on the town—simple and peaceful and beautiful, as I recall seeing it as we drove by—and we left it behind us without making so much as a photo stop.

Where on earth might we be going, then? And what is this trip for? I wondered to myself, as the van headed westward at speed. Manong gave quiet instructions to his driver, and I was too preoccupied with my own anxiety to eavesdrop. Meanwhile, Manong went quiet and took a nap as if according to some precise plan in his head, and woke up just as the van crawled to a stop along a small random street, quite a distance off the main highway. He opened the door to announce that this was going to be our first official stop.

We walked over a few meters to a concrete marker by the side of a house that read:

CARLOS S BULOSAN
1911 – 1956
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.
Born on Nov. 2 1911 in Binalonan Pangasinsan
Died on Sept. 11 1956 in Seattle Wash. U.S.A.

As he stood by the monument he proceeded to talk about Bulosan. Mookie and I were familiar with his work, but Manong shared details that we had never known before. I can't recall if he had said anything about having met him, but I remember vividly how proudly he spoke of Bulosan and how important Manong considered his work was to Philippine literature, and to the Filipino experience. Frankly, we were surprised that a historical marker on him would even exist, that his hometown would remember to honor him.

We boarded the van again, and this time I heard him tell the driver where to go next: Lingayen, an entry point for the Japanese invasion of the

Philippines in 1941, and the site of the American landing in 1945 when they liberated their colony toward the end of the War.

Like Bulosan's marker, we had never been to Lingayen Gulf, and I was surprised to discover that it was a long, peaceful stretch of light grey seashore. Manong waited patiently as I took in the gulf and quietly imagined how this would be a perfect choice to stage an invasion or a reinvasion. He then spoke about his experience during the war, and how it felt when the Americans finally arrived to retake the Philippines from the Japanese. He spoke not as if he had written it all down on paper or in his head, but from direct experience as a young man at the time, but he spoke of the War so easily and naturally, in a gentle and suddenly youthful voice, as though he were talking about something that had happened just a few years before. It was only then that I realized he had taken this trip many times. I remembered someone, probably another writer, telling me how Manong had also taken him on a long drive to this very same site.

The next stop was quite unexpected. Manong suggested we pay a visit to Our Lady of Manaoag, at a pilgrimage site that neither Mookie nor I had ever been to. We knew, of course, about the various miracles attributed to Our Lady, spread across several centuries of her presence in the Philippines since her arrival from Mexico in the 17th century. Besides these, there was a lot of history attached to the statue and the Basilica around her, but we had never thought to take the trouble to travel.

Manong waited in the van and told us to take our time. I don't know if it was because he wasn't quite that interested, or that everything would be self-explanatory and not require any commentary from him, or that he had taken guests there so many times in the past. Mookie and I were surprised that we had stayed longer at the site than we had thought we would. The history was deeper and more interesting than we'd expected, and the devotion was fascinating. As we boarded the van I realized that we had, in fact, taken part in the devotion.

Our final stop was a small city office in Bauang, La Union, where Manong was scheduled to inaugurate a small library named after the writer Manuel Arguilla, celebrated for the stories and essays he wrote before the War. This was a complete surprise to us. It turned out that it was Manong who had urged one of the provincial officials to dedicate the library to Arguilla.

The library was small, but in a small town like this, it felt powerful and full of hope. Manong had, on several occasions, complained about there being not enough Filipinos reading, and out of nowhere there was this small-town library that bore a name only Filipino writers really knew. Manong shook hands and exchanged pleasantries with the officials and the schoolteachers, while Mookie and I blended into the audience and attended to the refreshments and the treats. To our shock, before he delivered his inaugural speech, Manong introduced us to the gathering, along with a short description of us as young writers of a newer generation.

Manong recalled his speech about Manuel Arguilla in his column for the *Philippine Star* a few days later:

"I think no other Filipino writer has described the land, the seasons, the Ilokos and their villages with as much affection as he did. This love for the land was written with no less than his blood when he was executed by the Japanese for guerilla activities during the Occupation. No testimony, like Rizal's, could be more sublime and noble as this…."

"I urge young writers to read the Yabes anthologies which include some of the best fiction produced by writers like Manuel Arguilla from the beginning of our literature in English in the twenties onwards to the outbreak of World War II, and on to the early postwar years. In this way they can form that iron continuum with the past and understand that our literature was shaped by a contextuality and a faithful affection for our geography, our sense of place."

Not much later on, we heard that it was not quite a trip out of the ordinary. Manong frequently took guests on similar tours, covering Rosales, Binalonan, Lingayen, Manaoag, and sometimes, possibly even further north to Vigan or Baguio. There had probably been hundreds of these trips, counting writers, historians, and students, tripping across space and time and Manong's personal memory. We were happy about that, happy to be two pilgrims among many.

F. Sionil Jose and Me

Geraldine C. Maayo

I was 34 years old, fresh from the Silliman Writers' workshop that summer of '79. Jessie—my workshop best friend—and I walked into the Solidaridad Bookshop, giggling like teeners, our minds heady from the memories of the recently finished workshop; of the excitement of three weeks with writers and would-be writers, etc. We babbled about our Silliman sojourn, specifically about the men who captured our attention and our hearts, all this while browsing through the countless books so meticulously arranged in long, numerous shelves, making us swoon, wanting to get all of them, buy them, take most of them with us… when a voice cut into our chatty, girly conversation and said, in a rather thunderous and yet sweet voice, "So, you ladies just came from the workshop, so you are writers? Ok, I'm inviting you to come to this Saturday's meeting of the PEN."

That was 1979, the start of a long relationship with the man, and an almost consistent, steady relationship with PEN, the writers' organization whose Philippine branch F. Sionil Jose founded.

So we went to the weekly meetings, as well as to the monthly meetings, and the always exciting annual PEN conference, attending receptions for visiting writers, their lectures, the open fora for the Q and A. I was introduced to the world of the Philippine literati—the poets, essayists, novelists, journalists, the published and the unpublished. From 1979 to 2019—the last meeting I attended, held at the National Museum—I would attend the annual conference of PEN. But there were certain years in the middle '90s when my teaching schedule conflicted with the conference dates. The other factor being the practice Philippine PEN started around that time to hold the annual conference in the regions, Baguio, Bicol, etc., and we were, if I remember right, supposed to shoulder our own travel expenses to the conference.

The regional Asian conferences were the ones I found more exciting, for there were writer delegates from other countries.

PEN, I saw as family, especially those first ten years. 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.

I looked up to, admired, and respected the senior members who were also the members of the board of PEN: S.P. Lopez, Armando Malay, (Salvador Roxas Gonzales, De La Salle), Virgilio Almario, Mauro Avena, Nina Estrada Puyat, Lina Espina Moore, Estie Juco, Estrella Alfon, Gilda Cordero-Fernando, Lilia Ramos de Leon, Ines Taccad Cammayo.

FSJ had a one-on-one close relationship with the members, whom he treated as family. I was one of them, young as I was then. In retrospect, I did not know then what an important thing it was that happened in my life, in my 34th year, so fresh from the first and only writing workshop I was ever able to attend.

Those early years I got this feeling that I was some kind of *niña bonita* in FSJ's eyes. Maybe because I was attending almost all the meetings, even the special ones, the weekly ones, and definitely, the obligatory monthly meetings. Solidaridad was a single ride away from my place, taking only about 20 to 30 minutes. I particularly remember the special occasions at the PEN, specifically when the Joses hosted a visiting poet, journalist or novelist, who would usually deliver a lecture. We PEN members were the audience, and were expected to participate in a stimulating intellectual exchange.

In the early days, I would have Jessie with me, walking in M.H. del Pilar where we got our respective rides.

FSJ would call me at home. Everyone had a PLDT landline then. I remember his voice on the phone, and his sweetly demanding tone: "Geraldine, what are you doing? Why don't you come by and let's have coffee?"

We had several of these coffee-and-*ensaymada* dates—walking the short distance from Soli to Hizon Cafe—and all the while, he would be expounding on whatever would be either occupying his mind, or simply random thoughts. It must have been there where he expounded on certain literary ideas about my writing. And it must have been there where I casually asked the hypothetical question: "Sir, how does one get published?" This was

a few months after the Silliman workshop, and a flurry of stories had come out from my pen. These were published in national magazines one after another. His answer was a question: "*Bakit hija, ilan na ba nasulat mo?*"

I said: "Nine."

He said: Give them to me."

It turned out he was a reader for New Day Publishers.

In a year's time, I had my first book, He was out of the country during the launching. Tessie Jose practically did everything for the launching of my book.

I recall visiting him in Baguio, where he would be doing his writing at Vallejo Hotel. I can't remember how he got to know I would be in Baguio teaching one or two courses that summer, but he invited me to drop by and see him at the hotel where he would be cooped up doing his own writing. He found it difficult to write in Manila. It was an afternoon, overcast as most days are in Baguio. I went to his room and found him sitting on his desk, his typewriter in front of him, his hands on the keys. On another table were rows and rows of printouts, sheets of oily-looking paper with smudgy pale indigo-blue, printouts of what he had obviously finished.

"Here I am," he said, as though to say: "Here is how I am, how I look when I work, when I write."

I don't remember how long I stayed, but I remember a scene: the two of us crossing the width of Session Road—for coffee and more talk. I don't remember the cafe.

I don't remember specifically what we talked about. Frankie was a man who was talking most of the time. And I was a forever-curious student of writing and literature. It's possible it was during this tête-a-tête where I must've asked what he thought about what some people have observed about the prevailing theme of sadness in my stories. His answer, not the question I asked, is what I clearly remember: "Remember, Geraldine, that all great works of literature have a tinge of sadness in them." How right he was. A slew of writers immediately came to my mind: Dostoevsky, Mann, Turgenev, Tolstoy, Flaubert, etc.

I have in my hard disk files, in the folder "Literary," a page where I have encoded the pointers, advice, observations FSJ gave me in the course of our conversations: (1.) That my second book should be an absolute

improvement of the first; (2.) That my characters are so bourgeois— that I should write of proletariat themes, of the common people, like a bus conductress, a waitress. This pissed me off. Weren't we supposed to write of things we knew? I asked him that. I didn't know anything about the lives of waitresses, bus conductresses, etc. His answer was, as usual, quick and abrupt: "Research them, *hija*, study them." I'd hit back: Aren't we supposed to write of things we are most familiar with? Our own milieu? He reiterated that I must research on their lives. This was his favorite topic—the poor vs. the rich. And he was inflicting it on me. After a first book. Which he himself recommended. I don't know if he realized how I'd written on the subject of the struggling poor, of beggars in the street scrounging for food, under the heat of the sun, entering bus stop restaurants on highways, scrounging for left-overs from tables yet to be cleared.

He was not around when my book was launched at his bookstore. Mam Tessie took care of everything. I remember showing him a nice letter from the American owner of The Cellar Bookshop in Michigan praising my book, specifically the dialogues—"the best dialogues he has ever read in a month of Sundays, from a Filipina writer. And I remember the smile on his face as he teased me: "Now, you can die." A hyperbole.

I think those first five years—'79 to '84—were the years that we were closest. I surmise that he liked me for being a PEN regular, for unfailingly going to the meetings, whether they be the regular meetings or the special meetings or receptions for visiting writers of other nations.

In 2007, after not attending so many PEN conferences of the previous years, I decided to attend that year's annual conference, because the venue happened to be UST, not quite far from my place, the nearest among all the venues for the past 43 years. Looking up the stairs, I saw several familiar faces: he, Tessie, my former Professor Elmer Ordoñez, Bien Lumbera. Climbing the stairs, he greeted me with: "They were all asking who you were; and I said that's Geraldine." There was pride in his voice as he said it. My heart leapt with joy. He remembered me, and was proud of it.

Tribute to an Old Friend

Cristina Pantoja Hidalgo

I met Frankie Sionil Jose when I was still an undergraduate Philosophy major in UST. Frankie was already Frankie, and Solidaridad was already Solidaridad. But he made my friend Rita, and me feel welcome.

So, after getting our regular allowances from the *Varsitarian*, we would make a trip to Padre Faura and scour the shelves for those books we could only find in Soli.

I recall finding the novels of Pramoedya Ananta Toer and the *Letters of a Javanese Princess* by Kartini there, when no one else we knew had even heard of them. And Lawrence Durrell's *Alexandria Quartet*. And the poems of Apollinaire and Yevtushenko.

After graduation, Rita became Frankie's Assistant in the literary journal *Solidarity*. I was an instructor in UST. My boyfriend, who was teaching in UP, would fetch me after our classes, and we would go to Solidarity's office, on top of the bookstore, and hang out with Frankie and Tessie, and whichever writer friends of theirs happened to be visiting. It was exciting! It felt like our own version of Paris' Left Bank.

Later, Rita's boyfriend would come for her, and the four of us would have dinner in one of the many small cafés in Ermita—maybe Guernica's—and then go for drinks in one of the tiny bars, like Taboy, which had a blind pianist.

The years of student activism and the imposition of martial law changed all our lives.

In 1975, Tony accepted a position with UNICEF, and we left the country. But, on our regular home leaves, we would sometimes drop in to

say hello to Frankie and Tessie. Frankie would ask us about the literature in whichever country we were living. And, if I recall correctly, he inevitably knew a couple of writers in every country we mentioned.

Tony and I returned to Manila for good in 1990, and were delighted to discover that Frankie was still holding forth in a Solidaridad that looked exactly as it did when we first found it. The first thing Frankie did, after welcoming us back, was urge us to reactivate our membership with PEN. That was easy to do. The Board members were all old friends of ours: Elmer Ordoñez, Lito Zulueta, Shirley Lua, Charlson Ong…

Over the years we have remained good friends. We may have sometimes disagreed on political issues, and have sometimes been taken aback by his peremptory ways. But never did we experience anything but support and encouragement from Frankie.

In the last decade or so, most bookstores have stopped carrying literary titles, preferring to crowd their shelves with wattpad novels and horror comics. 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 is not even to mention the formidable body of his works.

When Tony set up Milflores Publishing, Frankie was ready with advice on the running of a small publishing house. One time, he stunned Tony by saying, "Better still, why don't you just take over my place? I'm not getting any younger, you know." We wondered, then, if Frankie was actually thinking of selling Solidaridad. Surely not! It must have been a joke. After all, he knew there was no way Tony could have possibly bought it.

When I became director of the UP Press, Frankie suggested that I recruit more UP writers to become part of PEN. "You are so many good writers there," he said to me. "PEN needs you. Tell them they are welcome here." And when I became director of the UST Publishing House, and later, of the UST Center for Creative Writing and Literary Studies, Solidaridad's doors were always open to us. Frankie was always willing to host our book launches, even when the books were by young writers whom he did not personally know.

Actually, I think my *Collected Stories and Tales* (UST, 2019) may have been one of the last books to be launched at Solidaridad in 2020, before the pandemic struck.

So, for that last gift, and for the friendship of more than five decades, *maraming, maraming salamat*, Frankie. And Godspeed.

January 6, 2022

Remembering: The 95th Birthday Celebration of Francisco Sionil Jose

Rita B. Gadi

Certain episodes leave indelible marks that remain etched in our hearts. Francisco Sionil Jose was signed across the landscape of my life, without erasures or editing. 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.

Comment Magazine was the publication when I first worked with you. The office was at the mezzanine of the Benipayo Press. It was spacious, cozy, and professionally arranged by Tita Tessie, your lovely wife, who was class and heritage, gently blended. Zeny Roldan, was the "etcetera" secretary for the multi-tasks she dexterously handled. Even then, I knew that I was walking on the carpet of an extraordinary writer.

When we transferred to Padre Faura, Solidaridad Publishing House was born and became the cerebral coffee meeting center of the cognoscenti and intellectuals.

You were a truly gifted man whose vision stretched beyond your essays and novels, reaching for that level of perfection in every genre of writing. You were very strict with grammar, syntax and the over-use of adjectives and superlatives. The editing you taught was that of a sculptor, carving out the mass to allow the image to surface by itself: clearly defined, pure, aesthetic. You were unrelenting with castigating words, your eyes staring intently, your voice close to a high pitch exclaiming: "Watch the splitting of the words; get the correct spelling; do not change the context; write simply from the heart," and so forth.

Interviews and essays about our national artists like Fernando Amorsolo, the painter, and Leonardo Locsin, the architect; and Akira Kurosawa, who was in Manila to receive the Ramon Magsaysay Award for film direction, were some of my awesome experiences because of you.

You have the kindest, gentlest hands of a literary professional who guided, coaxed, lectured and taught me how the written word is sacred and that publication is open to the world for the betterment of lives and not for the selfish satisfaction of the writer.

Through the years, I wove in and out of Solidaridad as your Assistant Editor: from college days, through my family life, and a brief hiatus in Kidapawan. My thesis on the war in Mindanao was confiscated by the military during Martial Law, but you braved publishing the original notes for Solidarity Magazine, and the Bangsa Moro history unfolded from there.

Solidaridad can never leave my heart.

To have worked with you, Sir Frankie, instilled in me the discipline and the devotion that a writer should have. Your novels had me enter the world of the oppressed, their struggle for justice, and the interminable search for an honorable, decent life. You surfaced the depths of suffering and the hope for the resolution of conflicts.

We celebrate you and a truly outstanding life with the magnitude of greatness: a National Artist Award as a national treasure; a library of your novels, essays, short stories, and other writings; a Book Shop and an office that have welcomed, entertained and influenced the best and finest minds of our time; a family of accomplished children and grand-children; a devoted, loving and beautiful wife.

You are a legacy of masterpieces translated in several languages.

Salute, Mr. Jose, my indelible memory.

Manong Frankie: The Writerly Grandfather I Never Had

Ralph Semino Galán

I come from a family of businessmen and tradespeople, policemen and military officers, office workers and sales agents, and some lazybones and inveterate gamblers, with a few teachers here and there to infuse the bloodline with intellectual pursuits. But my bibliophilia is still a bit of an anomaly, despite my Mom being an English teacher, who had encouraged me to read at a very early age—perhaps at two or three years old.

Since discovering the pleasure of reading, and a few years later, the joy of writing, I have always been inseparable from books, oftentimes reading in the dark, literally under the sheets, with a flashlight as my reading lamp. I remember being constantly reprimanded by my late Dad—who used to manage, first a printing press, then a logging company, then finally a small business that rented out air compressors—for reading late at night, sometimes up to the wee hours of the morning. "Too much reading will destroy your eyes," he warned.

But his prohibition did not dissuade me from exploring other worlds, other lives, which are so different from mine: more exhilarating, more magical, more action-filled. So it comes as no surprise that I first encountered Manong Frankie through one of his books, the novel *Ermita* in particular.

I learned about Ermi Rojo's life story in the late 1980s, when the novel received a positive review in *Time Magazine* no less—a full-page synopsis and assessment of its literary and extra literary merits, if my memory serves me right. I was only sixteen or seventeen at that time, and the

only other Filipino novels that I had read back then were Jose Rizal's *Noli Me Tangere* and *El Filibusterismo*. Manong Frankie's *Ermita* was the third novel I read written by a Filipino fictionist, followed closely by Stevan Javellana's *Without Seeing the Dawn* and Alfred A. Yuson's *The Great Jungle Energy Cafe*.

I remember that I enjoyed reading *Ermita*. It reminded me of three of the four novels that I had chosen to read and review for my literature class under Mrs. Corazon Dadufalza in Philippine Science High School. These novels, like *Ermita*, had narratives that were not only well-written but gripping as well, albeit tragic in the end: Dostoyevsky's *Crime and Punishment*, Flaubert's *Madame Bovary*, and Hardy's *Tess of the d'Urbervilles*.

I would only get to meet Manong Frankie in person, or face-to-face, to use current pandemic parlance, some five years later, when the writing fellows of the 2nd ASEAN Writers' Conference/Workshop on Poetry visited his Solidaridad Bookshop located on Padre Faura St., Ermita, Manila, the very locale of his novel. He welcomed the ASEAN delegates, myself included, with warmth and generosity, which, I would learn years later, was his typical reception for young writers and artists when they paid him a visit.

During that courtesy call, Manong Frankie gave away several copies of *Solidarity*, the literary journal that first paid attention to Southeast Asian writers and writing, to each of us. There were also free food and drinks for all, which I would also learn, another five years later, was typical, when I began attending the meetings and gatherings of the Philippine Center of International PEN, held at the end of each month in Solidaridad. I remember buying a copy of his novel *Viajero*, which he signed and simply inscribed, "Maraming Salamat!" I would receive more personal dedications and longer notes from him in the years to come.

In 1999, when I was named by Ophelia A. Dimalanta one of the junior fellows of the newly established UST Center for Creative Writing and Studies, I was able to interact with Manong Frankie more frequently. Back then, he would grace the Center with his presence twice or thrice a month as a senior fellow. He was always affable to me, though in a gruff grandfatherly kind of way, admonishing me at times for not paying more attention to my writing, since I was preoccupied back then with teaching as many as six undergraduate classes (with at least forty students in each class!) aside from helping organize the events of the Center.

I remember accompanying Ma'am Ophie, during that time, to an important dinner reception held in Manong Frankie's house in Quezon City—the guests included Bro. Andrew Gonzalez, the Secretary of the Department of Education, Culture and Sports back then, and the Director of the Toyota Foundation—where Manang Tessie, served us delicious dishes and desserts. I was able to have a brief *tête-à-tête* with her during that party, and learned how dedicated she was to Manong Frankie and his causes.

Years later, Manang Tessie would reveal in another *tête-à-tête*, a longer one this time, in Solidaridad Bookshop, that her grandfather, a medical doctor, was a classmate of Rizal in UST, and that, being a nurse herself, she was instrumental in making sure that Manong Frankie's medicines would not contraindicate one another by adjusting their dosage. She was partly (if not mostly) responsible, thus, for the long and productive life of the 2001 National Artist for Literature.

Through the years, 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 had 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."

So even if I, too, had my awkward and embarrassing moments with Manong Frankie—what comes to mind is the CETA-CDE National Conference incident, where he abruptly stopped me, as I was introducing him as the keynote speaker, in front of hundreds of participants, saying in a loud voice: "*Tama na iyan*, Ralph, *gusto ko nang magsalita*!"—I can only remember him with fondness and gratitude, never with resentment or derision, like the grandfatherly writer figure I consider him to be.

Remembering Manong Frankie in Tokyo

Jose Wendell P. Capili

Manong Frankie visited Tokyo frequently, usually writing, having meetings with his translators, or speaking during conferences.

When I became a Japanese Ministry of Education (Monbusho) scholar at the University of Tokyo (aka, Todai) from 1993 to 1995, Manong Frankie, and his wife, Manang Tessie, traveled across Japan. Manong was working on a new novel. He also received a Japan Foundation fellowship to do archival and field research on Artemio Ricarte.

Ricarte was the first chief of staff of the Armed Forces of the Philippines (1897-1899). Initially, Ricarte fought with the Philippine revolutionaries against Spain. But he refused to take his oath of allegiance to the United States, so he became an exile in Guam, Hong Kong, Shanghai, and Yokohama from 1915 to 1942. During World War II, the Japanese government brought him back to the Philippines to help pacify "the Islands" and establish a pro-Japanese civil government. No wonder Manong was so into him.

Manong Frankie also brought me to bookshops, museums, libraries, and engagements, where he was often the keynote speaker or guest of honor. He also invited me to eat in high tea places in Shibuya and Shinjuku. And each time, before leaving, he ordered fluffy Japanese egg sandwiches for me to take home.

One afternoon, I took a train with Manong from Shibuya to Roppongi. He was then writing chapters of his new novel in the atelier of a Dominican priest and artist in Nampeidai. One of my classmates at Todai's

Department of Comparative Literature and Culture lives in Nampeidai. It is an exclusive neighborhood near Shibuya's central business district. Japanese prime ministers and CEOs live there too.

Upon reaching Roppongi Train Station, Manong and I walked for about 30 minutes to the International House of Japan (IHJ). Founded in 1952, the IHJ received support from the Rockefeller Foundation, several Japanese organizations, and the former estate of Koyata Iwasaki of the Mitsubishi business empire. Since then, the ISJ has hosted many international conferences, meetings, and events. To a certain extent, it is Tokyo's multidisciplinary intellectual hub.

Manong brought me to the IHJ several times. He introduced me to his vast network of Japanese diplomats, professors, writers, researchers, translators, and students. Soon after, I received invitations to speak at the IHJ during their frequent meetings and fora involving international students from Japanese universities. There were also invites to publish papers and poems, mainly in Japanese.

Until then, 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.

Before Manong Frankie and Manang Tessie returned to Manila, I went to Nampeidai for the last time. They gave me baskets and boxes containing food, drinks, slightly used pots, pans, and utensils for me and my Japanese dormmates. They paid for the cab that brought me back to far-away Mitaka, where the University of Tokyo maintained a dormitory, mainly for Japanese undergraduate students.

After Japan, Manong recommended me to other scholarships and fellowships overseas. But I will never forget our frequent get-togethers at the IHJ. He also brought me to other similar spaces. I saw Manong through his kindness, especially during my student years in Tokyo.

Frankie and Tessie: Reflections on the Passing of F. Sionil Jose (1924-2022)

Cecilia Manguerra Brainard

After several years of not seeing Frankie Jose, I met him again in Cebu in 2013 at the musical adaptation of his short story, "Progress." Hendri Go was the man behind the production about an unappreciated government clerk. Hendri had invited me to the show.

The program went well, and afterwards, I went up to greet Frankie. I was feeling a bit guilty because I had not seen him nor his wife Tessie for over a decade, and indeed the first thing he said was something like, "Where have you been?"

I had launched my first two books at Solidaridad, the iconic bookshop owned by Frankie and Tessie. The first launch in 1988 (for *Woman with Horns and Other Stories*) had been arranged by Cebuana writer Lina Espina Moore, who had taken me under her wing. In 1991, I also launched the Philippine edition of my first novel, *Song of Yvonne* (aka *When the Rainbow Goddess Wept*) at Solidaridad; 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.

Now in Cebu, I explained to Frankie that whenever I would visit the Philippines from California, I would just have a few days in Manila, and Manila's traffic had become impossible. Grumpily, he muttered that I

should launch my books at Solidaridad, referring to launches of my other books elsewhere—apparently he had noticed. Frankie also made it clear that I should visit them at Solidaridad, and asserted we would launch my books there. His wife Tessie who was beside him, echoed his sentiments.

I was surprised that he and Tessie cared whether I visited them or not, given how busy they were. The two of them were like royalty amongst Manila's literati and intelligentsia; and they had numerous events and people to see. Aside from that, they had Solidaridad to run; they published books; Frankie headed PEN Manila. By this time, Frankie had authored some thirty books, with his five-book *Rosales Saga* novels published and translated by big international publishers. He had a string of awards including the Ramon Magsaysay Award for Journalism, the Cultural Center of the Philippine Centennial Award, the *Chevalier dans L'Ordre des Arts et Lettres*, the Pablo Neruda Centennial Award, and the National Artist Award for Literature.

And there the two of them were, looking hurt because I had not been visiting them.

I would learn that Frankie and Tessie had ties with Cebu and had affection for the place and its people. Tessie Jose's father, Dr. Antonio Jovellanos, had been the chief physician at Cebu's Eversley Childs Sanitarium; he had been an expert on leprosy. Tessie had an aunt, Sister Bernarda Jovellanos, who was a Benedictine nun in Cebu. Tessie's sister, Tusing Jovellanos Perez, lived in Cebu. Frankie described with warmth Cebu in the late 1940s, how he had visited it for the first time on board a C-47 twin-engine transport plane with bucket seats. He affectionately described Cebu as "a big town with very little traffic and a business district confined along a main street onwards to Fuente Osmeña, and ending at the Capitol. There were the Old Santo Niño shrine, the public market and the port area redolent with the smell of copra and horse dung."

Frankie and Tessie were fond of Cebuano writers. Aside from Lina Espina Moore, Frankie mentioned Estrella Alfon, Resil Mojares, Monsignor Rudy Villanueva, Erma Cuizon, Simeon Dumdum, among others. In the eyes of Frankie and Tessie, I was part of this tribe.

I made it a point to see them whenever I was in Manila.

By 2014, Manila had changed and had become denser, more chaotic, with high rises popping up everywhere, even in the Ermita area of Solidaridad. Still, whenever I entered the shop, I felt as if I'd come home. In

fact, the place evoked pleasant memories of my college years when my friends and I used to hang around the bookshop. There I felt safe and secure, and the books and people felt familiar; and seeing the Joses was like a joyful reunion with a beloved aunt and uncle.

I would climb up two flights of narrow stairs to find Tessie waiting, and she and I would spend time chatting in Cebuano about Cebu and literary tidbits.

After a while, Cesar (their assistant) would announce that "Sir" was ready to see me, and Tessie and I would climb the third flight of stairs (narrower still than the first two flights) to get to the top floor of Solidaridad where literary events were held, and where Frankie held court.

Because Frankie often had meetings with guests or students, I expected my visits to be brief, but those visits would last for hours. Aside from *merienda* around the round table, sometimes we had lunches outside—the Indian restaurant next to Solidaridad was a popular destination. When the new Casino Soler, opened, Frankie declared we would go there. He proudly showed me around the huge flashy Casino. There were other outings: once he brought me along to the book launch of a journalist in Forbes Park; he also invited me and Hendri Go to go with them to Quezon City to the Mall where he and Tessie took their evening walks. Afterwards, we had dinner at a Chinese restaurant there. What fun that was to travel with them in their SUV, fighting Manila's traffic all the way to Quezon City, then to walk with the pair alongside Mall shops. It felt like being with family.

While Frankie could come across as intimidating, it was surprisingly easy to chat to him. He loved talking to people. Ask them questions so they can talk about themselves, he once advised me. Frankie himself loved to talk. He enjoyed looking back at his past: that he had been born in Rosales, Pangasinan, of humble background, and his family had lost their land to wealthy landlords. Then he would lapse into Jose Rizal and how Rizal wrote about injustices, the same sort that his family had suffered. Then he would ask me if I knew a particular Spanish-Filipino family, and what did I think of them? After I gave my opinion, he would name various members of that family, pointing out who was "good," and who was not.

Needless to say, Frankie had strong opinions. Sometimes he had strong words about people who had crossed him. But he basically had a soft

heart, a real goodness towards people. I saw that tenderness in the way he treated his wife and his staff at Solidaridad. On one visit, I accidently learned that some staff members were students whom he allowed to sleep at the bookshop to help them.

For an important man, Frankie could be self-effacing and he could laugh at himself. Once we were talking about how poor book sales could cause the remaindering (discontinuing) of books. He recounted meeting his American publisher who asked how many copies of his new book they should print—500,000? He and I laughed because that is a huge number for a literary title; we both knew that Filipino books really didn't sell at that level. "What did you tell him?" I asked. Frankie smiled and indicated he gave a smaller figure, 5,000, if I recall right. He continued that the title was eventually remaindered anyway.

He also talked about the fire in their bookshop, how they dragged all the books, damaged and undamaged, outside. Then chuckling, he added that no one bothered to steal the books.

He was idealistic and would lecture about injustice and poverty in the Philippines, and Jose Rizal, and Marcos whom he opposed, and foreigners exploiting the Philippines, and so on. But sometimes, he would get into territory that I felt was not politically correct, especially in his last years. But these statements, even if wonky, could be discussed without damaging your relationship. He was always open to any debate. And I suspect, Frankie had "favorites" and his favorite people might have differing opinions from him, but he still liked them.

Once, a group of writers were gathered around the table at Solidaridad and Frankie went after a writer. Eyes half-closed, voice a bit gruff, Frankie asked him why it was taking him so long to finish his novel. It's been years, Frankie said. It shouldn't take that long. Flustered the writer became defensive and stammered his explanations. I felt a bit sorry for the writer who appeared embarrassed, 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.

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.

In 1949 Maria Teresita Jovellanos eloped with a young journalist who could barely make ends meet. In fact, Frankie said they had to elope because he didn't have the money to pay for a proper wedding. That marriage was made in heaven. Tessie's financial stability, intelligence, love, and devotion for Frankie allowed him to become the man he was. Tessie enabled Frankie so he could be F. Sionil Jose and spend day after day writing or dealing with literary matters. I doubt Frankie had to deal with mundane matters like a leaky faucet. Frankie knew this; the love these two had for each other was palpable. "Honey," they called each other, as they walked with linked arms, deep in their 90s.

This tribute to National Artist F. Sionil Jose therefore includes a respectful nod to his wife Maria Teresita Jovellanos Jose, who took the reins of being a publisher, bookseller, editor, public relations officer, accountant-bookkeeper, mother (to 7), grandmother (to 11), great-grandmother (to 7)—everything needed to allow her husband to accomplish his dreams and destiny.

Frankie, rest in peace.

Dishing with the Master

Menchu Aquino Sarmiento

For starving artists and thirsting writers, few sights outside of the buffet at an embassy to-do were quite as enthralling as the open bar beside Manong Frankie's study. 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. F. Sionil Jose ate and drank well, as did we, when we were in his company.

However, when one impudent young poet suggested that she might, without permission or invitation, appropriate the commemorative coffee mugs, which were embossed with the titles of the *Rosales Saga*, lined up along a shelf, the rolling eyes and disapprovingly pursed lips of those within earshot, quickly disabused her of such gauche insolence. She was clearly a taker and even incapable of contributing to the lively conversation swirling about the second floor of 531 Padre Faura. But Jose's hospitality had to be reciprocated with respect for their property at the very least. It wouldn't do, after all, to go around swiping books with impunity from the ground floor displays. Note: Manong Frankie had a huge open carton of publisher's proofs from which his visitors might choose, after he had decided upon which he would be ordering.

Occasionally, the Jose's open table featured a leg of Jamón Serrano with an array of European cheeses, and all the gustatory accoutrements: melba toast, bruun butter, aoli, dishes of Greek and Spanish olives, pickled pearl onions. Always, there was *pancit*, usually more than one kind, as

well as cake. Two decades or so ago, the late great Nick Joaquin came, with an offering of *cochinillo* from the legendary El Comedor. Manong Frankie wanted his fellow National Artist to meet the precocious Generation X, Y & Zers and us tail-end Boomers too. He believed us to be the future of Filipino arts and letters. It was this indulgent faith in his literary progeny, which made me choose a smiling porcelain Buddha with bare-bottomed children clambering all over him, from the tchotchkes upon his impeccably well-ordered writing desk. He had confided that he was feeling his age, and wanted me to have a memento of him. The orderliness of his work space, the assurance of a room of his own from which to write undisturbed, were made possible by his wife Teresita or Lita, as her family calls her. Women writers don't have such helpmeets but must make do for themselves.

Whenever we met, Manong Frankie boomed at me: "When are you coming out with your novel?" Such was his confidence in me, that twelve years before I got around to it, he was already urging me to apply for a Rockefeller Foundation Grant at the Bellagio Center in Lake Cuomo. He is the only Filipino to have been on this fellowship twice, but both times, Tita Lita had to stay behind to look after their kids, run their household, and mind the store. The exhortation to get my novel out was inevitably followed by another to sit beside him *"at kuwentuhan mo naman ako."* It has been said that all literature is gossip, and dishing with a master is as good as it gets. When the irrepressible Nelson Navarro was around, this would be a three-part gabfest of *alam ba ninyo. . . hindi ba si kwan 'yon. . . pero ang totoo. . ."* where our history was deconstructed, and the lesser denizens of what passed for Manila high society were held up for merciless scrutiny. Myths were recklessly debunked and fearless forecasts made from the murky crystal ball of Philippine current affairs.

When I resigned from the Philippine PEN board, due to irreconcilable differences with its leadership, Manong personally spoke to me about coming back to join the first International Conference to be held in Manila. That was a dream come true for him. Like a true father to his many fractious children, he quietly told me that *"Mabuti naman na ikaw ay palaban, pero panahon na para bumalik ka na."*

F. Sionil Jose Came at the Right Moments in My Life

Elizabeth Lolarga

He came at the right moments in my life, saving me from myself and my impulse towards self-destruction. On my last year in college, I paid him a visit in his cubicle on the top floor of Solidaridad Bookshop in Ermita. I handed him a copy of a collegiate magazine where I had written an essay chronicling my bout of depression that led to a suicide attempt, and how I survived the episode.

F. Sionil Jose asked me to take a seat beside his desk while he read the article. Then he said he had a confession to make—that back in his own college days, when he flunked a major science subject (he enrolled as a premed student at the University of Santo Tomas (UST), with the ambition of becoming the top neurosurgeon in the country and thereby becoming a millionaire), he got disqualified from his course. He went to the railroad tracks with the intention of meeting an oncoming train, but before he did that, he met with his English professor (I've forgotten the name) who encouraged him to shift to a writing course. He did, and the rest makes for a significant part of the history of Philippine literature in English.

I was soothed that even a man like Frankie who, for the longest time, I never addressed with an honorific like *Kuya*, *Manong* or even a familiar *Tito*, also went through the dark night of the soul.

But being a diagnosed bipolar, and taking my meds religiously, have not spared me from further depressive episodes. In March 2015, I was hit so hard by another emotional downturn that I contemplated jumping off the balcony of a 22nd-story office where I had just finished interviewing a musician. Something pulled me back (a higher force, maybe?), and I wiped

away my tears and went home. When I opened my laptop, I found an email from the bookshop in Frankie's stationery and handwriting.

The letter read: "My dear Babeth, I just got Hermie (Beltran's) PEN Journal and I have just finished your personal essay "Roots/Flights." It's a beautiful, evocative, profound and sincere—poetic in parts and so spiritually revealing of the Babeth who goes around in *baduy* dress. You are a brilliant writer, Babeth. Of course, I've known this from way back but all the virtues are now coming out in middle age! It's both roots and flight and there's no contradiction here. It's in our being human, but we sleep in the knowledge until we wake up as artists! Manong Frankie"

I broke down weeping, thankful for his words which seemed to be the grace that was awaiting me and pulling me from another limbo to the light. I exaggerate, but at that point in my life, that was the effect of Frankie's little note.

Between 1977 and 2015, our friendship was punctuated by visits to his office and walking (when he was stronger) to Za's Café, also known as Hizon's Bakery, where he taught me to have my giant *ensaymada* toasted by the kitchen and to dunk it in hot chocolate. He would quiz me on the books I was reading or what manuscript I was working on. He advised me to get out of journalism and go full-time into writing poems and fiction (that was back when I tried my hand at short story writing). But I couldn't find something substantial enough that would financially support such a decision. I told him, "I don't have a Tessie Jose in my life," a reference to his wife who ran the business side of the bookshop while he made the book selections.

In a typewritten letter from Hawaii in the 1980s when he was on a fellowship, he wrote that one could be a slave to a job or a *barkada* that propped one's ego and natural urge to have a sense of belonging. He thought that was my reason for liking too much and getting too comfortable in my then job at the Population Center Foundation's publications group.

I also attended, although not faithfully, the Philippine Center of International PEN (Poets, Playwrights, Essayists, Novelists) conferences, usually held at the Cultural Center of the Philippines Main Gallery. Under Frankie's watch and influence, the lunches and dinners were always lavish affairs with poetry readings serving as dessert, which prompted poet Virginia R. Moreno to complain, "Why make us sing for our supper?"

At one Southeast Asian Writers Conference in a hotel in Baguio City (since then flattened by the 1990 earthquake), Tessie took me aside and invited me to lunch at their nest. I call it a "nest" because it is the honeymoon cottage which the Jose couple rented from the Mitra family in the latter's compound. It wasn't too far from Burnham Park, but it was still and quiet, perfect for visits from the Muse. She said that was where Frankie took his writing breaks, scrawling or typing on the table in the breakfast nook that featured a large picture window that looked out to the main house's driveway and manicured garden. I was so honored to be let inside their private world.

Another similar occasion was a dinner Frankie hosted for Filipinos who had returned from Hawaii from their official fellowships, among them my colleagues at PCF, Marissa Camacho Reyes and Alejandrino Vicente. The venue was his home in Project 6, Quezon City, a two-story affair which was chock-full of arts and crafts from Southeast Asia. It seems Frankie or Tessie had a liking for all things *batik*, as the tablecloth and placemats were of that fabric.

He had a fully stocked bar, a feature of PEN meetings at Soli. Everyone had wine; he even brought out absinthe. Then with a straight face, he turned to me, saying, "For Babeth, give her a Shirley Temple."

I was in my late 20s but still not initiated into the world of alcohol. Which may be why in his eyes, I would be forever a young writer. In my copy of his book *To the Young Writer and Other Essays*, he signed, "For Babeth Lolarga—A young writer always."

It was my first time to sample Korean food prepared by one of his daughters—it may have been Jette on one of her trips home from the US. Jette died early in December last year. I think this may have contributed to her father's weakening and demise, for she was known as his editor and right-hand person.

When the group dispersed to go their separate ways home, Frankie asked me to stay behind, for he would take me to a writers' party, a Phase 2 to the evening. There would be drinks, he said, and maybe some poetry would be read. But when we reached the house in Greenhills, the people were making ready to leave, except for Virgilio Almario, future National Artist, who was flushed from his nth beer. We chatted for a bit, then Frankie announced he would drive me home, a little out of the way from Project 6, but he was still strong and could manage to drive his sedan at a late hour

while humming and singing along to a tape (or was his radio tuned in to DZFE?) of *The King and I*.

I can't count the times Frankie took me home after an evening at Soli or dinner out in Malate. He and Tessie shushed my attempts to say I could make my way home safely by cab. My address on Sta. Clara street, Kapitolyo, Pasig, became a little familiar to him through my letters. So he used it as a location for one of his stories.

Marissa had a similar experience. She and Frankie once took a boat ride in Hawaii, originally to go sightseeing. Instead it became an occasion for her to unburden the life of her grandmother. Before she knew it, he wrote a short story molded after the narrative she shared.

Sometime during my marriage, husband Rolly Fernandez and I went on a Sionil Jose reading marathon. As I narrated in my blog brooksidebaby.blogspot.com, "It reached a point where we'd try to discuss what we had read and ended up mixing up the characters and plots. Rolly counted how many times Frankie used the word 'sybarite' in a novel. That sounds like my husband all right. You can keep the editor at home but you can't keep the editor from working."

Frankie wasn't just an author. He was also an aesthete—his Solidaridad Galleries gave Onib Olmedo, Mario de Rivera, among many, their first exposure. He said that whenever an abstract artist would apply for an exhibit, he would pose for the artist first or show his fist to ensure that said artist knew his/her human figure.

Another pleasure to watch was his interaction with his confreres, like the younger Gilda Cordero Fernando, who used to have her own Filipiniana corner in Frankie's late lamented gallery, and fellow nonagenarian Elmer Ordoñez, the literary critic. Because of the latter's hearing problem, their animated discussions would turn into shouting matches. But they remained dear friends.

As the writer and wellness coach, Mariel Francisco, recalled, "Frankie and Gilda had this wonderful friendship, in which Tessie was a vital third element, and later (at Frankie's request) I became the fourth. Sometimes at Gilda's, other times at Frankie's, they would outdo each other's *meriendas*. They had the most vociferous arguments, for Gilda openly disagreed with Frankie on almost everything. And Gilda lost no opportunity to tell Frankie

to his face that without Tessie he could do nothing. But beyond it all they remained close and affectionate friends!"

I remember Gilda embracing Frankie at their every encounter, and saying out loud that her arms could not encompass his body because of his growing girth.

I think the secret to earning Frankie's trust was to agree to disagree, *walang personalan*. It's too late in the day to wish that the Young Turks of literature would have been kinder to a man, who in his heart was the embodiment of kindness, a sturdy pillar of support and wisdom for us to lean on.

(From *TheDiarist.Ph*, January 7, 2022)

Bagnet Salad and a Bookstore

Alma Anonas-Carpio

When National Artist for Literature F. Sionil Jose passed on, we weren't on good terms. This does not mean I did not love him—I still do, and so do my daughters. He was more than simply an important figure in our country's letters to my family, and to me. He was a cherished family friend who could, and did, call on me to cook for him. He was someone whose summonses were met with alacrity, and whose silence in the end was grieved much more than the disagreements that spawned it.

This writer from Rosales, Pangasinan and his lovely wife, Tita Tessie, captured my heart with their kindness to me and mine, and their generosity to those who frequented Solidaridad Bookshop, and its literary salon, on the third floor of that little building down the street from the Supreme Court. There was even a time when, after receiving what he'd called a "windfall," Manong Frankie generously sent me a check of P20,000 as *balato*. That money went to my daughters' college tuition, in its entirety, as I heeded the old gent's advice to "put it to the best possible use."

We had engaged in spirited arguments during many gatherings at Solidaridad, mostly with me being irreverent (but respectful), and he laughing delightedly, relishing the debates we would engage in. Despite those not-quite-polite interactions, I retained my role as unofficial bartender of Solidaridad's booze stock. Maybe it is because Tita Tessie and my late aunt, Monet Achacoso, were schoolmates at Holy *Mamaw*—pardon me, Holy Ghost College. I also got my fill of stories, about the aunt I resembled most closely as a youngling, from Tita Tessie, and those stories are precious to me. At any rate, Tita Tessie and Manong Frankie took me in as their own, a family friend, after they found out that bit about me, with Tita Tessie telling me how much like my beloved aunt I look.

One afternoon I had dropped by Solidaridad to purchase a book I had been coveting for weeks. I checked to see if Manong Frankie and Tita Tessie were there, and they were, so I went upstairs to greet them. "Ah, Alma! You're here," he said, booming a welcome from somewhere in his writing cave. "I enjoyed that *bagnet* salad you made for the *Tres Marias* book launch, but I have one complaint about it: there should be more *bagnet* than salad." Tita Tessie smiled at me, then looked at her husband in disapproval: "*Hay naku*, Frankie, you know the doctor told you to watch your diet." *Bagnet*, that heavenly *lechon kawali* of the north, was verboten to Manong Frankie, which is why I put it in a salad in the first place. I left with a loot: a loaf of freshly-baked wholewheat bread, Tita Tessie's lovely smile, and a firm pat on the shoulder from Manong Frankie—riches that still make me smile, years later.

A few months after that visit, I returned to Solidaridad with more-*bagnet*-than-salad *bagnet* salad, a tray full of chicken thighs I had baked, and apple pie prepared by my daughters for Tita Tessie and Manong Frankie. Alma Miclat had arrived, too, for she was scheduled to interview Manong Frankie. I watched the Joses enjoy their feast, my heart full of warmth for how much love I was watching unfold between them: Tita Tessie let her beloved have a slim slice of *her* pie. He turned the other way as she picked the biggest slice of his bagnet from the salad. It soon became my habit to cook food and bring it to Solidaridad for the Joses, a habit I sorely miss now.

Throughout my tenure as *Philippines Graphic*'s literary editor, the Joses always graciously accepted our invitation to the Nick Joaquin Literary Awards, and they always graced the ceremonies with their presence. When we'd meet, Manong Frankie proved to be a treasure trove of stories, the best of which were the ones about his days as a journalist, working for the *Manila Times*. Other people sought him out for his literary bent. I preferred his stories from the news trenches. To each their own.

I would get notes from him on the contents of the magazine, too, and some gifts that are still dear to me: little notebooks I'd take into the field when on coverage; a signed copy of his Samsons novel anthology; a whole bin of books he'd let me cart from Solidaridad's advanced copies of titles from all over the world; a book on aswang lore I'd borrowed but haven't returned. None of these things will leave my life, or writing cave, unless I bring them with me.

Was he a disagreeable man? Perhaps, but not to me. I have read his disagreeable pieces and disagreed with him, face-to-face, about almost all of

them. Almost, because the last two disagreements I had with him were via email, to which he did not respond. The public matter of those disagreeable posts made it so that I, as a journalist, had to make public what would otherwise have been private—and I used the same medium: social media.

It was out of love that I reminded him of the power of his pen—he being a National Artist for Literature and all. It was out of love that I reminded him of his calling as a writer and former journalist, because it is journalist's courtesy to police our own ranks, never mind if I will never stand his equal in stature. Whatever else he may be, Manong Frankie loved this country, 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.

What is wrong is wrong, and the best love I know to give is to tell people when they are wrong, clearly, with basis presented, and without deviating from the truth I try to tell. Things, I fear, did not end well between us. But I don't, and never will, regret my honesty with him.

I can't help but think about how this echoed Manong Frankie's own stories of his relationship with another National Artist for Literature: Nick Joaquin. Nick, too, had been a regular visitor to Solidaridad's upper levels. "We would debate, and loudly, sometimes shouting at each other, but there was always friendship there," Manong Frankie told me. Tita Tessie also chimed in: "We'd keep stock of beer for Nick, because Frankie does not drink."

"Nick was a dear, dear friend," Frankie told me softly, wiping tears from his eyes with a handkerchief supplied by his wife. "The world did not understand that. How I grieved when he died, how much I loved his company, our discussions, even our arguments. He had a brilliant mind, one I was so lucky to learn about and interact with when we spoke. He was a good friend to me."

When I think of Manong Frankie now, Mark Anthony's soliloquy rolls in my head—this poem by Shakespeare that my mother had me memorize, when I was five, is very apt for my feelings. I cannot say Manong Frankie was in any way the ideal, for he was imperfect as humans are wont to be. But I love him, for he was good to me.

I choose not to remember him as a literary lion in an unforgiving arena. I choose to go past the bread and circuses that are part of our existence

in this benighted country—the same bread and circuses that spawned those last two disagreements between us that saw us part ways.

Rather, I choose to remember the nonagenarian my twin daughters taught to selfie on his Samsung, right along with the late Bien Lumbera, one muggy midsummer evening. I choose to let his surprised laughter ring in my ears after one or the other irreverent remark from me. I choose to remember the grandfatherly hugs that enfolded my daughters in love, and the *halo-halo* we'd share from the Chowking down the street from Solidaridad while discussing the craft of fiction writing. I choose to remember how he scarfed down my bagnet salad with utter relish and a mischievous gleam in his kind, dark eyes.

Oh, I am more than painfully aware of the rest of the truths about Manong Frankie, and I don't ignore them. I can't. Yet, still, here is a man whose heart loved well, and truly. Here is a man who also held out a helping hand to many, many writers, myself included. He gave me and my family friendship and concern, and I did not even get to thank him in the end. Knowing him, though, he would have waved my thanks off with a low snort.

For all the controversial content of several of his opinion pieces in his *Philippine Star* column, "Hindsight," Manong Frankie loved this country and its people. My heart breaks that, in the end, that love of country I share with him brought my own words up against his and, perhaps, drew our interactions to a close.

As Neruda put it, "Love is so short, forgetting is so long." I am sure Manong Frankie has reunited with his beloved friend Nick now. I have to believe that, because that means that when it is my time to go, I will be reunited with both of them, and Bien, in a literary salon where there are no hurts.

F. Sionil Jose: "Our most important asset is memory."

Alma Cruz Miclat

Tributes from all over the world are pouring in for our National Artist and Ramon Magsaysay awardee for Journalism, Literature, and Creative Communication Arts, F. Sionil Jose, since he passed away on January 6 at age 97. Grieving, I looked for his recent personal note to me:

> "My dear Alma, your loss is also mine and ours. You may want to keep this original draft of my tribute to Mario. I am now immobilized, on a wheelchair. –Affectionately, *Manong* Frankie."

The tribute, titled *Mario Miclat: The Light that Dimmed*, hand-written on yellow lined paper on April 7, 2021, was serendipitously sent to me by FSJ on April 15, which was my late daughter Maningning's birthday. It was published in his *Philippine Star* column, *Hindsight*, on April 12, nine days after my husband Mario, University of the Philippines professor and dean, poet, writer and translator, passed away.

FSJ was generous in saying that: "Mario's passing is a major loss to Philippine academe, and to the country as a whole, for Mario was also a public intellectual of sterling character. Mario has written several books, fiction and nonfiction, which won him national awards."

He further wrote: "Of their stay in China, Mario wrote two books, a fictionalized narrative of their life, *Secrets of the Eighteen Mansions* (Anvil Publishing, 2010), and a semi-travel book with perceptive observations of life and places in China… As a novel, *Secrets of the Eighteen Mansions* adroitly weaves Chinese history and events into the plot of the novel, giving it

historical context and contemporaneity—a master stroke worthy of a great writer."

That tribute by "Manong" Frankie to Mario was not the first. In 2014, he penned the introduction to a festschrift in honor of the latter on his 65th birthday, a book titled *Fairground: A Literary Feast* (MMAFI & Erehwon, 2014). He wrote: "I asked Alma, Mario Miclat's adoring wife, if I could see him soonest and so one afternoon the other week, the couple dropped by the shop and I got a much-needed lecture on China, the power structure and the decision-making process in that powerful country which, of late, had given us cause for worry and apprehension."

I remember distinctly that day at Solidaridad, a quaint and much-loved bookshop in Padre Faura, Ermita which is as much an FSJ legacy as the Philippine Center of PEN International, which he founded in 1957. International PEN, acronym for "Poets, Playwrights, Essayists, and Novelists," can be found in over 100 countries. It elected FSJ vice president during its 85th International Congress in 2019 in the Philippines, the first time it was held in Southeast Asia.

Mario's and my meeting with Manong Frankie and his adorable wife, Manang Tessie, ended in a Japanese restaurant near the bookshop, with Manong having his favorite ramen, and picking up the bill. It was an enchanted evening of food, words, camaraderie, friendship, and kindness from the beloved couple of the literary world.

At the end of the book's intro, he wrote: "This collection of poems, essays, plays and short stories is a tribute from like-minded friends and acquaintances—an imprimatur not so much for what Mario has already written, but as yet another welcome reminder that he should persevere and with our hopes, also prevail."

Manong Frankie's generosity knows no bounds. He also contributed to the book, with 39 other distinguished poets and writers—a veritable who's who in Philippine literature—his short story, "Gangrene." The heartbreaking story is about a colonel who visits his dying son, an activist tortured by his own men.

FSJ also wrote in the book's introduction words that were for me, nostalgic and bittersweet: "I should mention here that I knew Maningning, Mario's precious poet-daughter, before I met him and his wife, Alma. She used to visit, and show her poems to me. They were lyrical and deeply moving.

Since she grew up in China, she also wrote poetry in Chinese. We talked about Filipino culture and literature most of the time. It was with a sense of horrible loss that I received the news of her suicide. How I wished I had given her more of my time to convince her life is worth all the suffering for as long as the artist is passionately searching for the beautiful and the true."

Manong Frankie's concern and love for Maningning did not stop when she left our world for the Great Beyond. He continued his support—almost like a benediction—by attending religiously the Maningning Miclat Art Foundation activities—poetry awards, art awards, book launches, benefit concerts. We've been blessed by his presence, like that of the other National Artists Virgilio Almario, Bien Lumbera, and Ben Cabrera/Bencab. It was a big boost to the morale and spirit of young writers, poets, and artists whom he encouraged to be creative all his life.

Manong Frankie can also be very charming with his spur-of-the-moment invitations, like when he invited poet Ruth Elynia Mabanglo, historian Fe Mangahas, Mario, and me for lunch in his homey abode in QC. The food prepared by Manang Tessie and daughter Jette (who sadly passed away in the US weeks before FSJ) was simply delectable, especially *Manang*'s curry, which she mastered from their years of stay in Colombo, Sri Lanka. The animated conversation which stretched into late afternoon was even more delightful.

At the 54th anniversary of PEN Philippine Center, FSJ invited Mario to read a paper in the 150th Rizal Anniversary Conference on Nation and Culture at the Cultural Center of the Philippines on Dec. 3, 2011. Mario's well-researched paper on Rizal, *Quo Vadis, Filipinas, 150 Years After Rizal's Birth*, is included in his book of essays, *Hundred Flowers, Hundred Philosophies*, posthumously launched with his book of poetry, *Kailan Diwata at 70+ na Tula*, and novel, *21 West 4th Street*.

On Mario's 70th birthday in September 2019, Manong Frankie and Manang Tessie joined other writer friends like Gilda Cordero Fernando, Rio Alma, Gémino H. Abad, Marj Evasco, Dinah Roma, Krip Yuson, Melba Maggay, Vim Nadera, Mike Coroza, among others, our bible study group called Church Café, our old NPA friends from Central Luzon, and the Miclat relatives. The venue, our favorite Trellis Restaurant in QC owned by our friend Dan Tayag, was also where we celebrated Mario's 60th birthday. It would be his last birthday celebration with friends and family.

Our last meeting with FSJ was at the 85th PEN International Congress, hosted by the Philippine Center for the first time in the Philippines and in Southeast Asia on Sept. 30-Oct. 4, 2019. Mario and I would fly to Davao on the last day of the conference for the first ever Mindanao Art Fair and Conference. Our busy schedule would take its toll on Mario, who would be hospitalized on the last week of December.

We spent Christmas of that year at the Philippine Heart Center, where, after an angiogram, his surgeon declared he could not have an angioplasty procedure anymore as the affected arteries had already atrophied. We were allowed to go home on New Year's Day of 2020. Three months after, nationwide pandemic lockdown would be enforced. It pained me to know that Manong Frankie died in his sleep on the day he was supposed to have an angioplasty procedure. But it could have been a blessing, too, to spare him the excruciating pain and possible complications arising from his advanced age.

In his "Hindsight" column titled "Writers Under Martial Law" on the 50th anniversary of Philippine Center of PEN in December 2007, Manong Frankie wrote: "Those of us who have reached this rickety age—who have written this long—we all know that our most important asset is memory, the capacity to remember, to know history, our past, and to retrieve from this treasure trove those artifices which we then shape so carefully, so lovingly. Then we hope our puny creation is literature."

F. Sionil Jose, "the grand old man of Philippine letters" and "the conscience of the nation," had a prolific writing career spanning seven decades. He penned more than a dozen socially engaged novels translated into 28 languages. several short story collections, essays, and a regular newspaper column.

For all the accolades heaped upon him now by a grateful nation, 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."

F. Sionil José: In Memoriam

Ambeth Ocampo

My father who passed away at 94 was looking forward to his P100,000 centennial bonus; the same was true for F. Sionil José, National Artist for Literature, who missed it by three years. Unlike most seniors in the predeparture area, Frankie was caustic, combative, and controversial in his last two decades. His published views were often contrarian, and on hot issues: President Duterte's incompetence or his war on drugs, the non-renewal of the ABS-CBN franchise, and Maria Ressa's Nobel Peace Prize were classic clickbait. It is easy for keyboard warriors who do not know him, or have not read his work, to dismiss him for opinions contrary to their own. They did try, but one cannot cancel F. Sionil José.

I asked him once why, in his twilight, he was always angry. He replied that his biggest frustration was that the world did not turn out the way he wanted or imagined it to be. He was angry from the realization that he was leaving to a new generation a world far worse than that he was born in. In jest, I warned his genial and patient wife, Tessie, that if Frankie continued on this warpath, his nickname might as well change into "Cranky." Worse, some might label him as "F. Senile José."

F. Sionil José is not one whose legacy rests on the recent tweets and retweets of quotes that incite anger and derision. 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. What appeared so was his way of inciting debate, not a fight. A pity that some of those he nurtured and loved in recent years publicly cut off from him, drawing battle lines to force him to be what they wanted or imagined him to be.

We did not agree on a number of things like his Cold War view of the world and history, but I let him be. I kept a distance when needed. I knew and saw how he was always attentive to young people, aspiring writers, and artists. He was genuinely interested in what they had to say, and the promise he saw in most of them. He encouraged many, like myself, at a time when they were starting out: unsure of themselves, their writing, their future. Oh, how he roared when we first met in 1988; I told him that I had been frequenting his iconic Solidaridad Book Shop on Padre Faura dreaming of one day being a bookseller too. As a matter of fact, I actually thought he lived in the mansion next door, and that thought made me believe, wrongly of course, that one could live on writing.

Once Frankie brought me on a memorable trip to the north, first to Pangasinan to appreciate the landscape of his *Rosales* novels, ending in Ilocos Norte, to talk about life and survival during Marcos' martial law. In Rosales, his birthplace, he showed me the lamppost where he read at night because they did not have electricity at home. He narrated how the novels of Rizal inspired him, particularly the story of Sisa and her sons, that brought him to tears, and awakened him to the inequality and oppression that plagues Philippine society then and now.

Frankie told me about Apolinario Mabini, who left the Malolos Government and retreated to the Balungaw hot springs to rest the limbs made numb and lame by syphilis. I told him that Mabini lost the use of his legs due to late onset of polio. The syphilis rumor was generated by his political enemies in the Malolos Congress. That conversation led to a correction in his novel *Po-On* (*Dusk*) and to a lifelong friendship. In his "Notes on the Writing of *Dusk*" (1998), he referred to our conversation and apologized for accepting the syphilis story as true, and presenting it as fact in the novel, in those notes he gave Mabini his due.

In 1999, a decade after we first met, he sent me the hardcover U.S. edition of his novel *Sins* inscribed: "There is a fastidious young historian here named Lamberto Campo. I think you've met him." It's 2022, I am not young anymore but looking back on the legacy of F. Sionil José at his passing and looking forward, one cannot but be grateful for a life that, rightly or wrongly, impacted many others who will leave the world changed from what it was before.

(From "Looking Back," *Philippine Daily Inquirer*, Jan. 12, 2022)

Solidarity

Manuel Quezon III

That was the name of his journal, published in the shop that bore the Spanish version of the word—Solidaridad. It was, I believe, the guiding principle of his life, even when his words and ideas served to alienate others. The Magsaysay Award, given to Francisco Sionil José for being "An author and journalist from the Philippines who guided and assisted numerous Filipino and foreign writers, artists and scholars in a rich cultural and intellectual exchange," put it concisely and best. This is what he did indeed do, and for which, to my mind, he was and will always be, a Filipino of rare distinction. He lived and breathed solidarity.

He counted—and kept—friends from all walks of life, from different generations, and many nationalities. My father was always fond of him, and so am I, because he providentially provided a key to freedom: during a visit to his bookstore, he mentioned to my father that he had a consignment of Brazilian magazines, and would he care to read them? There began a life-long love for that country—its language, its thinkers, and music—and visits that I am convinced was as close as my father ever came to enjoying life without the crushing burden of expectations.

And there are many, like myself, who, from time to time, received notes from him: sometimes simple words of encouragement (always gratefully received); on other occasions, simply a statement of lively interest (always the best thing to receive). To my mind 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. To the very end, he would not—because he could not—be ignored, not least because hardly anyone is left who could, or would, dare to confront him on his own terms. Instead, the overwhelming majority of responses to

his views were *ad hominem* attacks, the kind of thundering and shrillness that is all heat and hardly any light, because to anathemize a writer is not to defeat, denounce, or defang him, but ultimately, to enhance him. I suspect he relished proving time and again he incarnated ideas that revealed he had a surer finger on the public pulse than all the ideologically-driven denouncers who relentlessly attacked him and his ideas, but who didn't dare to engage him. Rare were—are—who did so: Clinton Palanca, Leloy Claudio, and even the Chinese Filipino businesspeople who organized a dialogue with him; Krip Yuson, confronting him on Mr. Duterte, Joel Pablo Salud, confronting him on the shutdown of ABS-CBN.

By the turn of the century he had outlived most of his peers, and out of sheer longevity his opinion writings, heavy with memories, grew even more ferocious and reprehensible to the majority, who were his juniors. He had that rare thing, a living memory of a time—absolutely inconceivable to anyone below 70—when Filipinos viewed themselves as builders of a nation and not the possessors of citizenship debased by lost opportunities, unresolved grievances, and the extinction of the national project of nation-building. The relics of that era often surfaced in his opinion writing—reminiscences and references to the parades that were a feature of pre-war Commonwealth days—and his political inclinations: what was his repeated flirtation, after all, with the idea of the military as potentially modernizing force, than a manifestation of what the Commonwealth generation had set out to do: create a professional class imbued with honor and dignity, without the entanglements and affectations of the rulers?

We have replaced all these characteristics with a circular firing squad of national denial. Having lived long enough to, not only fictionalize the past, but live and learn from it, he tormented his public by perpetually reminding it of something only he, increasingly, could still recall: the forward-looking dream of modernity systematically dismantled by both the Left and the Right from the Marcos era onwards. He never forgot the ultimate surrender every writer expressing an opinion is asked to make: first, to other writers, because of the possibility of a response better than yours; second, to the public whom you ultimately serve, who will read you, weigh you, and judge you far more mercilessly than yourself.

(From "The Long View," *Philippine Daily Inquirer*, Jan. 12, 2022)

The Quintessential F. Sionil Jose

Francisco S. Tatad

On January 6 this year, Francisco Sionil Jose, novelist, journalist, social and political critic, and Philippine national artist for literature, died at 97. His death has irreparably affected the nation's literary, social, cultural and political scene.

Critics have described Jose as the foremost Filipino novelist in English, the most prolific and celebrated of all his contemporaries. Before him had gone such notables as the talented 60-year-old poet and playwright Rolando Tinio in 1997; the 84-year-old master craftsman N.V.M. Gonzales in 1999; the legendary 87-year-old novelist, short story writer and essayist Nick Joaquin in 2004; the charismatic 87-year-old short story teller Alejandro Roces in 2011; the 96-year-old historical essayist Carmen Guerrero Nakpil in 2018; the 90-year-old short story writer and publicist Gilda Cordero Fernando in 2020; and the 93-year-old fictionist, master of prose and international editor's editor Juan T. Gatbonton in 2021.

Each of them stands high in the pantheon of Philippine letters, but none of them gained the acclaim that F. Sionil Jose did in his lifetime. His awards included the City of Manila Award for Literature in 1979; the Ramon Magsaysay Award for Journalism, Literature and Creative Communication Arts in 1980; the Outstanding Fullbrighters Award for Literature in 1988; the Cultural Center of the Philippines' Award for Literature in 1989; the CCP Centennial Award for Literature in 1999; the National Artist award for Literature in 2001; the *Chevalier dans l'Ordre des Arts et Lettres* from France in 2000; the Order of Sacred Treasure (*Kun Santo Zuiho Sho*) from Japan in 2000; and the Pablo Neruda Centennial Award from Chile in 2004.

Jose's five "Rosales novels," which the Dutch editor Ian Buruma described in The New York Review of Books as an "allegory of the Filipino in search of an identity," have been translated into 22 languages. No other Filipino author has been as widely translated. To James Fallows, the American writer who wrote in his *Atlantic Monthly* article that Filipinos had a "damaged culture," "America has no counterpart to Jose—one who is simultaneously a prolific novelist, a social and political organizer, and a small scale entrepreneur." Fallows is amazed that Jose could successfully run Solidaridad Publishing House and Bookshop as well as the Philippine Center for PEN (Poets, Playwrights, Essayists and Novelists) International, while producing a torrent of novels.

As a national artist, Jose's output is perhaps matched only by the Hiligaynon poet and novelist, Ramon Muzones, who died in 1992, but was posthumously made National Artist for Literature in 2018, for having completed 61 novels in Hiligaynon. Frankie, as his friends called him, was such a prolific writer that people tried to get hold of his latest book even before they could finish digesting his previous one. On the day his heart broke while waiting for his scheduled angioplasty at Makati Medical Center, he was working on three books simultaneously at the printers—"Promdi, an Ilokano Autobiography," "Writing the Nation," a collection of essays, and a collection of short stories. All will now be published later.

I got drawn to Frankie's work as a young student. As managing editor of *the Sunday Times Magazine*, he made it such a joy to read. From 1960 to 1965, he edited *Asia Magazine* in Hong Kong and came home to devote full time to writing short stories and novels, while running the Philippine Center for PEN International, and his bookshop. He was succeeded in Hong Kong by Johnny Gatbonton, who had edited the *Chronicle's This Week Magazine* and whose short stories "Clay" and "A Record of my Passage" had won the Palanca awards. I had never met either, but both became my two literary idols.

On my second year in college, *Asia Magazine* published a short story I had written in class, for which they paid me US $150. *The Varsitarian*, the UST student publication, used this as an excuse to make me its literary editor, without going through any qualifying exams. All this time I longed to, but never got to meet Frankie or Johnny Gat. I finally met them after I left college and became a full-fledged journalist. Solidaridad bookshop was on the same street as the Department of Foreign Affairs, which I covered for the

French News Agency and later the *Manila Daily Bulletin* before I joined the Marcos Cabinet. That's how I finally met the novelist.

My friendship with Frankie allowed him to see beyond his critical view of Marcos in judging my ten-year Cabinet service. In his Foreword to my 612-page autobiography, *All Is Grace*, (Solidaridad Publishing House, October 2021), Frankie says I was extremely helpful in restoring his right to travel after four years of being banned by Martial Law, and in facilitating meetings between PEN writers, foreign journalists and cultural leaders, and Marcos. The first of these meetings involved a high-powered PEN delegation from Britain made up of David Carver, Kathleen Nott and Peter Elstob, and any number of foreign journalists.

Frankie made me an active member of PEN, Philippine Chapter, and invited me to the PEN Congress in Seoul and Hamburg, together with the late Alejandro Roces, who also became a National Artist for Literature, where we met with prominent world celebrities like the Japanese Nobel Prize winner Yasunari Kawabata, the German Nobel Prize winners Heinrich Boll and Günter Grass, and American writers John Updike and John Cheever.

In 1980, I resigned from the Cabinet six years before the EDSA revolt. Frankie congratulated me for it. Later he supported my senatorial bid and my return to journalism as a columnist after two consecutive terms. As early as 2012, Frankie began urging me to publish my first novel, *The Last Holocaust*, then in progress, and some other book. I needed to work on the novel a bit more, I said, so he agreed to publish my autobiography, *All Is Grace*, instead, which Europe Books in London had also agreed to publish.

This was in January 2021. Then on February 6, 2021, he wrote me a short note saying "I forgot to tell you that Solidaridad has no money to shoulder the printing cost." I had to raise the money, and by October 2021, the 612-page hardbound *oeuvre* was out. I suggested a book launch, but Frankie thought the Covid-19 pandemic would work against it. The bookshop began to sell the book, and on November 22, 2021, after selling a few copies, Frankie wrote me a short note saying, "Maybe we can have a book launch. You have so many friends…" The bookshop was not big enough, so I said we had to find a bigger place, and I had to see if my family would allow me to host a book launch in the middle of the pandemic. In any case, I told Frankie on the phone, it would be quite an event if the launch were to be hosted by the "two Franciscos"—the first as author of the three books he was working on, and the second as author of *All Is Grace*.

He thanked me for suggesting it, but said he might no longer be around by his next birthday on December 3, 2021. "Heaven forbid, you have to live for another one hundred years!" I said. He laughed mildly before our conversation ended. His 97th birthday came and went, without any surprises. Then on January 6, 2022, at the Makati Med, he spoke to his heart. He described himself as an agnostic who sometimes "doubted the presence of an almighty and loving God." But for 97 years, he said, he had been served well by his strong and brave heart. He hoped that his scheduled angioplasty would be a success, but he never got to have it. He passed peacefully after thanking his "heart and the Lord for this precious gift."

Frankie did not quite make it to be a hundred, but 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.

Toward the end of his life, Jose stepped on a banana peel when he failed to join the choir celebrating Maria Ressa's sharing the 2021 Nobel Peace Prize with Russia's Dmitry Moratov, "for their efforts to safeguard freedom of expression, which is a precondition for democracy and lasting peace." He was vehemently attacked, and it must have hurt. As a National Artist for Literature and an RM Awardee for Journalism at that, he was expected to welcome the award for a Filipino journalist, and it was "politically incorrect" for him to suggest something was wrong with it. He could simply have said nothing, but the matter was far too grave and he was far too honest a writer and an artist to keep quiet. So he spoke.

Ressa is a fairly credentialed journalist, and if the Nobel Prize had given her an award for journalism, as distinguished from literature, nobody would have made any fuss. But as chief executive of the online news platform *Rappler*, the problem President Rodrigo Duterte raised against her had to do with the constitutional provision that all media organizations should be 100-percent Filipino-owned. She needed to show that the foreign investments received by *Rappler* did not violate the Constitution. This was the long and short of it.

Ressa has fought hard for herself, but it is another thing to fight for press freedom as such. As a life-long journalist, following ten years in the Cabinet and fifteen years in the legislative service, I was conducting a reasonably well-read, thrice weekly front-page newspaper column when

Duterte came into office. He resented my prying into his unexplained official disappearances and his uncertified state of health, and he threatened repeatedly, in public speeches, to bodily slap me if ever we met and to violate the honor of my wife. In the end, the chairman emeritus of my paper, whom Duterte had named to a sinecure, decided to completely cut me off. I became a proscribed columnist. Did *Rappler* ever speak against it?

I do not blame Ressa for accepting the award. She is no Le Duc Tho who rejected the Peace Prize in 1973 or Jean Paul Sartre who rejected the Prize for Literature in 1964 for the most valid reasons. But something has happened to the Nobel Peace Prize ever since the Peace Committee awarded it to Barack Obama in 2009 "for his extraordinary efforts to strengthen international diplomacy and cooperation between peoples." Frankie was right to speak out; a major repair job in Oslo is needed.

Remembering Manong Frankie

Christine F. Godinez Ortega

"To know the truth of the human heart for the sake of all humankind" is one advice I remember best from my many encounters with National Artist for Literature and Ramon Magsaysay Awardee, F. Sionil Jose. At the same time, I learned more about a writer's responsibility to himself, to his people, and to the rest of humanity.

Through the years, I came to associate more key terms with him, such as "cultural identity," "Filipinoness," and the writer's "boundless imagination." He was a much-awarded, wiser writer, whose publications include numerous short stories, essays, a children's story, and novels translated into many languages. And we begin to understand the years a writer spends in reading, writing, and interacting with people and, above all, perseverance over one's craft that keeps the writer faithful to his art in the pursuit of perfecting it.

The man's faith in humanity was always present even when he joked about current events or when he engaged in personal banter with young writers. He and his gracious wife, whom we took to calling Manang Tess, had always been hospitable to many writers, hosting *meriendas*, lunches and dinners often to writers in his home or at the Solidaridad Bookshop.

I also knew that he understood the true meaning of mortality. He knew his life was coming to an end—a realization that made his wise words heartfelt, resonating with many young people when he lectured about literature and creative writing in different schools, colleges, or universities, or enjoyed their company during conferences traveling around the country, despite his age and his limited mobility.

I met Manong Frankie for the first time as an undergraduate at Silliman University where I was a college sophomore in the English and American Literature program.

That day the weather had cooled. It was early evening when I prepared to wind down at the Periodicals Section at the Silliman Main Library. I just finished reading a paper about the sexual metaphor of Cinderella's shoes in, I think, the *Chicago Review* when I remembered that there was a prior announcement in class that a certain editor and publisher of the magazine *Solidarity* would be speaking at the Silliman Hall—a well-known landmark from Dumaguete's Rizal boulevard that today houses the Anthropological Museum.

Onstage was a man, his face intense, who stood straight behind a microphone, gesturing, and conversing passionately with my mentors, Edilberto and Edith Tiempo over what I—barely 18 years old—couldn't figure out at the time. The public address system was bad enough, and my mother's face kept popping up in my mind because it was too late an hour for me to return home.

The Silliman Hall was half full, poorly lighted, and I wondered where my other classmates could be. There were more faculty members than students that night in which this man, who turned out to be Francisco Sionil Jose, spoke. Martial Law was yet to be declared in the country.

After the open forum ended, I went up to Sionil Jose to shake his hand—a habit my classmates and I had when there were writers visiting the campus. My mentors promptly introduced me to him. But I had no questions to ask, and I merely smiled. Yet I knew instinctively that I would meet him again, somehow.

Years later, I did meet F. Sionil Jose again in Cebu during a PEN conference where I presented a paper, and in Manila, at his office in Solidaridad Bookshop, and in several more places across the country: Cagayan de Oro, Iligan, Zamboanga, Davao.

One of these memorable meetings was by a gate in Malacañang Palace. By then, he was National Artist for Literature. He introduced me to "Mahal," his wife, Manang Tess, while Sionil Jose insisted I call him "Manong Frankie."

It was the beginning of a warm friendship. The couple would host me and my friends whenever we dropped by the Solidaridad Bookshop.

Well into the 1980s and 1990s Manong Frankie had put on weight, moving slower than when I first met him in Silliman, but he was as gregarious as ever.

Manong Frankie once said to me (and I guess to many other writers), "You drop by whenever you're in Manila and don't knock at my [office] door. Just come in," he said, sitting before his enormous electric typewriter. And I thought, so this is where he writes his short stories, novels, numerous essays, and a children's story.

During the 27th Iligan National Writers Workshop where, as director, I had invited him to deliver the keynote address, he also mentioned that he had three notebooks for his notes: one in his office, one in his house, and another when he was traveling.

Other invitations to visit his home with my writer friends, most of them from the University of Santo Tomas (UST), came my way. Amid the conversation, food and drinks flowed. Once, Korean food was served, and we had fun broiling meats in his yard. Carried away by our conversation and laughter, we just forgot what time it was. When he and Manang Tess were ready for bed, Manong Frankie, in his by now familiar voice, would tell us that it was time for us to go. And having enjoyed the couple's hospitality, we took our leave gratefully.

On the second floor of the Solidaridad Bookshop, there were books all over the place. And the next time I visited him with my fellow writer Jaime An Lim, he invited us to choose any one book from the shelves. My acquisitiveness for books made me take two instead of one, insisting on keeping both—one on Borges and the other on Latin American poetry. As soon as he realized I wanted the two books, he tilted his head to one side, his mouth opened, and his eyes widened. Then he chuckled his consent.

At another time, Manong Frankie introduced me to American black poets through an anthology declaring that Langston Hughes and Gwendolyn Brooks were "good poets, good reads."

Each visit was a unique venture, if you can call it that.

Manong Frankie had many things to tell me and my friends, and he began this more than once with, "*Magyayabang ako*." He would then proceed to show us his translated novels. We'd grab one and flick open the pages we couldn't read, and marvel at the achievement of this Filipino writer that many students did not know much about.

Fast forward in the future at the advent of the digital revolution and the election of a popular President from Mindanao, he too shared his thoughts in Facebook from his column for the daily *Philippine Star*. He gave his straightforward, frank assessment of the present, and many young, opinionated writers, who had yet to prove themselves within the sphere of what we call Philippine literature, reacted angrily, and chastised him. I felt aghast over these developments, for here's a writer at the twilight of his years who need not be mocked for his political opinions, which to me, in a democratic set up, were honest but not contemptuous of those who disagreed with him.

Most Filipinos take things personally and *pakikisama* matters. I hope these writers when they get to be Manong Frankie's ripe age won't experience what he had gone through. Karma (*gaba* to me, a Visayan) does work in our lives. But Manong Frankie was a journalist and therefore, in my view, tougher than most, not easily disturbed by negative comments.

As a journalist and writer, Manong Frankie had always maintained that politics is part of life, and infectious where its sordidness manifest themselves one way or the other.

He was also quite free in giving advice; no matter how basic, he gave advice to writers about the writing craft. At times, he seemed to me bored in giving advice, but he still enumerated helpful tips to writers.

But what I remember more vividly were tidbits from him that made him human in my eyes: when he reminisced about his crush; when he, as editor of the *Sunday Times Magazine*, put Carmen Ortega on its cover; and when he was in Mindanao, going around Lake Lanao and other provinces in South Cotabato, citing his concerns about further development for the island, as it is culturally rich and as diverse compared to other regions of the country.

Now, the juicy part: his crush was from my hometown Dumaguete. When he was on a boat bound for Manila, it made a stopover in Dumaguete. He got off and went to his crush's house and found her "sweeping the yard." He described the woman and the house, and it amused me when I realized it was a house located three houses away from across our own. The story stopped there, and much as I wanted to probe deeper, I held back. It was water under the bridge.

I was half-laughing when he told me that story, for I wanted to know if he had missed his boat back to Manila and if they shared a cup of coffee. He told me the implication when a Japanese would invite a girl to have coffee with him in the morning.

The next time I visited Manong Frankie, he became aware that I had just changed my last name. He then asked if I knew a "Carmen Ortega." He said that as editor of *Sunday Times Magazine* he put her on the cover. Well, I thought she must have been a beauty to be on a magazine cover. Still curious, I asked, who is Carmen Ortega?

Manong Frankie told me she was the first wife of then President Ferdinand Marcos. Ah yes, I said I had some vague recollection of the name. I was a high schooler when I first heard of the name from friends of friends enrolled in Silliman's College of Law. The law students talked, no debated, over the issue of whether a candidate is qualified to run for the highest office in the land since he was married before, yet he had another wife. The law students were referring to the candidate, Ferdinand Marcos, who was married by then to Imelda Romualdez from Olot, Leyte. Unfortunately, I learned more about Imelda than about Carmen Ortega.

But what I knew about Imelda from my late Dad, who excitedly talked about Imelda's boyfriend, a medical doctor from Tanjay, Negros Oriental, about 45 minutes north of Dumaguete. In fact, I read in one of her first interviews as the country's newest First Lady that she dreamed of marrying a medical doctor instead of a politician.

That was when I began to hear more about Imelda. Years later, I told Manong Frankie when at 15-years-old, my siblings and I had spent our vacation in Cotabato City with our aunts and cousins there. It was also an exciting time because Cotabato was abuzz with the presidential campaign, and with Ferdinand and Imelda coming there for the first time, I heard about a "Solid North," an uncle kept on saying that, showing us a plastered Philippine map on the wall.

Because of the family's Waray connection I went along, because I also wanted to see Imelda, whose beauty was legendary since she became a candidate in the Miss Manila beauty pageant. Above all, she was a playmate of my aunt's husband, and a neighbor in Dumaguete was from Olot, Leyte who knew her.

On the day of the rally, one of my uncles, a supporter of Marcos, herded us kids into the vehicle and off we went to the Plaza.

True enough, I saw how tall and beautiful Imelda was with fair skin, high cheekbones, well-coiffed hair, and graceful demeanor seated beside her husband, Ferdinand in the plaza kiosk.

Later, our group followed the Marcoses to the Cathedral and each of us stood at the aisle to greet the man who wanted to shake our hands. When he came to me, Marcos said, "I saw you at the Plaza," and I smiled and bowed to him. That was how I will always remember the former President who had a photographic memory of people.

Somehow, I now believe what a small world we live in, and we meet people who were mentioned to us, or whom we would meet sooner or later in our personal or professional lives.

As literature majors, often, we took for granted meeting writers, especially Filipino writers. We always thought these writers would always be around. My mentors, who were writers themselves, often regaled us with anecdotes about their own professors and the writers they met as students in the US, like the American poet Robert Frost.

Back in Silliman as a literature major, aside from Manong Frankie, I met several local and foreign writers most of them Americans, like the poet Kenneth Rexroth. Foreign diplomats often visited as well, and some brought with them their own country's writers. The Silliman writers workshop likewise had many renowned Filipino writers who came and went as panelists and whom we interacted with as well. Among the more visible Filipino writers who often visited Silliman was Kerima Polotan who shared her writing habits to us. But one other writer I corresponded with as editor of Silliman's literary journal *Sands and Coral* was Gregorio Brillantes, whose short stories I read in my classes but with whom I never met personally. I learned much when he typed out neatly the corrections to his contribution on why he wrote in English in *Sands and Coral*. I remember him saying, "put a comma here, a comma there, another comma over there. "Oh", he said, "I hope with all those commas, you aren't in a coma yet!"

My memories of writers have always been pleasant because most of them were kind and friendly. And for all the suggestion that the Tiempos of Silliman were CIA agents, we their students were made to read and discuss Filipino authors. The books came in boxes, and as literature majors we were

made to read books from a reading list that included Manuel Arguilla, Nick Joaquin, Kerima Polotan, NVM Gonzalez, Gregorio Brillantes, and Gilda Cordero Fernando. And of course, there was F. Sionil Jose.

All wrote in English and naturally, those were the books we read, because Visayans that we were, we couldn't read Tagalog literature that well. We as students understood the motive of our mentors, which was to show that we belonged to an archipelagic, diverse, colorful, and exciting country, regardless.

In the 1970s, the political movement Feminism swept the country. And it was no brainer to be curious about how Sionil Jose, the writer, described his women characters in his 20 or so short stories and in his novels. Truth to tell, I read only two of his novels, some of his short stories and to be fair about it, I could not give a substantial assessment of how he characterized his women characters.

Later, it was my former undergraduate and post-graduate student, Dr. Loreta L. Fajardo, who discussed with me the women characters of Sionil Jose.

After doing her Graduate work at Xavier University, and meeting Sionil Jose in Cagayan de Oro and in Iligan for a conference I organized for PEN and for friends, Lito Zulueta and Shirley Lua, Loreta shared with me her thoughts about Sionil Jose's women characters. She said they "exuded sophistication, were seductive, sensual, tempting, provocative, and flirtatious." Loreta said Sionil Jose's descriptions were graphic and explicit that added "spice" that intrigued and fascinated her.

Meeting him in person and after being informed that Loreta had studied 20 of his short stories for her MA thesis, Manong Frankie asked what among his stories was her favorite, and she said it was "The God Stealer." Manong Frankie asked her next if she had read "Waywaya," and of course Loreta said she had. This to me explained why Manong Frankie traveled to many parts of the country despite his age and limited mobility. for a man in his nineties. He wanted feedback from his readers, and he knew what questions to ask them.

It has always been a learning experience to witness writers converse with his readers. 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" direct from his readers, even at the height of

his body of works, his awards both in the country and abroad, and his other accomplishments.

Manong Frankie as a writer and a human person, taught me to have some measurement of a writer's impact on readers. As a writer there were always challenges to be met, as well as to gauge his significance as a keeper of memory, and to confirm or to ensure that he had spoken to and about his own people.

In the ultimate analysis, he finally must have realized that, and to quote him during his keynote address in the Iligan workshop, "life is bigger than himself [the writer]" and that eventually, "he is judged through his art," not his politics nor his personal life.

Frankie

Ricardo M. De Ungria

As a high school student in the sixties fascinated by books and art, I took Saturday walking pilgrimages to Padre Faura and Mabini streets from our house in Paco, visiting Erehwon, Solidaridad, and Alemar's bookstores to browse mainly art books and pocketbooks with interesting covers, before moving on to the various art galleries along Mabini, including the Contemporary Art Gallery of Rodriquez, Philippine Art Gallery in Arquiza, and the Luz Gallery in Harrison, and ending at the AAP office cum gallery at the corner of Herran and Taft Avenue. Solidaridad was interesting because it had local books and imported books I didn't see anywhere else, and had framed artworks by Asian artists on its walls. (There would later be the Solidaridad Galleries near Malate Church on M.H. del Pilar where I would first see the works of Nena Saguil, Onib Olmedo, and David Medalla's "Bubble Machines.") The bookstore was small but roomier, and it felt lived-in by books! Besides, it had a cute young thing manning the cashier's desk beside the display window, who would turn out to be Frankie's daughter Jet, who I hoped watched us one night during the Christmas season while our Kinkstones band played atop the narrow cantilèvered roof of the first floor of the Caltex building in front of it.

One morning a few years later, I was browsing at Soli when I heard raised voices some three feet behind me. I don't remember now what the argument was about but when I turned to look I saw a balding portly man pointing at the door and yelling at a white man to get out because he had been saying things about the bookstore and Filipinos that he shouldn't be saying because he did not know any better. When the foreigner left, the balding man was still muttering to himself as he patted the books on the display table as

though to calm them down before going through a narrow door at the back and climbing to the second floor. Man's got balls, I thought, and that must be the owner. I made it a point to ask the cashier who owned the bookstore.

I don't recall now who introduced me to Frankie. It was before I even became a member of PEN Philippines. Maybe it was Godofredo Burce Bunao or Federico Licsi Espino who I usually saw there and was always trying to sell me any of his books which he fished out of the small bag he carried with him. Or Cirilo Baustista who was my teacher at La Salle. 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.

Eventually, I was able to win a few prizes in the Palanca contests, and to publish a few books that he must have read, such that whenever he chanced upon me in the bookstore he would talk to me. Soon we would continue the conversation in the second floor of the store, that functioned as the business office. And later in the third floor, that had a small gallery with a round table and chairs, and a small room by the stairs that had a shelf of books, a sofa, a toilet, and a wide desk where he worked. Beside it, curtained off from view, was a nice cushioned and pillowed nook big enough for him to lie down for some rest or shut-eye. Occasionally, he would invite me to merienda at Za's Café nearby, where he would tell me more stories about himself and other writers of his generation. Sometimes he'd give me a book from his shelves upstairs or else have me choose one from the books in the shop. I appreciated those gestures of kindness from him, knowing he was an Ilocano. He was always writing, and when asked about it, he would point proudly at a folder on his desk.

After I moved to Davao, I always found time to visit and see what new stocks the bookstore had. His shop assistant Cesar Quinagan would see me and tell Frankie I was around and Frankie would have me come up for coffee and conversation. And there were many times he took me to dinner with his wife Tess, and we'd be even more a livelier threesome, with Tess adding footnotes to Frankie's stories.

What did we talk about? A lot of things: writing, writers here and abroad, politics, issues of the day, his life and travels, and much more. Am surprised, on hindsight, how we were able to talk for hours. I didn't indulge in small talk, knowing that my tongue was often quick to flash its horns and

slash away. I preferred to listen to others and observe how they thought. I was more ears than mouth. But I guess we both provoked and teased out thoughts from each other—not deep thoughts really, but natural thoughts muscled out of strong personalities of different ages, alive at the same period of time. There wasn't much to disagree about in terms of ideas of social justice, elitist politics, coloniality of being, artistic relevance, and the like. And there'd be episodes of laughter from time to time. It was simply that he had more personal experiences with the reality of those things, and I learned much about those things coming from deep in his bones. I appreciated his rage and his impatience for change, seeing that they could also be mine.

Whenever I read any column or article of his that seethes, I know that the wrong he messes with again in order to try straightening it out again has impinged on him again because despite the passage of time and the changes in national leadership, nothing has sunk in and moved us out of the deep pit we are sinking in clamorously, merrily, heedlessly. He'd say what was in his mind—on anything and anybody—and damn the torpedoes. And what was in his mind was most often, and defiantly, not the same as most everybody else. Which is what I appreciated in him, and what I already miss.

On the eve of his death, perhaps sensing something, Frankie, who wrote all his life, wrote to his heart wishing it to stay with him so he could write another day.

Frankie, thank you for the friendship and generosity of spirit all these years. Without you, the bookshop will be different—and the same, because I know you'll just be spread all over it.

Hugs to you Tess! Stay strong! Take it easy now, and let the kids run the store.

See you!

Ricky

F. Sionil José, Lusty and Prolific Up to the Very End

Lito B. Zulueta

Francisco Sionil José's had always been a robust, stalwart, and kinetic presence that when the literary world learned he would undergo angioplasty at 97, despite genuine anxiety expressed about his surgery at such as advanced age, there was cautious optimism he would pull through. "He is a tough one," said writer and teacher Cristina Pantoja Hidalgo. "He'll make it."

But Frankie didn't even make it to the operation on Jan. 7. On the eve of his surgery, at around 9:30 p.m., he died in his sleep. As far as I know Frankie hardly read Shakespeare, but his death proved the Bard correct: "Thy best of rest is sleep …"

There had been warning signs. Tessie Jovellanos, the woman behind the man, had said she didn't agree with the operation since she feared he was too old for it. She should know, since she took up preparatory medicine at UST but didn't finish because they fell in love and eloped. It was Tessie who had made sure that Frankie stay fit and healthy in his advanced years.

One time at the famous second floor of Solidaridad Bookshop, the Parnassus of Philippine letters if there was one, after a book-launch and reception, we saw Frankie collapse before our very eyes: good thing his nephew was quick enough to hold him and prevent his head from hitting the floor.

Tessie heard the commotion from the mezzanine and came up. When we told her perhaps an ambulance should be called, she calmly waved our suggestion aside and told us to wait. "*Eh kasi kanina dukot siya nang dukot ng chips, akala niya 'di ko nakikita,*" she complained. "*Ayaw paawat!*" ("He had been sneaking in chips; he thought I didn't catch him. He's so stubborn.")

True enough, Frankie revived shortly and promptly got a scolding from Tessie.

His passing came as another blow to Tessie who still had to recover from the grief of losing her daughter, Brigida "Jette" José Bergkampf, which, in hindsight, was another warning sign. Jette had died in California on Dec. 6, three days after Frankie turned 97; she succumbed to Moyamoya, a rare neurological condition. She had apparently known it was a losing battle and gave instructions for her body to be donated for research on the disease, which is incurable.

The rest of the José siblings, every one of them based abroad—Evelina, Eddie, Eugene, Alex, and Nikko—except for Tonette, who helps run the bookstore, came home to help bury their father's ashes on Jan. 18, 2022 at the Libingan ng mga Bayani. Although there were only 15 mourners at the state cemetery due to tight Covid-19 protocols, the homecoming of the José siblings should signal a virtual homecoming for the clan, since Frankie and Tessie have 11 grandchildren and seven great grandchildren!

Prolific, Prodigious

The size and vigor of the José family embody the man, his prolific pen, and prodigious energy. With his vast literary output of at least a dozen novels and half-a-dozen short story collections, many of them translated into foreign and Philippine regional languages, his numerous essays and opinion columns, Jose was the Philippines' most prolific writer in English and her most translated author barring none. José's supreme achievement in fiction is the *Rosales Saga*, the quintology of novels of searing social consciousness that surveys Philippine history across four generations—from the twilit years of Spanish colonialism (*Poon*; 1984) to the postwar years that saw the land tenancy problem worsen and the Hukbalahap rebellion explode (*Tree* and *My Brother My Executioner*; 1978, 1979), then on to the 1960s that saw oligarchs consolidating their power by co-opting the intelligentsia (*The Pretenders*; 1962), then on to Ferdinand Marcos' martial law that tried to end the oligarchy only to foist its own system of cronyism and corruption (*Mass*; 1983).

Poet-critic-teacher Ricaredo Demetillo called the *Rosales Saga* "the first great Filipino novels written in English." He added, "José, has spoken the

awful truths and grappled with the fearful realities that centrally confront us, not in just one novel but in five books which, taken together, are the most impressive legacy of any writer to Philippine culture."

The chronology of the novels may indicate that the pentalogy's composition was a merry quilt of hemming and hawing, but Frankie had more or less configured its length and breadth as early as college in UST in the late 1940s. "I started writing the saga almost immediately after World War II," he told a forum in UST in 2010 honoring his mentor, Paz M. Latorena. Contrary to the chronology, *The Pretenders* wasn't really the first to be published but *My Brother, My Executioner*. It first appeared as *The Chief Mourner* in 1956, chapters of which were serialized in *Women's Magazine* edited by Telly Albert Zulueta. *Tree* first appeared in 1958 as *The Balete Tree*, also serialized in the magazine.

Malcolm Cowley

But even before these, *Tree* had already been finished more or less as a novel. In 1955, during Frankie's three-month tour of the United States on a Smith Mundt Leader Grant from the US State Department, he met the poet and critic Malcolm Cowley, who was also editor of Viking Press. "I had with me the manuscript of my novel *Tree*," Frankie recounted in the 2005 Philippine PEN conference. "He asked to see and after reading it, he told me he liked it. So he took me to New York to meet the literary agent, Ann Watkins. She read the manuscript and liked it too." They suggested revisions, which Frankie promptly did upon return to Manila. "I started working frenziedly," he said. "Then after a few days … I asked myself why I was changing the novel. Who was I writing for? Were the Americans my audience?" "In retrospect," Frankie continued, "I am glad I asked myself that crucial question. I stopped revising my manuscript … But I will always be grateful to Mr. Cowley for confirming a core belief and for pushing me toward the conclusion I never regretted: write for your own people."

Moreover, key chapters of the novels had appeared earlier as short stories. "I wrote most of the chapters of *The Pretenders*, *Tree*, and *My Brother, My Executioner* as short stories so I could sell them immediately," he said in his UST lecture. "I was very poor, a self- supporting student after the Liberation of 1945." Even *Po-on*, the last novel to be published, had been written as a story. "The first chapter, 'The Cripple,' was published in the

Sunday Times Magazine in the fifties," he said. "By then, I had already plotted the full structure of the saga."

All of this should show that Frankie had completed the *Rosales Saga* at least in his imagination by the time he was in his early thirties.

Cultural Fireball

José was also a dynamic cultural worker who founded and managed with Tessie the well-loved Solidaridad Bookshop, now a cultural landmark in Manila. He set up the publishing house Solidarity and edited the international intellectual journal of the same name that scholars now say helped "construct" Southeast Asia and make Southeast Asian studies the vibrant field of scholarship it is now. He and Tessie also set up Solidaridad Galleries in Malate, Manila where some of the most shining names in Philippine modern art were first exhibited: National Artist J. Elizalde Navarro, Nena Saguil, Onib Olmedo, Ibarra de la Rosa, Jaime de Guzman.

José was also a tireless cultural organizer, having founded in 1958 the Philippine Center of International PEN, the local and the oldest branch in Southeast Asia of the London-based federation of writers and journalists. Through his Solidarity journal, he also organized conferences and forums featuring local and foreign writers, artists, and experts in order to influence Philippine and Asian development directions.

Most Brilliant Bookshop

A belated Christmas gift to Frankie was the Dec. 26, 2021 report of the *Financial Times* on "The Most Brilliant Bookshops in the World." Supposedly "Our Readers' Picks," the list included "Solidaridad Bookshop, Padre Faura, Manila."

"First, this is a bookshop on the frontier of the literary world," reports the well-known London publication. "It's one of the only independent booksellers in the Philippines and it takes its duties seriously. Always well-stocked and up-to-date with English language books, with knowledgeable staff, and a proper bookshop atmosphere. Second, you stand a pretty good chance of meeting the 97-year-old novelist who owns it, F Sionil José, who can remember back to the second world war."

Jesuit scholar Fr. Miguel Bernad had complained at one time that Frankie should cut down on his cultural organizing so that he could focus on literary work, especially writing more novels. But the tale of the tape shows that Frankie was prolific even after *Po-on* was published in 1983. *Ermita*, perhaps his best novel after the *Rosales* pentalogy, was published in 1988; *Gagamba* in 1981. *Viajero*, which Frankie's French translator Amina Said considers his "very best," was published in 1993; *Sin* came out in 1994, and two years later, in 1996, its American edition was published by Random House as *Sins*.

Then on to the new century: *Ben Singkol* in 2001, *Vibora* and *Sherds* in 2007, and *The Feet of Juan Bacnang* in 2011. This list does not include the short novels published as *Three Filipino Women* by Random House in 1992, and of course, at least half a dozen short story collections.

Autobiography

Even up to his final months Frankie was writing and preparing at least three manuscripts for publication, one of them a novel, *Esperanza*, which Tessie said he didn't finish. The two other manuscripts will be published: *Writing the Nation*, an essay collection, and *Promdi: An Ilocano Autobiography*.

In the press by the time he was admitted to MMC was *Collected Stories*. In fact, it was already being printed when he wrote me on Nov. 19, 2021: "I am collecting my short stories in one volume and I'd like you to do the foreword—not more than a thousand words. It could very well be my obit. I am slipping away but thank God, my mind and memory are still keen."

In his twilight years, Frankie had become controversial for supporting President Duterte and the action of his allies in the House of Representatives denying ABS-CBN the renewal of its franchise, and for criticizing the Nobel Peace Prize awarded to Maria Ressa. In both instances, we in the Philippine PEN Board stated our position that politely differed from that of the founder's. We likewise enjoined his critics to respect his opinion in the interest of freedom of expression and free exchange of ideas.

Valedictory Saga

Along with the novels and the bookshop, the Philippine PEN is probably Frankie's greatest life work. During its 50th anniversary conference at the National Museum on Dec. 9, 2007, he gave his valedictory as founding national secretary and in hindsight, the first of his many farewells. Paying tribute to the other founding members of the PEN, he reminisced about Adrian Cristobal, Nick Joaquin, and Francisco Arcellana, who had by that time crossed the Jordan.

"Now, Adrian is no longer with us," Frankie said. "A generation is going. As Nick Joaquin said at Franz Arcellana's necrology at the Cultural Center, 'Franz, I will be joining you soon.'"

"So Adrian, wait for me. I will join you soon too."

But of course "soon" was relative; it was more along the line of Shakespeare's "fadeth in the west." And even then Frankie didn't fade away too soon—he could not because he wanted the Philippine PEN to host the PEN International Congress in Manila before he kicked the bucket; he kept on nagging us about it.

In 2019, he finally got his wish. Writers from some 50 countries around the world descended on Manila to hold the first PEN International Congress in Southeast Asia. In recognition of his achievements as writer and PEN PH founder, the congress unanimously elected him international vice-president, an honorific he shared with other Nobel laureates and Nobel nominees like him.

During the closing dinner, Frankie gave again one of his many valedictories but this time with a surprise twist. He fished out from his pocket a harmonica and along with the Manila Symphony Orchestra, played the poignant anthem of universal fellowship that should cut across race, color, sex, belief, and opinion:

"Auld Lang Syne."

CRITICISM

Po-on: From Darkness to Darkness

Jaime An Lim

The history of the Filipino people and hence the growth of their consciousness and the attainment of national awareness is primarily the history of their struggles against colonial oppression.

—Renato Constantino,
Neocolonial Identity and Counter Consciousness

Though last of the *Rosales* quintet to be written, F. Sionil Jose's *Po-on* (Manila: Solidariad,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.

It is in this looking back that national continuities and patterns become more apparent; and when viewed against the sacrifices of the past, the failures of the present—the corruption of ideals and the easy triumph of greed that pervade *The Pretenders* (1962), *My Brother, My Executioner* (1973), *Tree* (1978) and *Mass* (1979)—acquire a heightened poignancy and irony.

It is interesting to note that *Po-on*, like *Noli Me Tangere* by Jose Rizal and *The Three-Cornered Sun* by Linda Ty-Casper, fosters a strong sense of community, albeit through different means. In Rizal's novel, the oppressed are in a sense drawn into a communality by their tragedy: one individual's

misfortune echoes that of another. To that extent, the lives of Ibarra, Elias, Sisa, Don Pablo, and the other victims of San Diego are but variations of the same theme. This shared fate underlies their oneness, their spiritual bond.

In Ty-Casper's work, the revolution provides the unifying focus of the characters' anxiety, commitment, equivocation. Although often divided by conflicting loyalties and convictions, the revolutionaries are one in their recognition of the force of historical process. The use of multiple points of view affords the reader a glimpse into the characters' inner struggles, but their dominance is eventually eroded and they become, all of them, helplessly thrown into the vortex of violent events and movements. And it is history, as the author has indicated in her dedication, which stands out as the novel's main protagonist, the subsuming force to which the rest of the characters can only react with apprehension or heroism, self-preservation or self-sacrifice.

In F. Sionil Jose's *Po-on*, the sense of communal identity, which is central to the novel's theme, is portrayed in the process of defining itself, of growing and transcending the individual, the familial, the tribal, to become the national consciousness. Indeed, the entire narrative can be plotted in terms of the gradual development of the concept of nationhood, the spiritual birth of a people, as represented by the main character, Eustaquio Salvador (or Istak, for short).

The narrative primarily utilizes Istak's point of view, except in a few situations where the physical absence of Istak from the scene precludes his narrative involvement, as in Ba-ac's fateful visit to the convent in Cabugaw during which he unintentionally kills the young arrogant priest, Padre Zarraga; and Bit-tik's journey to Apo Diego's hidden village in the Caraballo range. Using Istak as the central consciousness in the novel is fortunate.

By allowing him a predilection for introspection and a questioning intelligence, the author makes him an ideal witness to the series of events that sweeps and alters their lives. Istak, who has served as Padre Jose's sacristan and has studied Spanish and Latin, not only demonstrates the perceptiveness to see the moral discrepancies around him, but also the compelling need to understand and resolve them.

As the novel's moral conscience, he articulates what the rest of the characters can only express in resignation, confusion, or inchoate rage. It is also in Istak that the reader sees most clearly the gradual evolution and

acceptance of a larger identity and consciousness for himself, and for his people.

The novel shows a perfectly symmetrical structure. Part 1, which begins with a letter by a Spanish priest to his superior, has nine chapters. Part 2, which ends with another letter by an American soldier to his teacher-brother, also consists of nine chapters. In their letters, both Padre Jose Leon, S.A., and Tom reveal a rare capacity for kindness and understanding for the people that they have come to "conquer" or "civilize." This generosity of spirit, however, contrasts sharply with what the reader encounters in the novel and serves to demonstrate that the colonial policies of Spain and the United States do, in fact, allow for a wide latitude, not only of altruism, but also of abuse and oppression.

The book straddles two colonial eras (underscoring perhaps the artificiality of the neat division of colonial reigns which often overlap): the last decades of the Spanish regime in the 1880s, and the first years of the American rule up to 1900. The very division of the novel into symmetrical halves indicates a form of judgment on the essentially identical nature of the colonial rules of the Spaniards and the Americans. It suggests that, despite the occasional goodness of individual colonizers, the very idea of usurping other people's lands, of forcibly controlling their lives, whether for their own good or otherwise, smacks of injustice—and, therefore, must be resisted at any cost.

Thus, the initial half of the novel deals with the oppression perpetrated by the Spaniards: the loss of Ba-ac's arm after he is hung by the hand for a week for his failure to work on the new church; the dismissal of Istak from the *kumbento* for witnessing the new priest's seduction of Carmencita; the expulsion of Ba-ac's family as tenants in the friar's land allegedly because of poor harvests; the burning down of the entire village of *Po-on* and the pursuit of the villagers by the civil guards for Ba-ac's crime; the wounding of Istak and the rape of Orang by the chief of the civil guards, Capitan Gualberto.

The second half of *Po-on* deals with the revolutionary unrest that eventually ends the Spanish rule in the country. The fall of one reign, however, only heralds the rise of another. In quick succession, hardly giving the Filipinos a chance to breathe, new masters replace the old.

> In another year, a new ruler—and a new enemy—had come. The Americans had defeated the Spaniards and were now battling the Republic's poorly equipped army. General Aguinaldo had none of the giant horses and the big guns that enabled the Americans to move with speed and overwhelm the puny units that faced them. They were also a ruthless enemy who defiled women and bayoneted children (138).

That last assertion, still provisional at this point because only based on hearsay, is finally confirmed in Chapter 7 when Istak, while on a mission to deliver a message to General Aguinaldo, who is being pursued by the Americans, observes with horror the massacre of all the villagers of Baugen and the burning down of their houses by the American soldiers.

> Now, blue-shirted American soldiers dashed into the village, shouting, firing. The screams of pain and fear were not just of men and women but of children. He crawled away to the edge of the forest bordered by butterfly trees and though he could not see the village now, he could still hear the screams, the guttural shouts, and the neighing of frightened horses. When the firing stopped, he slithered close to the village again; now, the big men walked about the village. They had gathered in small sheaves portions of a roof and were igniting them and tossing them onto the roofs of the houses. Po-on all over again…. (180-81).

A strong sense of *deja vu* permeates the second half of the novel. The reader feels that all of these events have happened before—the rape of a young girl, the clubbing of Istak to unconsciousness, the hanging of the *insurrectos* in the plaza, the pursuit of fugitives by soldiers. Nothing much has changed, except the face of the oppressor. But it is the same senseless acts of oppression all over again.

When Istak reaches the conclusion that "the Americans were no different from the Spaniards—they were here to humiliate, deny life" (183), the reader is willing to concede its truth because the novel has developed that very idea so thoroughly, through recurring images of almost identical

violence in the first and second parts of the novel, that the identification of the Americans with the Spaniard is practically inescapable. Even the epistolary prologue and epilogue reinforce this similarity, for both Padre Jose and Tom, as pointed out earlier, do share essentially the same virtues and limitations.

Despite the Spanish abuses in general, Sionil Jose nonetheless allows the possible kindness of specific individuals. On this point, he demonstrates the same qualifying tendency found in Rizal and Ty-Casper, so that even in the face of the worst persecution, the author's condemnation is still less than total. Padre Jose, for instance, softens the harshness of the Spanish image because he stands in sharp contrast to the Zarragas and the Gualbertos of the novel. His close association with Istak has opened the latter's mind to the wonders of languages, medicine, botany, history; to the comforts of the Christian teachings. Although he does not appear in the novel except in the thoughts and remembrances of the central character, Padre Jose's presence is nonetheless palpable. He colors the views and judgments of lstak: he provides the moral standard to which Istak aspires; he is the secret protector, the constant guide to whose wise words and kind deeds Istak returns with compulsive regularity.

But in the course of the novel, with his ever-deepening disillusionment, Istak gradually distances himself from the memory of his old mentor, and his attachment becomes ambivalent to the point that it turns into something else—resentment, anger, even hatred. After all, hasn't Padre Jose, like the arrogant Padre Zarraga, also required tokens of respect and indebtedness? On his birthday, haven't the villagers stood in line to kiss his hand, to pile the convent hall with mountains of food? Istak's unconscious hatred finally surfaces in a feverish dream, on the third day after he is shot and left for dead by the *guardia civil*. In that dream he is transformed into an Igorote and he tells Padre Jose:

> Your God is not mine. He is not in the seminary in Vigan, he is not in you, and if he is in all men, then He wears the uniform of the Guardia, he has a gun pointed at us. I was baptized in the river and the river is cold and it is my brother An-no who carried me there, and it is Dalin and my mother who cared for me. It is they and my people whom I will serve, not you and your god. And as for you—and the likes of you, I will kill you! Death to all Kastilas! (60-61).

These conflicting emotions—a sort of love-hate syndrome—are often seen in the relationship of the colonized to his colonizer.

Just as he eventually learns to come to terms with these conflicts, Istak is also able to synthesize foreign influences and native elements into something new. For instance, the teachings of the Catholic church and the native pagan beliefs are combined into a Philippine church which, while not pagan, is not totally Christian either.

It is a religion whose followers easily accept the coexistence of saints and *komaws*, angels and guardian-snakes. The future is augured in dreams; ill winds harbor misfortunes. God protects the innocent from evil just as surely as washing the feet with warm water at the foot of the stairs protects the house from wandering ghosts. It is symbolically apt that Eustaquio Salvador—the former acolyte, and Padre Jose's protégé for the priesthood—discovers his true vocation as a faith healer, an *herbolario*, a unique Filipino medicine man whose practice blends scientific knowledge, religion, common sense, drama, and a bit of mumbo-jumbo.

Not too surprisingly, Sionil Jose's novel itself reveals the same characteristic tendency of the Filipino to "Filipinize" an imported form: to realism and historicism are added colorful elements of native folklore, local anthropology, and fantasy (the latter Diego Silang and his secret valley; the propitiation of spirits, the burial customs; message-carrying dreams, treasure-guarding snakes).

This process of adaptation or synthesis transforms something borrowed into something more native and, therefore, more meaningful because it bears the imprint or personality of the receiving culture. Although the author does not extend the tradition of the Western novel, his proficient use of Philippine themes and history demonstrates the form's peculiar adaptability to native contents.

Istak's original destiny as a man of peace, a giver of life, is soon to change with the advent of the Philippine revolution and the coming of the Americans. As an acolyte, he has been indoctrinated in the more pacifist virtues of forgiveness, humility, and love. His chief reaction to oppression, therefore, has been one of meek acceptance. After all, hasn't Padre Jose expounded on the necessity of suffering, which is the foundation of Christian faith? "[M]an would suffer as Christ did. In pain was his redemption" (23).

At the most, he can only run away from relentless persecution; he cannot strike back.

Thus, the first half of the novel follows the flight of the entire Salvador clan from Spanish retribution for Padre Zarraga's murder. Among the family members only Ba-ac, who bears the symbol of Spanish oppression in his amputated arm and who burns with helpless rage, can dare to be violent. But even his murder of the arrogant priest is largely unpremeditated, an act brought about only by the latter's intolerable abuses.

In the course of their long flight from *Po-on*, during which they encounter all sorts of barriers—checkpoint guards and rampaging Igorotes, hunger and sickness, wild animals and floods—Istak's resentment toward the Spaniards, who are after all the cause of their sufferings, gradually intensifies. It is ironic that the family escapes the pursuing Spaniards only to meet the indifferent cruelty of natural forces: Ba-ac is strangled by a huge python and Mayang is carried away in the strong currents of the Agno, never to be found. Istak's resentment is eventually carried over to the church, for isn't the church Castilian too? Can one worship God without obeying and respecting His ministers? And isn't God white, just like the priest? And if so, is there any real salvation for those whose skin color differs from His?

> I pray that You be not white, that You be without color and that You be in all men because goodness cannot be encased only in white.
>
> I should worship then not a white god but someone brown like me. Pride tells me only one thing—that we are more than equal with those who rule us. Pride tells me that this land is mine, that they should leave me to my destiny, and if they will not leave, pride tells me that I should push them away and should they refuse this, I should vanquish them, kill them (92).

However, for a long time, this resolve remains only in Istak's mind, resurfacing now and then in times of extreme anguish and doubt. In their new village called Cabugawan, a sanctuary carved out of the wilderness around Rosales, and with a new family name (Salvador is changed to Samson to prevent the Spanish authorities from tracing them), a new life, a

new beginning seems possible, and Istak and his family become preoccupied with life-sustaining activities. He tills the land, ministers to the sick, puts his uprooted house in order.

When the first rumors of war reach their isolated village, he counsels not flight but staying put. The time of fleeing is over. "If there are men who believe so much in themselves that they can drive away the Spaniards, let them think that way; let them shout themselves hoarse. Our duty is to our families" (135).

Up to this point, Istak's loyalty is principally, if not exclusively, towards his family: his father and mother, his brothers, his wife and children, his uncles and aunts, his cousins, his nephews and nieces—the relatives of his extended family. Thus most of the characters in the novel reflect those familial ties. Throughout their flight, the family members help and support one another. Respect for elders, cooperation, and loyalty are not just social virtues but necessary strategies for survival. One member's fortune or tragedy inextricably affects them all, just as Ba-ac's guilt becomes the burden of all. Their closed system admits outsiders only with caution, because too often strangers bring bad luck, betrayal, treachery. If they come from the same region, then there is at least an implicit kinship in terms of a shared language, common customs, tradition. Identification and sympathy are easier to give or achieve.

But if they are from other regions, then there is suspicion, distrust. Dalin and her family, who come from Lingayen, have suffered at the hands of men from the north. Istak himself has always looked upon the Igorotes, the Bagus, with uneasiness. Indeed, while camping out at the foot of the Cordilleras, his family is attacked by the Bagus who resent, and possibly fear, the trespassers in their land. And during the fighting at Tirad Pass, Istak, who is just a simple Ilokano peasant, is treated with suspicion and distance by his co-fighters, the Tagalogs.

Regionalism, then, unifies the group even as it divides the people. Their geographical isolation, their strong regional identity and tradition, and their distinct languages have not prepared the Ilokanos and the Tagalogs, the Igorotes and the Bulakenos, the various ethnic groups in the country to accept a larger identity that subsumes them all. As Mabini sadly observes: "If only we could learn to trust one another—Tagalogs trusting Ilokanos, Pampangos trusting Tagalogs. . . More of this and, Eustaquio, we have a nation" (160).

Thus, before Istak can see himself as a Filipino, he must transcend not only the limited perception of himself as simply a family man, a Salvador married to Dalin, whose sons are Antonio and Pedro. But he must also learn to see that as an Ilokano he is joined in a fraternal bond to his brothers and sisters from the rest of the country. Yes, even to the Igorotes who decorate their houses with the skulls of their enemies.

If Padre Jose is Istak's religious teacher, then Apolinario Mabini, the Cripple, the Sublime Paralytic, is his political mentor. It is through Mabini's influence that Istak begins to look beyond Po-on, beyond Cabugawan and Rosales. Mabini's visit to Rosales, Pangasinan, as the author indicates in a footnote, has a historical basis. From this small detail, Sionil Jose has recreated an atmosphere rich in debate, political intrigues, and nationalist aspirations. As one of the architects of the short-lived Malolos Republic, Mabini is naturally vehement in his defense of the Filipinos' right to freedom from both the Spaniards and the Americans. From Mabini, Istak learns to see the tantalizing vision, the exhilarating possibility, of a free people, a free Filipinas.

In the past, the status quo has seemed indestructible, permanent. He has accepted his humble station in life as a preordained condition. As an *indio*, the highest he can aspire to in his life is to be an acolyte. But even that small dream is withheld from him, at the whim of his new superior. But now, for the first time, hearing about the revolution that is being fought courageously, if not always successfully, by the Filipino people, the flight of General Aguinaldo and the unfortunate loss of General Luna, Istak begins to perceive colonial oppression as a pervasive phenomenon, touching not only his own family but countless others; an oppression, more importantly, that is being met with widespread resistance. "We must not be subservient to anyone, not you to me, as I have never been to anyone. In me, in you—in all of us is dignity. We should stand bravely because we are citizens of a sovereign nation no matter how weak that nation. We are Filipinos now, do you understand, Eustaquio?" (152). And would he consider making that supreme sacrifice of becoming a part of a revolution, "to face the enemy, fling stones at him, and bare his chest to him?" (155). As somebody who has been witness to the gratuitous persecution of his people, Istak finally realizes the need to resist, to fight back.

But as a man of peace, Istak, like Simeon, finds the idea of Violence unattractive. Besides, his primary duty is to his family, to his wife and

Children. "I am not going to be involved with his violence" (155). It is only fitting that he should resist the idea of involvement in a revolution, for such a commitment demands a drastic change in the priorities that he has known all his life. Throughout their ordeal, his family has been the only source of support, of loyalty, of comfort; and now, suddenly, he is asked to offer his life to an amorphous concept, an entity too large for his parochial mind to encompass, a thing called "nation." "How can I love a thousand islands, a million people speaking not my language but their very own which I cannot understand?" (179).

So when he finally offers himself and accepts the mission to deliver a message to General Aguinaldo who is fleeing from the Americans, the reader knows that the decision has not been made lightly, that the act is more than an expression of courage and sacrifice, that it symbolizes Istak's entry into the nationhood of the Filipinos.

None of Rizal's characters in *Noli* has really faced this kind of identity crisis, although there are other instances of identity problems: mistaken identity, withheld identity, falsified identity, revelation of identity (e.g., Santiago as the assumed father and Father Damaso as the real father of Maria Clara; the young man buried beneath the tree who could easily be Elias or Ibarra). In Ty-Casper, the conflict of identity often takes the form of divided loyalty, particularly among the mestizos or the Spanish-Filipino characters who have to choose during the revolution on which side to fight. Cristobal fights on the side of the revolutionaries while his cousin, Leon, ends up fighting on the side of the Spaniards. Thus, relatives, who have no personal enmity against each other, unwittingly become enemies during the war. But since some *peninsulares* and Philippine-born Spaniards, like Ramon Arroyo, stand alongside Cristobal, this means that the question of identity or identification is ultimately a matter of sentiment and conviction, rather than that of blood.

Istak's situation, however, is different: his exposure to an expanding range of experiences has not only brought about an awareness of his membership in increasingly wider circles of identity—family, region, country, in that order—but it has also demanded, in those difficult times, a reversal of the familiar order of his attachment, so that country comes before family.

As observed earlier, the first half of the novel deals with the family's flight from Po-on and the founding of their new village, Cabugawan; most of the second half deals with Istak's pursuit of General Aguinaldo in the

Ilokos. Flight and pursuit are essentially complementary movements, or mirror images. And this again reinforces the formal balance that underlies the structure of the novel. If the name of the enemy has changed, the risks have not.

Once, in Po-on, a Spanish captain has shot him and left him for dead; in Baugen, an American strikes him unconscious as he covers a young girl who has been raped and shot dead by the soldiers. Yet, for all his sacrifices, we know that nothing will really make any difference. History has already completed the rest of the story. General Aguinaldo, forewarned or not, will eventually fall into the hands of the enemies. But, for a while, our knowledge of the historical outcome and Istak's dogged determination to guide the general to safety creates dramatic irony; And when the young General del Pilar, a Tagalog, looks down upon this poor Ilokano emissary and rejects his warnings about a secret trail at Tirad Pass, we finally see the inexorable confirmation of destiny.

Although General del Pilar is "fated" to make his last futile stand at Mount Tirad, Istak is not. Having fulfilled his mission, he is free to leave and return to Cabugawan and his family. In fact, the Tagalogs do not want him around, they do not trust him because he is an Ilokano. They encourage him to leave and surrender, to save his own skin.

Yet, despite their distrust and rejection, despite their ridicule—the devoted family man, the staunch man of peace, the gentle giver of life—decides to give up family, peace, and life so that other Filipinos may continue having them. In his willingness to sacrifice the self to a higher purpose and for others, Eustaquio resembles Elias in Rizal and Amado in Ty-Casper.

While still an acolyte in Cabugaw, Istak wrote:

> We go from one darkness to another and in between, the hidden light of the world, of knowledge. We open our eyes and in this circle of light, we see not just ourselves but others who are our likenesses. This light tells us all men are brothers, but even brothers kill one another, and it is in this light where all this happens. But living in this dazzling light does not blind us to what lies beyond the darkness from where we emerged and where we are going. It is faith which makes our journey possible though it be marred by

> the unkindness of men, their eternal faulting, before we pass on to another darkness (47-48).

With its almost Biblical cadence, the passage is obviously meant by the young Istak to describe man's brief and imperfect sojourn through life, from birth to death. Yet, not too surprisingly, it also suggests the historical context of the novel. The two colonial periods through which the characters move are, inarguably, dark periods in the history of the Filipino people; and, the bipartite division of the novel demarcates the two darknesses. The transition from one to the other is filled with new knowledge and liberating visions, as well as violence. One form of that violence is the mutual destruction of brothers by brothers—Spaniards, Americans, and Filipinos killing one another.

Colonial oppressions are also acts of unkindness. From self-identity, the characters define themselves in relation to others, whom they see as their coequals, their likenesses. And the promise of freedom, like faith, is the sustaining force in the characters' struggles to overcome the persecutions of their own brothers.

This possible allegorical interpretation of the passage, while admittedly simplistic, somehow anticipates and reflects with uncanny accuracy the narrative movement and the structural design of the novel. It is in such felicitous touches, in the repetition and restatement of patterns, big and small, that the theme is beautifully and memorably amplified.

F. Sionil Jose and His Women Characters

Loreta L. Fajardo

Critics of women studies opine that the roles women portray in Philippine literature are distinguishable. They can be wife, mother, daughter, sister, mistress, seductress, witch, and outcast. Margarita Orendain ("The Invincible Populace: Women in Narratives for Children on the Cordillera,"1996) observes that the possibilities of roles by which women are portrayed and represented in much of Philippine literature are defined in the absolute terms of the good and of the scourged. This view is substantiated by studies that apparently point to some distinct characteristics that women characters in fiction possess. In effect, several studies about women have rendered various characterizations and opinions of women in general, and the Filipino woman in particular. But Mina Roces (2000, citing Badinas, 1994) posits that, in the past, women characters were rarely seen to be political agents of change unless they held political office; and that, since they were not empowered, images of women have usually been associated with a particular phenomenon called victimization, exploitation, and commodification.

But in more recent texts women characters are no longer portrayed as submissive and long-suffering wives or dutiful and self-sacrificing mothers or daughters. Neither are they portrayed as the unthinking masochistic sex objects of male lust, nor the cruel, vengeful woman that appears in many male-authored texts. Instead, they have been portrayed as strong individuals who show control of themselves and who can stand firmly on their decisions with aggression. The stories of Estrella Alfon and Aida Rivera Ford, for instance, show women whose strength and audacity could be considered far beyond what is expected of them. In Alfon's story "Magnificence," the mother

fought for her daughter who would have been victimized by a pedophilic family friend disguising himself as an affectionate minder of her children (Reynan M. Santos, 2017)

Helen Lopez ("The Outsider Within: The Cultural Representation of Women in Selected Tagalog Novels of the 1920s," 1992) finds that the portrayals of women in Philippine literature reinforce traditional stereotypes within the patriarchal order. Lilia Santiago (as cited by Kintanar, 1992) agrees with Lopez. In her own survey of women characters in the novels of Jose Rizal, Amado V. Hernandez and Nick Joaquin, she has found them generally portrayed as weak, indecisive, if not, outright victims and wretches. More interestingly, her study draws a link between the condition of women and the nation's conditions at the time these novels were written. They were realistic portrayals and metaphors for the various crises the country went through at those times.

Within this context, a study on the women characters of an award-winning writer can be seen as an important contribution not only to the scholarship on women literature, but also to Philippine literature in general. A noted Filipino writer whose works spanned a long period of time since the 1930s, Sionil Jose cannot be allowed to simply leave the corridors of Philippine literature without the recognition due him. The analyses cover only the women characters from his two short story anthologies, namely, *The God Stealer and Other Stories* and *Waywaya and Other Stories*. This writer believes that Sionil Jose's depiction of women characters is intriguing, as other critics have observed.

Woman as Doormat

A suffering woman is seen as a martyr. In her dissertation, *Female Suffering in Medieval and Early Modern Literature*, Allison Adair Alberts (2014) posits that the late medieval Latin Church's devotional practice adapted the Roman martyr's standard—in which physical suffering leads to salvation and glory—as imagined, emotional suffering. Most late medieval English Christians never encountered religious persecution, but they understood that this largely self-induced, emotional pain reaped the same reward as the early martyrs' physical pain. Alberts further said that uniting secular and religious literature across the medieval and early modern divide has shown how the martyr's example deeply influences—though

simultaneously problematizes—popular constructions of the feminine ideal. *Female Suffering* analyzes how and why texts consistently return to suffering as a means to reinforce, interrogate, or refute cultural expectations of women. Albert's piece is of help in understanding the suffering women in the selected stories of Sionil Jose.

Sionil Jose's stories—"The Heirs," "Two Letters," "Riddle," "The Exile," and "Tong"— present women who sacrifice their personal pleasures and dreams for the interest of their loved ones and families. These are women who give more premium to the welfare of their loved ones despite their miserable conditions. This brings to mind another writer, Marjorie M. Evasco (1992), who opines that one of the most dominant images projected by women in early Philippine literature is that of the silently suffering martyr. As mother, wife, lover, sister, or daughter, she is molded after the image of the ideal woman—the Virgin Mother (Mother Mary for Catholics) who suffers in silence and denies her wounds for the sake of love. These include women who have settled with the idea of what is perceived to be their primary role in life—bearing children. And with this role, her personal whims must not come to the fore.

Thus, Josefina in 'The Heirs" does not disappoint Don Jacinto when she is told, "Don Jacinto was going to have a woman to keep house for him… expected her to be a fecund bearer of children." She contents herself with being a domesticated wife who opts to always stay at home and submits to whatever her husband demands from her. Although perceived initially to have a strong character, since she descends from a wealthy Spanish businessman, she succumbs to the pressure of producing the children of her more powerful and richer husband. The same image is seen in Don Jacinto's daughter-in-law, from whom his son, Don Felix, also demands heirs. After she gives him a sickly-looking daughter, a fiery Don Felix asks for a son: "… what is the use of this house if there are no male children to enliven it!" His constant demand for male heirs causes her unhappiness and desperation, which eventually leads to her insanity. In the desolate asylum, she regresses further emotionally and physically until she dies.

In "Two Letters," Nana Antonia is the typical mother who chooses to embrace hardships and sacrifices so her children can pursue their studies. Despite her advanced age and having a fragile condition, she works like a slave as she dreams for a bright future for her children. Her son, whom she sent to a law school in the city does not actually know of her predicament in

the province. The story does not mention if her sufferings have ended and if she has realized her dreams.

Ella Jacinto in "Riddle" is likewise a martyr. In her youth, she dreamt big "…talking big, owning the sky, dreaming of the good life." But after her elopement with a former schoolmate who projected an image of opulence and comfort, everything changes. He turns out to be "a slob, a braggart and a loudmouth," who cannot provide her the comfortable life he has bragged about. Having borne him three children, Ella sacrifices her happiness and continues to live in misery, aggravated by the physical and emotional maltreatment from her husband. She seeks to keep the family intact despite being ridiculed for her situation—the opposite of what she has aspired for, though she is hopeful that everything will still end with a happy note. With regret, she would tell her childhood friends, "My husband is all right. It didn't turn out to be as I expected. Time teaches a lot of things."

Nena in "The Exile" foregoes her own happiness for the sake of her parents and siblings. At a very young age, she had already embraced suffering. "She was twelve when she came to the old house. She helped in the kitchen most of the time; she was a tenant's daughter and had come to work…" But her natural charm and pleasant ways easily catch the attention of her politician landlord who sends her to school so "she could be more useful." She metamorphoses into the brilliant and confident woman her landlord envisioned her to be, and becomes one of his mistresses. Nena knows the predicament, her prime concern is to give her family the comfortable life she has dreamed of. She sacrifices her honor and dignity and a decent life so she can improve the impoverished condition of her family. Another character in the same story is the wife of Nena's landlord, who cannot contain her philandering husband. His infidelity becomes more obvert when he even brings home his mistresses, and shows his wife and children how he adores and flatters them. But the wife treats everything as normal, to the children's disappointment.

Meanwhile, in the story "Tong," the female character suffers emotionally, because she is forced to marry a wealthy Chinese widower, so her uncle will be saved from bankruptcy. As a result, she foregoes her own happiness and leads a miserable life. She becomes the "tong"—the bribery fee—of her uncle.

The above discussion confirms that women, although they may have the option to choose happiness and contentment, end up in miserable

situations, because of circumstances which seem to be out of their control. They are likewise projected as women who are molded to suffer for the rest of their lives and with no resolve to improve their lot.

Woman as Victim

Victims refer to people who are caught up in an asymmetric relationship or situation. They are those who suffer injury and harm by forces beyond their control. In the Philippines, many writers portray women as victims of circumstances, and even of their own personal convictions and decisions. As a result, they live in a limbo and become pathetically unconscious of other alternatives to living.

But the women characters of Sionil Jose apparently do not suffer physical pain only. In "The Forest," a beautiful, innocent, and naïve woman is victimized by a young military officer. Physically attracted to him, she easily gives in to his whims and lustful desires, resulting in her pregnancy. Because he has no plans of marrying her, he proposes an abortion which she rejects. Angered, he eventually abandons her. Confused, devastated, and emotionally battered, she cannot think of any other solution to end her problem but to jump from a cliff. Another nameless woman is victimized by another man in uniform in this same story. Apparently, her innocence, naiveté, and simplicity are abused, and unfortunately her miserable plight is only known after she is discovered unconscious in the hills with "lacerated breasts and the pubis that was mashed." People would recognize her as "the one who entertained the squad of army who got the pro kits in the Red Cross station." No one could tell what she had done to merit such brutality. But what is clear is she was stripped of dignity which could have been her last defense after volunteering to be of service to her fellowmen.

In the second story of "Two Letters," province-bred Elen, wanting to have a taste of the cosmopolitan lifestyle in the city, leaves behind her boyfriend, forgetting everything about him. Unfortunately, her new life in the city offers more misery than happiness. She is sexually abused by the son of her landlord and gets pregnant. Helpless and frustrated, she goes back to the province and faces the cruel reality of the consequences of her initial decision—her old boyfriend has forgotten her, and her province-mates loath her presence in their midst.

In "Flotsam," Lita wants to lift her family out of poverty, and agrees to become a helper of a Chinese copra merchant, who also offers to send her to school. But the favor has an attachment to it, as she is constantly sexually harassed by the merchant. Devastated, she leaves her place and moves to Manila, hopeful to find work and to continue her studies. But misfortunes continue to haunt her and she ends up being a housemaid instead. Fortunately, she is able to meet a relative who promises to help her. But her kinswoman proves to be another "instrument" of misfortune, as she convinces her to become a prostitute. Eventually, she comes to love her new job, forgetting her dreams and aspirations. As she ages, she loses her charm and beauty, but is able to go on living by peddling sweepstakes tickets in the dirty streets of Quiapo. Based on how she is depicted by Sionil Jose, it is clear that Lita has been victimized not only physically, but also emotionally.

Meanwhile, Marina Salcedo in the story "Progress" is a victim of the bureaucratic process in the government agency she works in. Hopping from one section to another to get her papers done for a job promotion, she gets to meet the last person to sign them. But the latter refuses to, if she does not treat him to a dinner date. Thinking this could be the last step in her promotion, she agrees. The date turns out to be a disaster, as she ends up sexually abused.

Shinae in "The Refugee" is in a similar situation. As a tour guide of a history professor who visits Korea for lectures, she unconsciously takes the bait he offers, blinded by her admiration. After he tells her that she looks like his former lover in Hong Kong, Shinae easily falls for him. Their constant togetherness leads to intimacy, but she is told that he cannot reciprocate her feelings. Trapped by her fondness and admiration for the old professor, she becomes greatly confused and devastated, and is left to fend for herself as the professor leaves for another country.

Strong-willed and Aggressive Women

This third classification of Sionil Jose's women characters is in sharp contrast to the first two earlier mentioned. Being aggressive and strong-willed, she is projected as audacious and resilient as well, an empowered woman.

In "Dama de Noche," Ramona is determined to realize her grandiose dreams. She goes to Manila and pursues her studies, but fate is

uncooperative. She searches for ways to survive what she is going through, and uses her charms to befriend people who could help her. She meets Pepe Sevilla who volunteers to help, but his assistance is not enough. So she does not realize her plans, but though she fails in her dreams, she does not wallow in despair. She insists on living an independent life, refusing other people's help. Her response to the deplorable conditions shows her valor and bravery.

Dely, in the "Light Bringer," is one of her company's trusted executives. With a colleague as her lover, she does not mind being his mistress; and the relationship does not get in the way in their corporate life. But when the lover learns of how she has manipulated so that he has been demoted to make way for her promotion, she dumps him and ends their relationship. The decision might be painful, but Dely is determined to let go of him. For her, it is wiser to be alone, than to be tied to a relationship with a patronizing and narrow-minded man, who only thinks of his own feelings and self-interest.

In the story "Respectability," a nameless mistress attempts to reconcile a father and a son. This is not an easy task, begging her lover's son to visit him, since his days are numbered. Despite the cold treatment she gets from him, the mistress insists to no avail. The strength to see face to face the family of the man she has been caring for is not an easy task, and it takes courage and determination to do so, but she does it despite all the challenges. Her sincerity and loyalty to her lover might be considered the barometer for her inner strength.

Another woman who shows her own brand of valor is the widow in "Something is Wrong with my Hearing," who becomes the toast of gossipmongers, because no less than her own mother has spread the news that she has poisoned her own husband to death. In addition, living with blood relatives in animosity is quite a miserable situation. But for this widow, life continues even if she has been tagged as "an atheist as she never went to church… used dirty words… and was not at home most of the time." Unluckily, her own son does not side with her. But for all that she has been through, she continues to live with her family, and the gossipmongers in her neighborhood. Moreover, she is not seen to retaliate against her detractors.

In the story "Hero," the aggressive and strong-willed Linda would initially be involved in rallies and demonstrations as a young, university student. However, she realizes that fighting the oligarchs, Malacañang occupants, and the Americans is pointless. She also realizes that her heroism and idealism cannot bring her comfort. Thus, she works hard to get all the

things that she unconsciously desires at the expense of dignity and honor "…she gets even with the moneyed and powerful men by selling herself and peddling drugs." She even questions her own father who has instilled in her the values of heroism, and for fighting for one's country. "I don't care about your war anymore," she tells him, "I just want to get on and I don't want to be tied up imprisoned by the past and its sentimentalism." She bluntly adds that "one's patriotism no longer has a place in the Filipino's heart… everyone in the Philippines is a traitor… we are a nation of traitors, Papa." Obviously, for Linda, the only way to conquer poverty and misery is to "join the bandwagon." This, after she has seen how "her former friends had been living it up in the government, in business…"

Meanwhile, in "Arbol de Fuego," Lorna shows her strength early on in life. She would claim "I was very poor… with not enough, never enough to eat… how did I get to school? By the sheerest guts, by the sheerest hard work. Any kind of work." But, swayed by the promises of a young lover, Pepe, she becomes pregnant. Not the type to wallow in misery, she searches for Arturo, the father of Pepe, and makes him fall for her. She transforms into a very ambitious and confident woman, to the extent that she would demand for Pepe's return from the U.S. so he could marry her. The story hints that she is able to get what she wanted.

In "The Wall Between Us," Ligaya refuses to be caged in an environment that she abhors. She "commits an unforgivable offense," causing her to be evicted from a dormitory run by nuns. She goes to her lover's house only to find out that, because of sibling rivalry, he has left his house, leaving his older brother as occupant. Ligaya insists on living in the house, so that the older brother becomes her new lover. Her manipulativeness shows she is a woman in full control of her life. She is a strong-willed woman.

From the above discussion, it can be concluded that Sionil Jose strikes a balance in the depiction of women characters in his fiction. If he has portrayed women as sufferers, victims of people and events, he also has depicted women whose strength and resilience counter life's difficulties. In an article for *Philippine Star*, "The Women in My Fiction," he writes:

> I've attempted to make my fictional women as real, so that my readers will be convinced of their authenticity, although they are obviously symbols. As such, they should not appear as artificial constructs. Organic symbolism

> gives a work of art, a novel, a deeper meaning, illustrating the precious ambiguity of art. Its discovery is one of the ineffable pleasures of reading. More than this, the reader is unconsciously, yet profoundly, bonded with his past, and the national experience as recorded in the fictional imagination."
>
> I have never really tried to categorize the women in my novels and short stories… Almost all the women in my fiction are creatures of the imagination. If ever one is based on a real person, I made sure dissimilarities exist. My fictional women came from various places and from all walks of life: Tondo and Forbes Park, the mountains and the small towns and bucolic villages. I researched on their backgrounds. A teacher is not just a teacher—I give her character, her history, education, her relationships. She appears in the story as a complete person."

From the article, we see glimpses of how Sionil Jose has depicted women in his fiction. From a personal perspective, this writer loves how the famous writer is able to present different images of the Filipina, a wide variety of female fictional characters.

In a chance encounter with F. Sionil Jose in my university—he was the keynote speaker of the Iligan National Writers Workshop—I personally told him that I made a study of his short stories. He asked if I liked his short story anthologies, and I answered in the affirmative. But I got his enthusiastic nod when I told him that I was intrigued by his depiction of women characters.

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Answerable Only to Ourselves: F. Sionil Jose's *Mass* and National Amnesia

Hope Sabanpan-Yu

> "We compromise ourselves the day we are born. If we are looking for the original sin, there it is- our incapacity to live honestly with ourselves because we are human, because we are shackled by custom, by obligations and we accept compromise only in the light of our conscience, answerable as we are only to ourselves."
>
> - F. Sionil José, *Mass*

This is a quote from a novel that has stayed in the depths of my consciousness ever since I first read it as a college student. In some gentle way, it has made my understanding of history and struggle with questions that are related to justice and responsibility. I found myself rereading it, with each time finding something new in its pages. It provides, I think, a good departure for some reflections about novels that bring together creativity and history.

Mass: A Novel, was written by multi-awarded National Artist for Literature F. Sionil Jose (December 3, 1924 – January 6, 2022) and published in 1973. Today it is well known and widely read. Jose's early work earned much praise, along with the other books in the *Rosales Saga*. In a recent blog, Stephanie Zubiri writes:

> Jose has dedicated his life to documenting the social injustices that plague Filipino society and the persistent sickness he calls "national amnesia." One of his greatest

> inspirations as a writer is the National Hero, Jose Rizal, whose primary weapon was his plume when many of his contemporaries were brandishing arms. Jose deeply admires Rizal's devotion to his art and to his country.

The popularity is understandable. The 1980s continued to be a decade of social realism in Philippine literature. But through these years, Jose went on doing as he had always done: writing novels on massive, spread-out Rizalian themes of justice and equality, evil and abuse, faith, redemption and revolution. Many of his works are set in places he was familiar with—Cabugawan, Rosales, Pangasinan. His stories unfold in the misty backstreets of Manila, the houses of elite Forbes Park, and the quaint places of old Pangasinan. Jose reaches bravely for the great metaphysical questions of life and moves on—slipping into passages of prose that are profound or loaded with existential questions. His work succeeds magnificently. At its best, his writing has that power peculiar to the creative arts. It can change the way you see the world.

In the opening pages of *Mass*, Jose takes his readers out of their comfortable chairs and transports them, without explanation or apology, into a bleak and poor Cabugawan that proves to be a prison for Jose, aka Pepe, Samson. More disconcertingly still the narrative takes the reader through the life of Emy, the supportive mother who does not lose hope that one day her son will be like his father, Antonio.

For Pepe, Manila is a refuge, but an insecure one. The past keeps threatening to seep through cracks in his memory. For Pepe, his father, Antonio, has the troubling power to light a spark in his mind. So, Jose invites his readers to see the world through the eyes, not of the victims of evil, but of someone who, at an obscure subconscious level, is aware that he is lost, but has found psychological defenses to seal himself from confronting that knowledge. The daily routines and dramas of the persons he meets and becomes close with absorb all his energy. Only in his heart does he seem to hear the 'troubled human cry' and know for a fleeting moment that he cannot "escape a sense of responsibility".

Over the years, such questions of poverty, migration, revolution, responsibility had become staples of countless books and articles. When *Mass* was published, writers had already ventured into the labyrinthine realms of Martial Law and the issues of corruption and social turmoil. Jose

is adventurous in his choice of topics; and his novels, like much good creative writing, reach into dimensions of history.

The theme of historical responsibility is a universal one, of which Pepe's story is just an extreme illustration. For most readers too, "the present is enough for us to cope with," a place whose absorbing routines allow us to create a comforting amnesia, even if in a less drastic form than Pepe's struggle to leave the shadow of poverty and that of his father. But the novel resists simple universalisms and generalizations and allows room to evoke the multiplicities of memory and forgetting.

In *Mass*, the counterpoint to the main character's search is the awakening and somewhat challenging role that Ka Lucio, an ex-Huk commander whose refuge lies, not in forgetting the past, but in fighting for the present: Ka Lucio, despite all the evidence of his shabby and difficult surroundings, believes himself to be living for what will help the people: freedom, shelter, medicine, and education. It is the meeting with Ka Lucio in the Brotherhood that makes the first decisive breach in the walls of Pepe's resistance, starting a process that will ultimately force him to confront the inequality that has been destroying the masses since the beginning.

Pepe's nemesis, though, lies in encounters with the bourgeois, among them Juan Puneta, a fellow Filipino whose life has been privileged by money, and who is unrelenting in his determination to push his agenda. In the telephone conversation that Pepe is able to eavesdrop on, he learns that Puneta has been masterminding trouble all along:

> The man seemed frantic. "What's this I hear about another big demonstration in January? Shall we tell our men to work on the kids again? They want more money this time. After all there were more than ten killed in the last . . ."
>
> "Of course, of course," Juan Puneta said with exasperation. "They have to be there. Always. I don't care how many get killed. They must simply make sure that the kids will blame the Metrocom, the police, for everything." (Jose, 234)

Jose "justifies his politically-charged work which call for the fight for justice by the poverty-stricken masses against the few who feed off them." (Galang and Moyano, 123) "I will not let anyone forget": that, surely, might

be a motto for F. Sionil Jose. But the reader, confronting Puneta's remorseless iniquity, can also see that the work of memory is at times a kind of violence. The novel invites us to consider the nature of and the need for that violence. It poses questions, not only for those who escape into amnesia, but also for those who insist on remembering. The novel is not expected to offer strongly argued conclusions; the questions do not have simple answers.

The encounter between Puneta and Pepe has the former trying to bribe the latter. In the chapter titled "The Dawn is Red," Puneta explains that more people would be killed.

> "Not only because we have the money. More important, with money we have been able to develop brains. And if we can't have brains, we buy them."
>
> "Like you're trying to buy me now?"
>
> He laughed in spite of himself. "Pepito—you're very sharp," he said brightly. "Of course! This is why I brought you here. To convince you. Living in that dump, working for that priest—that is not your future, *hijo*. Your future is much brighter. The gates of Pobres Park are open to everyone—you know that. You are welcome—as long as you abide by the rules. Let the scum fight for the crumbs. Ours is the cake . . . And we are not going to give this cake away. No, *hijo*. We cannot lose." (Jose, 237)

Most centrally of all, *Mass* takes up a question with which scholarly history still struggles: the issue of historical responsibility. Jose in the 1980s was more concerned with the question of justice. What happens when apologies or sense of responsibility for the past are insufficient to soften the hearts of those who were wronged? What happens if the past is simply unforgivable?

The wrongs of the past create injustices that persist into the present. This places burdens of responsibility even on those who were not personally responsible for the original sin, but who have failed to right enduring injustices that flow from this sin. Which of us can endure the terrible moral absolute which F. Sionil Jose lays out before us: a world in which there are

only "two sorts of people"—one lot who goes through hell, and the other lot that makes them, or else just stands back and does nothing. In people who inherit a responsibility-laden past or present, the hunger for absolution can become intense and laden with emotion. To be forgiven by those who "go through hell" is to have a burden lifted from their shoulders, their self-esteem restored, their hearts liberated.

This does not happen with Puneta. He continues to reject righting the wrongs. When he speaks with Pepe, his overwhelming temptation is to even ram the fist harder:

> "We are going to be here for a long time. As a matter of fact, for always. We know how to change, and that is why we will always be on the top. But the change comes from us, dictated by us. And as for the President—his interests are with us; he is one of us! Not with the masses—ha, the masses! That's wonderful for speeches. They could not care less for the class struggle, for ideology. Do you know, Pepito, that all they want is a roof over their heads? And three bowls of rice a day? You yourself said that. And most of all—a sense of order, of security. It is really that simple. Their perception of the world, of society, is dictated by their needs, and we will give those to them, slowly, slowly. Never the pie. Just the crumbs." (Jose, 238)

But the cost of amnesia is isolation, a retreat from human society, for fear that any encounter with others may once again stir the agonising pangs of memory. In the final pages of *Mass*, Jose evokes the story that Antonio Samson wrote, *The Ilustrados*. Pepe was seized by the terrifying certainty that only a great mind was capable of writing the book. Those who deny the past, Jose suggests, are condemning themselves precisely to that endless solitude. The only escape from solitude is to face the past and the present in a world where one remains unforgiven. It is a wake-up call to rise up and change the world for the better.

But this is a novel, not a philosophical text. It draws the fine threads of specific themes out of the tangled fabric of everyday life and holds them up to the light. The novel finds its life in the midst of the tangle. They confront them while at the same time struggling to cope with the everyday. The power

of creative writing is its ability to put the philosopher's big questions back into the tangle of everyday life.

And it is in that tangle itself that *Mass* finds some kind of resolution. Memory is painful; forgiveness does not come cheaply, and may not come at all. The only path to accepting responsibility is the step-by-step path through the infinitely complex everyday world of human existence.

Jose was a novelist using his craft to probe deep questions of history and philosophy. There are no simple morals or conclusions, though the journey is full of suggestions about the meanings of the past. Education, books, and the power of words figure prominently in the itinerary. Moreover, the novel shows revolutions. *Mass* describes the uncertainties and social upheaval that Marcos used to justify his dictatorship.

In the mouth of Pepe, it is the angry cry of the righteous. But Jose's writings fight a war against forgetting in a quieter and more peaceable way. Bearing witness, he insists that we remember, not just the grand tales of the tides of history and the rise and fall of empires, but also the irreplaceable small pasts of the individuals caught up in history's flows. He makes each of those small lives, and the landscape in which they were lived, matter to his readers. And that, in a way, is what history is all about: the reality of those millions of human lives that have gone before ours. The infinite complexity of each of those lives, with its pains and hopes and loves and visions of possibility. History can only rescue small fragments of a tiny fraction of those lives from the abyss of oblivion; but every fragment rescued adds to our understanding of what it is to be human.

Jose's work is also a "small act of rebellion" against how history is written. He has written short stories in which the remembered and the recorded past is mixed in complex ways with imaginative re-creation. What matters is that its creative power should make the past come to life for readers in a very different time and place. Jose's writings place the big philosophical questions of history back into the endlessly complex tangle of life in which they are always played out: the world, not just of the mind, but also of the emotions and of all the physical senses.

Creative writing unsettles our senses and interrogates our certainties. Jose makes his readers share the experience of Pepe Samson's memory and memory-making, and so become more conscious of the amnesia in their own lives. He enriches our visions of the forms in which history can be passed

on from one generation to the next, challenging us to narrate and write our histories in a novel manner. *Mass*—blurring the boundaries between fact and fiction, history and literature—is profoundly disconcerting, since it brings direct emotion into a space that is often dominated by abstract intelligence. The novel makes history and social thought very personal, breaking down the barriers that protect the life of the mind from simple existence.

Jose's novel remains a masterpiece because it challenges one to go to the heart of scholarship. 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?

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Unmasking the Polite and the Perfumed: F. Sionil Jose's *The Feet of Juan Bacnang* as Allegory of an Ailing Nation

Amado C. Guinto, Jr.

Spanish colonialism was not the product of unilateral action by Iberian *conquistadores* and *frailes* but alliances with local chiefs who provided the resources, manpower, local knowledge and leadership that made possible the extension of Spanish power. Chiefs were coopted with titles, positions, and privileges, but, more important, were actively engaged in calculations of risk and benefit in the face of a new power.

- Resil B. Mojares, 2006

How did they become so powerful, even acceptable to us? Simple. They co-opted the slogans of nation. They proclaimed themselves as nationalists who protect us from all foreign incursions in our economy, in our culture. Decolonize your minds, they cry out. Yes! They are powerful because we believe them.

- F. Sionil Jose, 2011

We also ventured that the reason why there seems no end to elite rule is that those in power create or reproduce the conditions for their own reproduction or perpetuation considering that they control the coercive and ideological instruments or agencies of the state. Otherwise, as Marx said, they won't last a year.

- Elmer Ordonez, 2012

The Italian poet Dante Alighieri wrote that the road to hell is paved with good intentions. If he were still alive, he would probably have given himself a tap on the back for a clear prognostic of what was to become the Philippine socio-political landscape. One hundred and twenty years after the first declaration of the country's independence from Spain's tyrannical three-century rule, the Philippines is yet to see a nation free of corrupt government and a real democracy—one that is not of the rich. F. Sionil Jose's latest magnum opus of a novel titled *The Feet of Juan Bacnang* allegorizes this image of the Philippines as a country suppurated with exploitation, and social injustice by its own elites.

The novel shows the glaring material difference between the poor and the rich and powerful. But more importantly, the novel exposes the ugliness of those considered the polite and the perfumed of Philippine society. It also renders a scathing commentary on the way these same people—from whom the so-called brains of the nation emanate—are complicit in preventing the Philippines from rising as a nation. The story begins with the final moments of Juan Bacnang's life while he ruminates on ending the bizarre life he has led, from being a poor, scrawny boy in the unheard barrio of Nalipatan to becoming the right (read: murderous) hand of the country's most powerful man. The protagonist Bacnang is an illegitimate boy from Ilocandia. He was born out of rape. As indirectly implied by his mother, his father is a rich mestizo in Manila and holds an important political position. He later finds out that his father is Senator Juan dela Cruz III, a World War II guerilla, and an obscenely rich and powerful man in the political circles in Manila.

The novel chronicles the boy's journey from dire poverty to becoming instantly wealthy courtesy of the part of his body which he hates the most—his feet. Bacnang has a pair of ugly feet with big toes webbed to the rest as the tissues are undifferentiated. Medically known as syndactyly, his feet are

hideously small, broad, and smelly, a condition which is considered ominous. Later in the novel, it is revealed that Bacnang inherited this deformity from his father and he would pass it on to his own son. The same set of unsightly feet which signify deformity of the body and the spirit are also his passport to a rollercoaster life of extravagance.

His feet become his ticket to his wealthy and powerful father, and they come in handy when he needs to flee Nalipatan after "accidentally" murdering his childhood best friend out of jealous rage, raping the girl he lusts after. Upon carefully inspecting Juan's feet, Senator dela Cruz III finally acknowledged Bacnang as his own son, joyfully pronouncing him to be Juan Bacnang dela Cruz IV. He has long been unsuccessful in producing a male heir despite his collection of women. This meeting with the Senator is Bacnang's moment to be catapulted into the heady life of fortune and crime. Henceforth, he breathtakingly transforms from a rural boy to a lawyer, who graduates from a leading university; and then to a business magnate who would be known as "Sunny Johnny"—the name that ironically marks his descent into the insidious and corrupt elite.

The novel describes Bacnang as a young, charming, and intelligent boy. He is also frugal, diligent, and determined amidst the hardship that typecast the Ilokano. But deep within him, he is consumed with an insatiable desire for the flesh. One of his first crimes was raping a childhood friend, and after having been accepted as heir to the dela Cruz empire, he surrounds himself with more women. His newfound wealth and power must have made him even more ravenous for sex as he keeps an incestuous relationship with his half-sister, rescues the girl he raped in the barrio from prostitution, marries an heiress from the South, and keeps his wife's sister as a mistress. Along with this virile power is his proclivity for crime and corruption. Doing wrong has become very easy for him.

In examining Juan Bacnang's life, one can see the rapaciousness of the Philippine elite. The novel reveals the foulest secrets, and depicts the ugliest truths about the lives of our crème de la crème. However, these desolate realities must also be taken reflectively. The need to review how these have been accepted hypocritically by Philippine society is imperative. Using the novel as my springboard for discussion in this paper, I would like to uncover how the Philippines has fostered a culture of impunity through the evils of its elite.

Sex and the Sins of the Fathers

The novel says that Sunny Johnny has an unquenchable appetite for sex. He has sexual intercourse five or six times in a night, and he has come to terms with this as normal. This sexual insatiability seems to trigger other urges. Johnny becomes overwhelmed with ambition. We follow his breathtaking rise to power as the son of the Senator, and as nephew of the mysterious, powerful character called The Leader, and his own irreversible demise as a human being. His perversion is masked by his physical prowess, keen instincts, organizational skills, and uncanny good looks, which make him attractive to many women. This seems to mirror our own political leaders, whose clean and well-mannered image actually hides their corruption, greed, and other horrid qualities. And, pathetically, even if the Filipinos know the ugly truth about their leaders' corruption, they keep on electing them to office. The indifference of the Filipinos has made them accept that their leaders are inutile and murderous, and they will keep on voting for them just because of their entertainment value, or their names recall.

Historically speaking, the Philippines has had a turbulent colonial narrative that puts the elite at the forefront. Resil B. Mojares in his book *Brains of the Nation* (2016) traces the manner by which the elite have come to be during the colonial times. He writes that imperial knowledge-building's primary intention was not so much to understand the colonized *indios* per se, but rather it was driven by motives of reconnaissance, conversion, proselytization, and conquest. Its main ideological reasons were to establish ecclesiastical and military control, and "enforcing a European conception of order on a primitive 'anarchy' of facts, converting natives to a 'superior' way of life (and death), marking the differences of biology and culture that authorize racial and political hierarchies" (Mojares 2016: 387). He adds that although the natives felt the results of the European knowledge-building, they never had access to these texts because these were produced for Europe which in effect objectified the natives (388).

But the precolonial society already had their own wealth of indigenous knowledge. According to Mojares, these traditions of knowledge were most vital in oral, ritual, and localized forms which did not concur with the Western mode of discourse production, hence the deprivileging of these native forms of knowledge. Attached to this deprivileging is the persecution and cooptation of native bards, seers, and ritual specialists who held the indigenous knowledge, as they were viewed as bearers of "superstitions" and

agents of resistance by the Spaniards (Mojares 2016: 390). These bards, seers, and ritual specialists could well have been our first cognoscenti, but with the new power, their only choice was to engage it in the way that would ensure their own survival. And with their cooptation, they became representatives of a new regime of knowledge and power. Mojares explains:

> …Spaniards set the ground in which a native "intelligentsia" began to emerge. It was the practice of missionaries to recruit talented young men, usually form the local elite (later called *principalia*), as informants, translators, copyists, catechists, *cantores* (singers), *fiscales* (parish secretaries), and *sacristanes* (acolytes)…we do not only have a case of young, compliant natives conscripted as mission assistants but natives actively engaging Spaniards to protect old prerogatives or appropriate new sources of power. Members of the indigenous elite parlayed their status and wealth to gain preferments in colonial church and government. They became the *donados* and *beatas* (auxillaries of the religious orders), soldiers and lower-rank officers, and the first university students… *Principales* parlayed "local knowledge" and control of manpower and resources to bolster their position vis-à-vis the Spanish priest. They proved quite skillful in exploiting to their advantage the instruments of the colonial regime. (396)

This gives us a picture of how these native elites (who might have been the seers, bards, and the *babaylanes* in another time) access new sources of power. These people had access to two worlds, as signified by their ability to speak two languages—their own language and the colonizer's. This ability to shuttle between two systems of signs, says Mojares, could be viewed both positively and negatively (2016: 400): positively, as this ability translates to opportunities to hold resources and is thus seen as worthy of emulation, and negatively, because speaking two languages may also mean the propensity to become a turncoat with reference to a snake's forked tongue.

In other words, the *principalia* or the native elite, driven by their economic empowerment as the conqueror's own colonial agents, have already had the penchant for cultural and social advancement. In Caroline

Hau's article, "Sins of the Father: The Elite in Philippine Literature," in *The Manila Review* (2014), she presents a number of iterations of the word "elite." This include among others "upper classes," "haves," "the rich," "*mayaman*," "*makapangyarihan*," "cacique," "*ilustrados*," and even "the middle classes." The word "elite," according to Hau, has come to correlate with wealth, power, influence, status, education, ethnicity, leadership, talent, and lifestyle. She expounds that their presence has always been felt and their actions have real consequences, and that their relations with each other and with the rest of the Filipino people have an important bearing on the fortunes (and perhaps misfortunes, if I may add) of the Philippine nation-state (Hau 2014: 3). She adds:

> In a sense, "elite," along with its cognate "elitist" (*elitista* in Tagalog), is the name that scholars, students, media practitioners and other professionals, and activists give to the human agency behind the problems and failures besetting the Philippines. Deemed traitorous, colonial-minded, opportunistic, predatory, *mayabang* (arrogant), and indifferent to the plight of less privileged others, "elite" is one element of a politically potent binary system of values, with the "the poor," "the masses," and "the people" constituting the opposing element. (3)

In his novel, F. Sionil Jose confirms these images of the elite in his portrayal of Juan Bacnang. Like the native elites during the colonial period who were admired and mistrusted at once, Sunny Johnny acquires a reputation for "humility… natural good humor and charm, his cultivated carefulness not to hurt or demean anyone by rash and improper language." Yet, towards the novel's conclusion, he has become irreparably corrupted by his work for the dictator. He burns villages, masterminds kidnapping for ransom, and murders his own brother-in-law. Committing a crime has become so easy for him. As the novel progresses, we are told that "(a)lthough he admitted the sin, that admission became just one more plate, one more scale on his body armor. Soon came a time when sin or crime became not a moral condition but just one of those social impediments to be avoided." And as all the sins pile up, they reveal themselves in the epidermal corruption that Juan and his Boss the President suffer (Hau 2014: 5). How apt is the image of Sunny Johnny's skin turning white to obliquely refer to the polite and the

perfumed, and that his skin's whiteness to be skin actually being torn away as it molts like that of a reptile to mean the hidden irredeemable perversion of the elite.

Sunny Johnny's voracious hunger for sex also mirrors how the elite are rapacious in accumulating social and cultural advantage through exploitation of available power sources in order to ensure their illicit affairs. The novel traces the roots of this malady and declares that the moral decay affecting our leaders is exacerbated by our colonial history when all the rules were thrown out and everyone fended for one's self. Colonialism conditioned our elite to become the inutile and corrupted leaders they are now, as they unfortunately imbibed the vices, not the virtues, of the colonial powers that they had intercourse with, figuratively and perhaps literally (Mercado 2013). For Sunny Johnny, this corruption would manifest as the growing abscess on his skin and would culminate in his final transmogrification into a terrifying hooved and horned beast of the Armageddon.

The Inchoate Nation

F. Sionil Jose does not mince words in criticizing the socio-political climate of the Philippines. In the novel, he explains the failure of the Philippines to become a real nation through the character of an honest journalist named Narciso A. Tured. In his conversation with Sunny Johnny, Tured gives a bleak picture of the Philippines. He says, "What went wrong in the past is what will go wrong with our present leaders, Mr. dela Cruz, including the man you believe in. They never transcended themselves, their great egos—and, of course, their familial and ethnic loyalties. This is the reason we are not a nation. There is always something for them, something tucked in fine print, in their subconscious."

Jose depicts this condition of the Philippines, and he points to the elite as the main culprit of the country's state of inchoateness. In his own blog entry titled "Past, Present, And" (http://www.fsioniljose.com/blog/past-present-and 2016), Jose vehemently demands the unmasking of these elites who are comfortably occupying bureaucratic sinecures. He writes:

> In our apathy, we have come to accept that many Filipino voters will vote for candidates who are popular although inutile, whose names are easy to remember and who are crowd pleasers. They will not look into the candidates' past,

> their achievements or lack of it. And so we deserve the nincompoops that we put in Malacañang and in Congress…
>
> The widespread destitution in our country cries for a revolution that will wipe out the oligarchy which has colonized this nation…
>
> …we must now face the ugliest of truths about some of our leaders—they are murderers. This is the theme of my last novel, *The Feet of Juan Bacnang*. The novel illustrates the hypocritical acceptance of these killers by Philippine society and the impunity of their evil. To eliminate them, we need a leader who is not afraid of them and can restore justice in Philippine society. (2016)

Jose is saying that these elites or the oligarchy were the same acolytes of the old colonial masters who have coopted the ideas and the slogans of revolution, thereby faking their nationalism in order to colonize their own people. In her seminal book, *Necessary Fictions: Philippine Literature and the Nation, 1946-1980* (2000), Hau emphasizes a similar postcolonial sentiment. She stresses that the Philippine post-independence history gave the lie to the promise of freedom, sovereignty, and progress, such that the hand of the colonial past remained oppressively visible in the present. For Hau, the new oppression did not simply take the form of the exploitative foreigner or outsider, but the other within, an other that is also Filipino (Hau 2000: 101).

The novel manifests this unfortunate truth about the kind of leaders that we have. In their ineptness, the leaders think so little of the masses, and this is exemplified in the advice of Sunny Johnny's senator-father to him: "Look around you, around us. It is those who know the people, their strengths and weaknesses, how they will react as individuals—not citizens of a town, a region or nation. Look around you—because we are individuals and not citizens, we commit crimes, we abuse others, all in the name of our family, our clan… We have no memory at all—the kind of memory that will build a nation." The senator's counsel to his son shows the Machiavellian philosophy of crime and cruelty that our leaders use in governing. In the process of exercising their political power, they revert back to the idea of individualism and forget the concept of the collective community with which they are supposed to adhere. In a manner of speaking, Hau and Mojares

concur with Jose that the elite failed as vanguards of the nation with their historic cooptation that betrays their greed and self-interest.

In the novel, Tured ties all the loose ends that reveal how the elites have caused an unfinished nationalist project. Referring to Sunny Johnny and his complicity with the crookedness of his Boss the President, Tured hits the nail in the head when he says that Johnny represents what has been wrong in this country for so long, because he is not alone. There are others of lesser means, but like him in the way they work; they ingratiate themselves into the minds of the ordinary Filipinos, who consider them as patrons, philanthropists and sadly, even patriots and nation-builders.

Coda: The Role of Literature

With his grim depiction of the Philippines in the novel, F. Sionil Jose also offers a glimmer of hope in the character of Tured who, despite offers of bribery and threats to his own dear life, resists the lure of corruption and remains resolutely critical of the oppressiveness of those who wield the coercive and ideological instruments of the state (Ordoñez 2012). In his final memoir, Tured challenges his readers:

> How do we destroy the termites? First, we must locate them, then look at ourselves, our strengths and our weaknesses which they have exploited.
>
> For those of us who have the awareness, our duty is to draw them into the open so that all of us can see them, how they destroy not just our bodies but our minds. We do not have the arms and the money which they possess but we have the numbers and it is us who feed them. So we must deny them their food—our votes in elections. If we cannot overwhelm them, let us shame them, ridicule them, expose them for the evil that they are. (Jose 2011: 262)

Using Tured's character as his mouthpiece, Jose calls for the unmasking of the truth behind the polite and the perfumed. He reminds the readers of their own power when they are able to strip naked the elite to reveal the sinister truth of their evil.

By using Tured's memoir as the concluding chapter of the novel, Jose symbolically discloses the role of the writer; he exalts the role of literature in exposing the fraudulence and evil that hides behind the façade of the elite and their brand of nationalism. In this novel, Jose shows that the evil characters of old are really the familiar politicians in our present day. Thus, Jose also demonstrates the fraught relationship between literature and nationalism.

Caroline Hau, likewise, discusses salient points about the fraught relationship between literature and nationalism in *Necessary Fictions*. In "The Problem of Consciousness," the first chapter, she interrogates issues of Philippine nationalism and their nuances. She reveals the entanglements that construct the very discourse of the Filipino as a historico-political collective. She anchors her interrogations of literature as an "ethical technology" concerned with the formation of the "ideal" citizen, one whose consciousness is supposed to have been shaped by the lessons of history, and is geared towards the imminent moral and economic progress of the nation.

Hau suggests the idea of locating national consciousness within the pedagogical practices of reading literature (2000: 16). In this connection, she surmises that reading a novel

> refers to the institutional formulation and deployment of literature in the cause of nation formation. What cements the link between literature and nation formation is the fact that Philippine nationalism draws on a powerful pedagogical imperative towards ethical self-development. Literature is utilized strategically in the formation of an educated, "model" citizen-subject who aids in the transformation of his or her society. (16)

What Hau emphasizes is the role of teaching literature as the counterhegemonic movement's "ethical technology" intended to produce in the Filipino subject of moral and political knowledge and action. In other words, literature and pedagogy have the responsibility of forming the nation and producing citizens. It goes without saying that reading literature for its "moral" and "truth-telling" content is "contaminated" with different political investments, thus allowing for the exploration of the problems of fostering nationalist consciousness (17).

In the third chapter, "Literature and History" Hau discusses how literature is important not only in the formation of a national consciousness, but also in the collective memory of the nation. For Hau, literature as a repository of memory reorients the language of recollection toward that of reflection. She calls this the demon of comparisons, which she adds should induce critical thought.

What the country is facing today is the threat of collective amnesia brought about by the same hooligans, the polite and the perfumed, who have abused the nation. One hundred and twenty years after the declaration of the country's independence and after several EDSA "revolutions," the elites still lord over while the masses are perpetually left on the fringes. Our history is bound to be erased, and we might not learn from the lessons of the past, or be able to expose evil for what it truly is. Unless we strengthen our arts and culture, most especially our literary education.

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Leaving Rosales, Leaving Sipnget: Trauma and History in F. Sionil José's *My Brother, My Executioner*

Shirley O. Lua

Introduction: A Narrative of Pain

My Brother, My Executioner, the third book in F. Sionil José's *Rosales Saga*, is most heart-rending. Its disturbing potency is on par with that of José Rizal's *Noli Me Tangere* or Carlos Bulosan's *America is in the Heart*. In my literature classes, I am no longer surprised by my students' reactions after they have read the novel. Girls confess that they have wept buckets of tears over the story, and boys linger at the end of the class, a troubled expression in their eyes, and ask, "What happened to Luis Asperri?" as if inquiring after the well-being of a close friend. The novel has this kind of remarkable effect—gripping the readers to form an emotional affinity with it. Critic Lito Zulueta has pointed out that José's novels have the capacity "to summon sentiments and passions that are deeply human and heartfelt. The power strikes at the core of the person, the impenetrable soul that is the repository of memories and desires" (143).

Scholars such as Gelacio Guillermo, Shirley Geok-lin Lim, and Thelma Kintanar have viewed José's protagonists as "failed intellectuals," incapable of effecting a positive change in society.[1] This, according to Kintanar, is symptomatic of the imposition of Western intellectualism, which seems futile in addressing Third World problems, such as class disparities, poverty, and corruption. However, shall we consider the problematic conditions of José's characters merely on the level of intellectualism? This kind of approach

might serve to abstract and isolate the individual dilemma without regard for any affecting personal determinants and socio-historical contingencies that might have shaped the character into what s/he is.

In this essay, I view José's writing as a "historical act," and *My Brother, My Executioner* as a narrative of pain. I examine how the novel re-constructs representations of individual pain and trauma, and how these representations are inextricably linked to a larger history, the history of trauma and violence in the Philippines. A novel of such intricate design and magnitude has set the individual narrative against a backdrop of historical events, such as the peasant-based colorum uprisings of the 1930s, the cacique system in the rural areas, the Japanese Occupation, and the Hukbalahap conflicts. The main character's short turbulent life parallels that of an emerging nation in socio-political turmoil. S/he becomes an "unwitting" witness to the history and memory of violence, devastation, and death. My investigation is informed by the trauma theories of Sigmund Freud and Cathy Caruth, among others.

The Latency of Individual Trauma

My Brother, My Executioner opens with Luis Asperri returning to Rosales to visit his ailing father. Of illegitimate birth, he is the offspring of the union between Don Vicente, the powerful landlord of Rosales, Pangasinan, and Nena, a poor peasant who once worked in the Asperri mansion. Luis has left college and assumed the editorship of *Our Time*, a pretentious left-leaning magazine owned by the business mogul Eduardo Dantes. Abiding by his father's wish, Luis marries his cousin, Trining, to keep the family wealth, to the anguish of his lover, Ester Dantes, who then commits suicide. When his father passes, Luis becomes the new landlord. The novel ends with the Huks' destruction of Rosales, headed by Luis' half-brother, Commander Victor.

In the novel, we perceive that Luis Asperri, an intelligent young man, is wracked by doubts, bitterness, and melancholy. He seems incapable of taking decisive actions, most of the time, subjecting himself to a state of inertia. Is he just immature or self-absorbed because of his birth origin? Of his singular state, Luis terms it "malaise," "ennui," "pain without surcease, even after the wound has healed and the scab has lifted" (76), "the sore that festers in me" (19), "these doubts that rankle in my mind and poison my heart" (77), "the cancerous hatreds that had embittered him" (94), and even calls it

"suffering" (76).

Using the lens of psychoanalysis, we treat Luis as one suffering from trauma. His recurring feelings of guilt, melancholy, and anger, and his attitude of detachment and deadened response are what medical sciences have deemed the indicators of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD). Luis' trauma is "a wound of the mind." In Freud's exegesis on trauma, later significantly extended by Caruth, one crucial feature of trauma is its inherent forgetting and the latency of its manifestation.[2] Due to its sudden incursion into their life, the violent occurrence is not fully comprehended by the victim, or its overwhelming impact is not immediately processed by the victim's consciousness. Thus, the object of trauma is repressed or neglected in the recesses of the victim's mind cave. Symptoms appear belatedly in the forms of fears, nightmares, flashbacks, hallucinations, negative reflections, or aggressive conduct. Caruth declares, "[T]rauma is not locatable in the simple violent or original event in an individual's past, but rather in the way that its very unassimilated nature—the way it was precisely *not known* in the first instance—returns to haunt the survivor later on" (*Unclaimed Experience* 3).

Luis' most traumatic moment takes place when he is thirteen years old. He is suddenly uprooted from his impoverished birthplace and displaced in the manor of a stranger called Father.[3] It seems that his mother has "abandoned" him to another fate. On the contrary, Luis is the one who chooses to depart, or rather, he initiates his immediate departure. When his mother tells him he must live with his father, Luis protests at first, refusing to believe that his mother would let him go. He then presumes that she does not want him, has never wanted him, because he is "different." This experience has been predicated upon by Luis' suspicion of his birth, for even when he was still a boy, he has been teased by playmates and gossiped about by neighbors. Thus, he resolves, "I'll go tomorrow then, Mother" (29). And that night, as his mother gently covers a blanket on him, Luis turns away and whispers, "Leave me, Mother" (30).

War has estranged Luis from Rosales and Sipnget. He could have gone home every weekend or during the holidays. He could have visited his mother frequently. After four years of staying in Manila, Luis returns to Rosales only because his father is ill. On seeing Sipnget, his heart momentarily soars, "I am home. I am home. This is the place honored in the mind and sanctified in the heart…" (21). The very next day, ironically, he leaves "home." The fact is, he continually leaves Rosales-Sipnget. Even after

he has become landlord, he desires to leave. Have years of being away made him an outsider to his own homeland? Is it his loathing of his own father? Or is "home" tied to the past "which must be escaped because it spelled perdition and all the bog and swamp of his muddied beginning" (21)?

From the perspective of trauma theory, Luis repeatedly embarks on this act of departure because he is unconsciously compelled to do so, whether he really wishes it or not.[4] Freud observes that, "the compulsion to repeat is attributable to the unconscious repressed within him" (58). Luis' initial departure from Sipnget at the age of thirteen has been an excruciating experience, perhaps too painful for the boy to utterly comprehend it. The space of trauma is his own act of leaving, not his mother's "abandonment," nor his father's "intrusion" into his life. In addition, the inherent forgetting and incomprehensibility of his trauma propel him to re-enact the experience. Leaving is a literal act of repeating the past. It is a belated re-possession of what originally has not been fully known.[5] Taking a step further, Luis resorts to dissociation.[6] He claims his mother is dead, as though he is ashamed of his peasant family. We perceive though that Luis has to "kill" his mother; he must deny the existence of Sipnget so he does not have to return to his hometown. For in returning, he must leave again, and leaving is such a traumatic experience.

This trope of departure is invariably associated with two other recurring images in the novel's flashbacks. "To be traumatized is precisely to be possessed by an image or event" (Caruth, "Introduction," *Trauma: Explorations* 4-5). The first image is that of Luis' mother striking him, and second, the image of his mother spitting at the name of the man he called Father. Eight-year-old Luis once asked about his father and his mother slapped him. He recalls, "Her hand fell across his face, its sting sharp on his lips. He stared at her in utter surprise, feeling the pain spread across his face, but he did not cry. He did not move and he could feel something warm trickling down his mouth, and when she saw this she ran to the kitchen and with a damp towel wiped the blood off his lips" (José 27). Luis' reaction is that of bewilderment, he does not grasp his mother's anguish, nor does he understand why she has struck him: "…though always, the memory of her hand across his face and the taste of his own blood would be imperishable in his mind" (27-28). Caruth puts forward, "What returns to haunt the victim… is not only the reality of the violent event but also the reality of the way that its violence has not yet been fully known" (*Unclaimed Experience* 6). It is not

so much the physical pain from the slap that bothers Luis, but the image of the "blood trickling down his mouth." For this is the same blood that the man he called Father possesses. This is the same blood of the "man whose face his mother said she could spit at without blinking" (9). The trickling blood connotes the extent of the violence and the depth of his mother's hatred. It is also an image reflecting his mother's wound, in its ambiguity, in its incomprehensibility. Luis' trauma is thus inextricably connected with the trauma of another. These recurring images bear witness to the wound buried in Luis' psyche, and the impact of its incomprehensibility.

Of more import is how Luis survives or attempts to live through the unconscious trauma. Caruth asserts that the trauma effect lies not merely in one's encounter with the traumatic event—perhaps loss or death, but in "*having survived, precisely, without knowing it.*" (*Unclaimed Experience* 63). The survivor's frequent remembrance of an image or event signifies more so his incomprehensibility of his survival. Thus, Luis' motion of repetition is not an endeavor to understand a child's loss of its mother, but rather, his claim to survival, an act of undulation "between the story of the unbearable nature of an event and the story of the unbearable nature of its survival" (Caruth, *Unclaimed Experience* 7).

At the novel's finale, when the Huk rebels attack Rosales and Luis finds himself and Trining alone in the red house, he refuses to leave. He justifies that "he knew in his bones that he could not live elsewhere—not in the city, which would remind him of Ester and of the lies he had told. Living here required courage, too, which he must now possess. Most of all, being in Rosales would confirm, for him at least, that illusory contract he must have with his own people" (179). This time, why does Luis not leave Rosales? Is it the trauma survivor attempting to master his incomprehensibility? Or is it another trauma—Luis' shock and pain over Ester's death and his latent response? Or is this the trauma borne out of the Sipnget massacre? Is the refusal to leave a drive to destruction and death?

Addressing the Historical Traumas

In the novel, Luis's individual trauma is related to the trauma of another—the national trauma, and of a larger history of violence. Curiously, the narrative does not dwell much on Luis' life during the Japanese war. It simply mentions that Luis, secluded in Manila, has not "suffered" during the war, and bearing the Asperri name, has been spared. The only other semi-

lengthy account of Luis' activities during this period is his brief encounter with the original Commander Victor, retold in Luis' letter to his Father (which he never sends). Yet, somewhere between the silence of the paragraphs, a phrase indicates "He was frightened..." (52) Such economy nonetheless implies that something "frightful" has been entrenched in Luis' unconscious, for it is in the inherent "dismissal" that the trauma is initially experienced. The lines, "What did he really know about the war? He was too young to have been in the Army and too old to be with the women…" (52), suggest that the traumatic potency of war has not been fully perceived by the boy. This does not mean that Luis has not been "traumatized" by war's atrocities, where the number of killings and deaths far exceeds any human imagination. Luis writes, "I saw them kill… In their company I was part of a wave" (145). He recalls mere details such as "mutilated bodies, clean bullet holes" (188). "Through its very missing, his story… bears the impact of a trauma" (*Unclaimed Experience* 40). Luis' selective memory is a sign of the inherent forgetfulness—a self-imposed amnesia. His silences and omissions are precisely symptomatic of the trauma of history.

What is significant, however, is the novel's silence. For instance, of Manila during the Japanese invasion, we witness a brief account in Luis' letter to his father, "…that Manila would be safe… the conquerors did not bother us and we were adequately supplied not just with the amenities that you were used to but with the same dogged loyalty that your encargados and your tenants had always shown you" (144). Is this believable? How could Manila be "safe" when it was overrun by Japanese troops, and later, by American battalions and tanks? Civilians were tortured, raped, imprisoned, or killed. Blasts and bombings occurred everywhere. Wreckage and fatality scattered at every corner. In *The Battle for Manila*, Richard Connaughton, John Pimlott, and Duncan Anderson document, "During the month-long battle [between the Japanese and the American forces] which followed between February 3 and March 3, 1945, the city was completely destroyed: all that remained by the end were heaps of smouldering rubble. The charred bodies half-buried in the ruins bore terrible witness to a massacre beyond the nightmare of any Manileño. An estimated 100,000 Manileños were killed…" (15) And this larger history of violence succeeded in various towns and villages across the archipelago, even as it traversed the seas to replicate such horror in Southeast Asia, and in the Asia Pacific.

Memories of traumas, because of their inherent forgetting, can never be comprehensive or accurate, and may at times be subject to silences, omissions, exaggerations, and errors. However, the veracity of the survivor's account should never be an issue in the reconstruction of memory as history. Janet Walker declares, "It is precisely the quality of exaggeration that gives this memory its historical resonance" (136). The recollection itself, which serves as a testament of the traumatic incident, shows the claim to survival, and of resistance against extinction. "Manila is safe" because Luis has emerged physically unscathed, or so it seems. The hyperbolic statement "Manila is safe" sums up the insufficiency and obscurity of Luis' memory, but at the same time, testifies to the historicity of war's horrifying effect.

The novel reenacts post-war Hukbalahap activities in the north and creates an atmosphere of relentless tensions and imminent doom. Vivid, concrete images are deployed to define the uneasiness and anxiety that enshroud the Asperri household, for instances, the ubiquitous presence of the civilian guards, the "stone as large as duck's egg" thrown at Don Vicente's room, and the unpredicted appearance of Commander Victor in Luis's room. Luis realizes, "It suddenly became clear that Rosales was like the rest of the country—in turmoil—and it was here, right in this very house, that the turmoil was perhaps keenest and deepest" (8). The anxiety is exacerbated by discussions in newsrooms and rumors in social gatherings: "By Christmas talk was rife that the Huks were already in the outskirts of the city, that they could now attack Manila at will. Many provincial capitals in Central Luzon had been raided and occupied by them for at least one night before the Constabulary could retake them…" (63).

The novel chooses to reveal only the disquieting aftermath of the Sipnget massacre—a barren land, a bustling land transformed into "a flat and ugly wound" (96). Through Luis' eyes, we see "How lonely and empty Sipnget had become—a few buri palms, the bamboo brakes that lined the river bank, the green puffs of acacia, rows of broken buri palm trunks left to rot near the river bank, the water shining in the sun, the broad stony island, and the stubborn reeds, jutting above the water with their catch of moss and water lilies" (95). And the voices of the past—"the halting screech of his mother's scolding and the soothing remonstrances of an old man"—seem to have faded with Sipnget's annihilation. Here, the trauma is not in the violence of the act, but in the image of desolation, and in the few fragments of words and silences from Tio Joven. Luis is outraged by the tragedy, particularly by

his father's callous order in sending tractors to flatten out the village, thus obliterating the memory of its existence. Perhaps, he is even more devastated that he has *not known* of this until three months later. Sipnget's erasure makes him realize the "bleak truth," that "there was no sense in returning" (100). Again, the survivor is compelled to leave. The way the traumatic shock is not entirely perceived will return to haunt him later.

Universally, the historical power of trauma is an endless cycle of the past, of the violence and horrors of yesteryears. The conflict among brethren recurs throughout histories, beginning with Cain and Abel, and the descendants of Isaac against Ishmael's. *My Brother, My Executioner* is specifically the narrative of Filipinos in discord—Luis versus Victor, son versus father, the landlords versus the peasants, and the military versus the Huks. This narrative is a manifestation of the inherent latency of historical traumas that have afflicted our nation, including class exploitation and the loss of lands ("It is a land exploited by its own leaders, where the citizens are slaves of their own elite," 73); and the external colonialisms and internal colonialism ("The thieves who raided the GI quartermaster depots, who robbed the government treasury, the same ones who continue to do it now. These were the people who traded with the Japanese and got rich working for themselves. How can I believe in the Americans when they are responsible for making heroes of these scum?" 71). The war results in a pervasive tragedy—the collective trauma of the post-war generation. Call it ennui or malaise, but Luis' predicament is symptomatic of his generation's trauma. He contemplates,

> It is a generation that really is aimless. We say that we have been sobered or matured by war, the generation that could be the trailblazer, for it is the generation that has known the first years of independence. But for a few exceptions, we are headed nowhere. The generation that preceded us was interested in independence. What are we really interested in? (129-130)

Is this the grim indication of their incomprehensibility of their own trauma, and even more so, of their survival?

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 its re-imagining and representation of traumatic experiences, the novel seeks to recover stories of the wounds and the sores that are otherwise unavailable, that in their latency, need to be addressed.[7] "History is made when the pain of the past is both remembered and forgotten." (Xiong, 213). In telling the story of Luis Asperri and how historical violence has intruded into his personal life, José investigates how the personal history of trauma is never an isolated case, but is bound to the traumas of others, and to the larger history of trauma. Caruth declares,"…that history, like trauma, is never simply one's own, that history is precisely the way we are implicated in each other's traumas" (*Unclaimed Experience* 23). Paradoxically, histories are never new, for they are uncanny repetitions of what have previously happened. They are nevertheless not just repetitions of one's trauma, but more so, a recounting of one's attempt to survive.[8] Thus, narratives of past traumas must be retold or written. It is in retelling, in writing, that their cry can be heard, that every possible survivor's departure can be sensed. Philippine literature, as a history of departure, leaves the sites of adverse accidents and repeated traumas, to depart for another new history, or to seek the formation of an altered history.[9]

Finally, we—the girls and the boys of literature classes—play the inevitable role of the "therapeutic listeners," attending particularly for the departures and the claims to survival. In this age of more personal vicissitudes, national tragedies and global traumas, we shall continue to read novels like *My Brother, My Executioner*, to remind ourselves, as Caruth has counseled, to "listen through the departures we have all taken from ourselves" ("Introduction," *Trauma: Explorations* 10-11).

Endnotes

1 In her essay "Coming Full Circle: The Rosales Novels of F. Sionil Jose," Thelma Kintanar declares that "Luis is the third in Jose's portrait gallery of failed intellectuals… intensely aware of the social evil because he has once been and is indirectly still a victim, yet unable to act, easing his conscience by agonizing in beautiful prose. They [including Tony Samson and the narrator of *Tree*] serve as a commentary on the sometimes crippling effects of Western intellectualism on intelligent and sensitive individuals who have to live under Third World conditions of grinding poverty, social and economic inequality and unabated corruption" (24). Gelacio Guillermo, likewise, deems Luis Asperri a "bourgeois intellectual" and "angry young intellectual," declaring that "Luis's failing is his mind: it is not made to resolve problems in reality but to fabricate illusions" (34). Geok-lin Lim also suggests that Luis' failing is of the intellect. He is one of those who have betrayed "personal ideals for material comforts" (85). Lim observes that "Luis relates this internal wound to his illegitimacy which has created a profound questioning of his identity and individual value. He symbolizes the dilemma of the intellectual who, because he is capable of reflection and analysis, is trapped in his subjective anomie and cannot act positively for social change" (86).

2 See Freud's *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* and Caruth's *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative, and History*.

3 Interestingly, this echoes that of the Spanish wife of Don Vicente who has become "mad." It is said that "she was a sensitive woman who was [not just] uprooted from hearth and home…" (José 43).

4 Freud in "Beyond the Pleasure Principle" relays the *fort-da* game of a boy whose mother has to leave him during the day.

5 Caruth has observed that "The pathology consists, rather, solely in the *structure of its experience* or reception: the event is not assimilated or experienced fully at the time, but only belatedly, in its repeated *possession* of the one who experiences it. To be traumatized is precisely to be possessed by an image or event." ("Introduction," *Trauma: Explorations* 4-5)

6 Dissociation is a psychological defense mechanism which the survivor resorts to by distancing himself from events. According to Elizabeth Waites, it "allows the mind, in effect, to flee what the boy is experiencing, thus maintaining a selective conscious awareness that has survival value.

The shock of trauma produces states that are so different from ordinary waking life that they are not easily integrated with more normal experience." Quoted in Walker, 127.

7 As Cathy Caruth has said, "What the parable of the wound and the voice thus tells us, and what is at the heart of Freud's writing on trauma, both in what it says and in the stories it unwittingly tells, is that trauma seems to be much more than a pathology, or the simple illness of a wounded psyche: it is always the story of a wound that cries out, that addresses us in the attempt to tell us of a reality or truth that is not otherwise available. This truth, in its delayed appearance and its belated address, cannot be linked only to what is known, but also to what remains unknown in our every actions and our language." (*Unclaimed Experience* 4)

8 Caruth says, "Repetition, in other words, is not simply the attempt to grasp that one has almost died but, more fundamentally and enigmatically, the very attempt to *claim one's survival*. If history is to be understood as the history of trauma, it is a history that is experienced as the endless attempt to assume one's survival as one's own." (*Unclaimed Experience* 63)

9 So it seems "the very possibility of history [is] in the nature of a traumatic departure" (*Unclaimed Experience* 14).

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Pinoy Ako, Pinoy Tayo: Fashioning the Fragmentary Filipino Identity in Teaching F. Sionil Jose's "The God Stealer"

John Jack G. Wigley

"The God Stealer" is a short story written by National Artist F. Sionil José. It is his most anthologized work of fiction. It is not just a tale about an Ifugao stealing a religious idol, but also about the friendship that developed between a Filipino and an American, a representation of the relationship that developed between the "colonized" and the "colonizer." This story won first prize in the 1959 Carlos Palanca Memorial Awards for Literature, and it is included in the book by José with a similar title, *The God Stealer and Other Stories*.

As a teacher of Philippine Literatures for many years, I have always included this story in my course reader, as I find it a good material and fertile springboard for discussing identity, culture, and tradition. As a facilitator, I would always begin the discussion by giving the summary of the story, or by asking several students to recount the events or scenes in the story.

The main characters in "The God Stealer" are Philip Latak and Sam Christie. Philip, better known as Ip-pig to his friends and relatives in the province, is an Ifugao who consequently lives and works in Manila and becomes a Christian. By being a city dweller, Philip becomes less sentimental about his cultural identity, beliefs, and customs. On the other hand, Sam Christie is an American who wants to see the rice terraces of the Mountain

Province. He is also interested in purchasing an original statue of an Ifugao god. Philip and Sam both work in a travel agency and Sam is Philip's boss.

During a feast honoring Philip for his return, the two characters are disappointed because of the unwillingness of the Ifugao people to sell any statue. Sam Christie wants to buy an authentic Ifugao idol—one that he could take home and treasure alongside his other precious collections—a Grecian urn, a Japanese samurai sword, a Siamese mask. Philip then decides to steal his grandfather's god to give to Sam as a token to repay him for the support and the salary raise given to him by Sam. After finding out that his god is missing and stolen by his own grandson, Philip's grandfather becomes depressed and dies. Because of his grandfather's passing, Philip decides not to return to Manila anymore with Sam as a way to repent and ward off his guilt. Philip transforms himself back into an Ifugao clothed in traditional garb, carving a new god to replace the old idol he has stolen.

Then, I would proceed to ask a general comprehension question about the narrative. Do you see symbolisms in the names of the two main characters of the story: Sam Christie and Philip (Ip-pig) Latak? Obviously, Philip stands for the Philippines and the typical Filipino. His surname "Latak" means the remains, the residue, or what seems to be left of the original. Sam refers to Uncle Sam or colonial America, and his surname Christie is an abridged or colloquial term for Christianity which means colonial Spain. Here, the representation of the colonizers of the Philippines is evidently portrayed.

Taking the selection further, I would attempt to raise the following comprehension questions:

1. What is a prose allegory? Is this story an example of a prose allegory? What do the following characters represent—Sam, Philip, Sadek, the grandfather?
2. Did Sam Christie deliberately steal the god? Why is the god stolen? What is the significance of the stolen god?
3. What is the essence of Philip's statement, "You can buy everything, even gods?"
4. Explain the last paragraph. Is there a resolution in Philip Latak at the end of the story? Prove your answer.
5. Ultimately, what is the story all about? What does it speak about Philippine traditions?

But like any teacher, I also intend to integrate other points which could make this discussion more interesting and introspective. Since the themes of the story center on colonial mentality, identity formation, going back to the roots, and the concept of nationhood, I try my best to work on these areas.

Whenever I raise the quintessential questions "Who is the Filipino?" or "What constitutes a Filipino?" I would always see students looking for or groping for tangible answers, either by describing qualities that make a Filipino, or explaining some cliché examples or reflections about Filipinoness, but never really hitting the mark.

It is a clincher.

I would take the time to offer some concepts pertaining to Philippine history and identity formation.

We learned about some tokenized assumptions of the complexity of the Filipino experience. We allegedly have inherited our lackadaisical, almost lethargic attitude from the Spaniards, revealed in the practice of the "siesta" (an early afternoon break from work) and the "mañana" habit ("mañana" is a Spanish term for "tomorrow," the habit of "putting off for tomorrow what you can do today" or "due tomorrow, do tomorrow"). America's influences on us proved to be massive, ranging from their independence of spirit which resulted in our virtual mimicry, their grandiose lifestyle which morphed in the formation of colonial mentality among us, and the Hollywoodization of our culture, the McDonaldization of our cuisine and the Rock and Rollization of our music, fashion, and the arts. We simply have become what we are today because they have made us this way.

But the Spaniards fled our country more than a century ago. The Americans, who never set us "totally free," have been around, ingraining and integrating their presence and influence in our culture and ways of life. But the Americanization of society has been a long standing problem not only of the Philippines, but also of all the countries in the world. The US has positioned itself to be the international police dog. It has ingratiated itself to become the Orwellian Big Brother—watching the world from its own superior vantage point. Add to these, the influences of the Chinese, the Japanese, the Indians, the Malay, and the other Europeans which have also seeped into our culture and traditions.

The Filipino identity has long been subjected to various essentialist and reductive remarks—that the Filipino people are suffering from severe colonial mentality and are brown Americans living in a nation without a visible nationality. These conclusive assumptions collude to make acceptable the primacy of the idea that the Filipino is a broken, fragmented, and residual being who thrives on mimicking the so-called "superior cultures." As a result, the damaging effects of colonization, the negative identification of nationality due to the generalized narrative of identity, and the fissures compounded by our presumably strong adherence to tradition, religion, and strong kinship, all contribute to the aggravating reductive image of the Filipino suspended in limbo and indeterminacy, hardly grounded by gravity, and paralyzed by cultural cringe.

However, geographically and culturally, the Philippines remains a paradox. It is a republic consisting of more than seven thousand islands, with each island constituted as fragmentally diverse from the others. It is a land where ironies and contradictions thrive. The gap between the rich and the poor is wide, and widens, even as the rich and the poor struggle to coexist.

On the one hand, we have the properly educated. On the other hand, the barely literate. We have the cosmopolitan elite of the urban centers and the underprivileged of the rural areas, the Catholics up north and the Muslims down south. We speak distinct languages, live in varied territories, adhere to divergent yet conflicting value systems, and adapt to extremely different cultures and beliefs. How does one explain the notion of Filipino identity when almost three-fourths of the country's population straddles or falls below the poverty line even as the once biggest shopping mall in Asia is found right in the heart of Manila? How does he/she account for the singularity of Filipinoness when the question of national identity is highly mediated and contested by affiliations resulting from diverse life-modes, global migrations, and cultural differences? Like Philip Latak in the story who was initially smitten by the allure of foreign ways and mores, Filipinos will find themselves at the threshold of change because of the constant bombardment of multiculturalism and globalization.

The Filipino is always bound by traditions. Whatever remains from the bequests of our ancestors have been permeated with Hinduized, Sinicized, Hispanized, and Americanized structural influences. At this juncture, the Filipino responds, and will continue to respond, to all these

influences either by imbibing some or rejecting others, manifesting his or her mutable sense of tradition.

At present, history and culture are being rethought and recast as human constructs because the past becomes only accessible to us through textual appropriation. Using the historiographic metafiction framework, we can gather, assess, and imagine how the past is lived through texts, traces, and traditions and not duly from the grand narratives culled from history books and archival documents.

Even if we are purported to be diverse literally and metaphorically, our concept of identity ("katauhan") remains a grand narrative. We have learned before that an identity should be whole, untarnished, and devoid of any outside influence. For example, when we perceive Chinese identity, we affirm that it is an identity defined by its distinct characteristics—authentic Chinese art and literature, multi-layered Chinese history and music, recognizable Chinese architecture and tradition. We can even pinpoint certain colors (red and gold), fashion and designs (*cheongsam* and calligraphy) exclusively identified as Chinese. Whenever you go to China or even India, you know you are in Asia. And then you say that when you go to the Philippines, you realize that there is nothing really distinct in this country. That it may just well be any other country in the world. Everything is highly Westernized. Wherever Chinese or Indians are, you see them wearing their traditional *cheongsam* or *sari* outfits, whether they attend important business functions or just peddling mosquito nets and blankets on their scooters. Corollary to this, you don't see Filipinos marching along Quiapo wearing traditional *ternos*, *baro't saya* or *Barong Tagalog*. You begin to wonder why are we not like them? Why don't we have a distinct culture or identity?

Let's go to food. The taste that we have developed throughout our history and tradition is always a hodge-podge of everything. Isn't it interesting to learn that our favorite drink/cooler/ dessert (you see, even the label is problematic and cannot be specified) is *halo-halo*, which is literally a concoction made up of the combination of fruits, vegetables, crushed ice, milk, sweetened crops, and *leche flan*? It is all there in the halo-halo. It has become the emblematic signification of all the ingredients that make up the concoction, which is actually parallel to the Philippines, colored and embellished with micro and macro influences from north, west, east and south.

But about our eating habits and table manners, I could say in this regard that the Filipino identity is distinct. Unlike in Western countries, where the order of food is strictly followed and observed—entrees and appetizers first, soup and salad second, main course third, desserts next, and finally, the drinks and wine to ward off indigestion—in the Philippines when eating, there is hardly any sequence observed at all. We can drink first before we eat. Or maybe try the dessert first because it looks so tempting. We can take the rice and the viand later. Or perhaps, why don't we pour the soup on the rice? It could be more delicious that way.

When there's a fiesta, food is always served buffet-style. We put everything in one plate—rice, noodles, *rellenong bangus*, *lumpiang shanghai* laced with sweet and sour sauce, barbecue chicken glazed with barbecue sauce, *lechon* dipped in its own *lechon* sauce, *buko-pandan* and *leche flan* for dessert. We eat all of them at the same time. Never mind if the viands or the sauces get all mixed up. They will all taste the same anyway once inside the stomach.

Our concept of entertainment is also worth critiquing. For us, entertainment should have all the necessary ingredients—a little bit of singing, dancing, and dramatics. This perhaps explains why karaoke was invented by a Filipino, and why it has mushroomed all over the country and has become our national pastime. Some Filipinos even face untimely deaths just to have the chance to sing via karaoke Frank Sinatra's "My Way," right? When we watch films, we cannot sit through a serious one for two straight hours. It is too depressing. We need variety. There must be a happy balance of suspense, drama, comedy and music. In short, a good film must be a perfect blend of everything: *iyakan, tawanan, sayawan, kantahan,* and *lambingan*. *Dapat meron ding sampalan, meron ding lihim na mabubunyag sa huli, dapat merong sasabihing importante ang isang mamamatay na bago siya bawian ng buhay, dapat huling dumating ang pulis. Dapat kikidnapin ang* leading lady *at dadalhin sa isang inabandonang bodega.* I never realize that we had so many vacant warehouses in the Philippines. *Dapat ding nakajacket ng itim ang bida kahit na ang init-init dito sa Pilipinas.*

A TV host could never be considered a good one if he is all brains and no comic ability. He should know when to pitch informative ideas and when to crack jokes to break the monotony. Filipino newscasters of local news program actually differ little from emcees of variety programs, in terms of their speech and ways of hosting. Ted Failon or Mike Enriquez are certainly

no different from Willie Revillame or Vic Sotto when delivering news or hosting, respectively. All of them are animated speakers and the Filipino audiences quite like them this way.

Even when we greet someone on the street or in the hall, we tend to be over-expressive. I remember an American friend of mine who once said to me that we are the only race in the world who can do all the facial movements at the same time when greeting someone on the street—bulging eyes, flaring nostrils, twitching eyebrows, grinning mouth, contorting cheeks, twisting facial muscles, and raising forehead saying *Uy, kumusta ka!* I didn't realize that we are like this. It took a foreigner to make this witty observation.

The story "The God Stealer" symbolizes a tradition of clash between race and culture. By weaving and interweaving the story through fertile discussions, readers can determine the various possibilities of contextualizing traditions, which can be a source of personal and national pride, a deterrent to identity formation, or a result of multi-negotiated convergent space.

F. Sionil Jose's "The God Stealer" ends metaphorically with Philip Latak's focused and ardent work in carving a new god to replace the old one, garbed in his traditional Ifugao clothes. This, as in many representations, continues to depict the Filipino as an individual trapped between opposing worlds, as a person searching for his or her authentic soul, or as a figure hybridizing disparate aspects of his identity formation. Nick Joaquin once remarked that the "true identity of a Filipino is a Filipino searching for his identity."

The allegations hurled against the Filipino which were discussed earlier in this essay might have some truth-claims. But students must not forget that this fragmentation of our identity is not solely our own doing. We have been divided because the divisions have time and again, shaped our lives and our consciousness—our land is a group of fragmented islands, our history has been periodically classified according to the sequence through which our colonizers have conquered such lands, and our people have been consistently divided according to many regions, diverse languages, and a mix of multiple nationalities. Corollary to this, we have been "salvaged" (meaning "saved" in the original English definition, or "murdered" in the appropriated Filipino English context) by the pressing dichotomy of the materiality of the self and the providence of religion.

What is wrong with a fragmentary identity? Is it because it is not

whole, or complete, or does not measure up to the ideal construction of the self that we ascribe to an individual?

The problem lies in the obsession of people that identity must be whole, pure, and untarnished. This is a grand narrative. There is no such thing as pure culture or perfect identity.

Perhaps, a presupposition one may derive from this is the thought that fragmentation is brought about by the way a Filipino sees his or her sense of completeness, given the uneven landscape of his or her history, the disconnected modes of his or her existence, and the splintered subjectivities that constantly confront him or her. An identity can still be whole even if it is made up of broken pieces from different parts. We are a mixed culture because of the colonizers and their influences. This is what history has given us. But we can turn this around by changing our mindset about the concept of fragmented identity and embracing the idea that we are still whole, only made up of fragmented parts.

It is about time that we become proud that we are cultural mongrels. We are a mix of everything. And this is good.

It is in being half, or in parts, that we become whole. One foot is in the water, the other on the ground. No matter where we go, we are a hybrid identity, with a hybridized sense of self.

As I end the discussion, I would feel that I was able to pique the interest of the students as they engage in a very lively discussion about Filipinoness. I would ask them finally if they subscribe to the idea of the Filipino's hybrid identity, and how this acceptance and embracing of the notion of fragmented identity can be an advantage in helping the Filipinos attain progress.

I feel complete. Now, does anybody care for mixed nuts?

TRIBUTES

Frankie Was the First True ASEAN Citizen

Edwin Thumboo

I myself am in my 89th year and have slowed down somewhat since Covid. Frankie was a great man but more importantly, his greatness rested on kindness. He was always there when he spoke with me. I learnt a great deal from him. Being of mixed parentage myself, I was able to ask him quite a great deal of the new societies that were emerging slowly in South East Asia

Frankie was the first true ASEAN citizen. 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.

I feel so sorry that I was not able to see him before he left us. Every time I was in the Philippines, I stayed with him, his wife and family. I still remember the comforts of his home, the mixture of family and privacy.

I miss him very much. Although he was not much older than I am, I saw him as a teacher and in a quiet way, as a fabulous, quiet Christian.

Thank you for giving me this opportunity to share my thoughts about Frankie.

Remembering Manong Frankie

Robert Yeo

I cannot remember when I first met Francisco Sionil José, the Filipino novelist, and short story writer. Very likely in the late 1970s, at a conference in Malaysia. As I got to know him better, I discovered he did so many other things besides writing fiction: he owned a bookshop called Solidaridad, located in Ermita in the Philippines capital Manila, and a publishing house of the same name. The bookshop became a center for writers, intellectuals and activists from around the world to meet, and they provided articles for the magazine, *Solidarity*, which he edited.

Frankie invited me to a conference organized by the Philippine Centre of International PEN to be held in Manila, 14-17 December 1981. The topic was "Literature and Social Justice" and the conference attracted about 70 delegates from twelve countries, with the largest number of foreign visitors coming from South Korea. As well, there were Peter Elstob, the secretary of International PEN headquarters in London; 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, and myself.

Given the international reputation of PEN, I was not surprised that the conference would end with resolutions. The conference was, after all, titled "Literature and Justice," and the president of the Philippines was Ferdinand Marcos, widely regarded as a dictator.

Resolution Number 2 read:

"At the same time, the Conference expresses concern over the continued detention, including solitary confinement, of some writers in prison; the continuing threat to rearrest writers who have been provisionally released, and the reports that at least one poet-journalist has disappeared under mysterious circumstances.

"The Asian Writers Conference, therefore, appeals to his Excellency, the President of the Philippines, to release writers in prison against whom no charges have been filed, to transfer to civilian courts the cases of those against whom charges have been filed, and to effect their speedy trial, to accord humane treatment to, and put an end to the solitary confinement of writers still in prison, and to conduct a thorough inquiry into the case of the writer who has disappeared under mysterious circumstances.

"The Asian Writes Conference further appeals to His Excellency, the President of the Philippines, to assure the freedom of expression of writers in the Philippines without the threat of arrest and imprisonment."

There was a South African delegate present, Sipho Sepamla, director of the Federated Union of Black Artists (now the FUBA Academy of Arts), and it was not surprising that a resolution was passed, No. 3, on South Africa:

"The Conference notes with great concern the continuing flagrant repression of the basic human rights of the black African people in South Africa, and the freedom of black African writers, artists, and intellectuals.

"The Conference expresses its strong sense of solidarity with the black African people, writers, artists, and intellectuals in their struggle for human freedom and dignity, and appeals to all writers, artists, and intellectuals in the world to help and support their struggle in South Africa."

As our host, Frankie was very kind to my wife and me. Both his wife Tessie and him always said we were welcome to his home whenever we visited Manila, but on the occasion of the Conference, he had obviously too many guests to allow him to attend exclusively his home to us. On November 25, 1981, he wrote,

"I am glad that you finally got word from Asia Foundation. At our general meeting this week, Krip Yuson agreed to take you to his house for the duration. This is the arrangement with the Asia Foundation; their grantees will stay with writers. But you did not mention your wife coming with you, which is of course wonderful.

"I am sorry that I cannot ask you to stay with us; the house will be full. Tell Esther I am sorry that I will not be able to take care both of you as I will be so damn busy going around and I hope you will understand.

"We will make a reservation for you in one of the hotels close to the bookshop, which is actually the PEN Secretariat, too, so that in case you need help it will not be difficult for you to get to me. I will see to it that the place is not expensive and of course, Esther should register also as a Singapore delegate, and why not? Poh Seng is coming on his own and he will be booked at the Philippine Plaza. The price (special) for delegates is US$25 a day, single. Let me know as fast as you can if you want to stay there, too, for the duration of the conference and then move to a cheaper place after. It is all up to you. If my houseguests shall have gone by the time, you can even move in with us. But let us see how it will turn out.

"See you on the 18th or earlier. But let me know your arrival date so that you will be met at the airport. It is a mess out there, not like Changi."

On January 19, 1982, he wrote again:

"Hello Robert. Sorry I was not able to attend to you more. Next time, just remember there's a room in the house for you and Esther!"

"The Conscience of the Nation": Remembering the Great Frankie Jose

James Fallows

I was heartbroken to see in the papers this weekend that F. Sionil Jose, a writer and civic leader known to millions as "Frankie," had died at a hospital in Manila at age 97.

I say heartbroken rather than shocked, because through the decades in which I had known Frankie, starting in the 1980s when he was younger than I am now, he had frequently joked that his joyful indulgence in every temptation of life would soon do him in.

As I noted in short piece in 2009 about a visit to him in Manila:

"Every time I've met Jose over the last 20-plus years, he's said, 'Jim, I am getting so much fatter!'—with a big laugh, because he loves food (among other pleasures) so much. But Jose has a deadly-serious claim to being the conscience of his nation—at legal and physical risk during the Marcos years, and as a sobering voice in the years since then.

As I also noted at the time, the main reason I had been interested in the Nobel Prize announcements for Literature was to see whether the jurors would finally get around to recognizing F. Sionil Jose for his life's work.

That can't happen now—Nobel prizes go to the living—but all the rest of us can still notice the remarkable works of this man, and the power of the life he led.

The first of his books I read was *The Pretenders*, from his famed five-volume "Rosales Saga" novels. The book's plot and tensions are specific to the

Philippines. 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.

Notes on the Contributors

Jaime An Lim is a prize-winning author. He has published two poetry collections (*Trios* and *Auguries*) and two short story collections (*Hedonicus* and *The Axolotl Colony*). He was co-founder of the Iligan National Writers Workshop and coedited *Mindanao Harvest 4*, a National Book Award winner for best anthology in 2022. His book of literary criticism *A Post-Colonial Reading of the Philippine Novel, 1887-2018* is forthcoming from UP Press. He holds four post-graduate degrees from Indiana University, Bloomington, including a Ph.D. in Comparative Literature. He is a former dean of the Institute of Arts and Sciences of Far Eastern University. In his free time, he paints and keeps a small ornamental and vegetable garden in his backyard. He also provides home to a number of stray cats in the neighborhood (Alex, Karen, Lea, and Rio).

Cecilia Manguerra Brainard is the author and editor of over 20 books, including her three novels: *When the Rainbow Goddess Wept*, *Magdalena*, and *The Newspaper Widow*. Her recent publications are her *Selected Short Stories* and *Growing Up Filipino 3: New Stories for Young Adults*. Cecilia also runs the small press PALH (Philippine American Literary House), which has published books by Linda Ty-Casper, Veronica Montes, among others. As a former Executive Board Member of the writers' group PEN, Cecilia represented PEN USA West in International meetings in Barcelona and Santiago de Compostela. She served as an officer in such groups as the Midnight Special Cultural Center, PAAWWW (Pacific Asian American Women Writers West), and the Arts & Letters at the Cal State University, LA. Cecilia has received a California Arts Council Fellowship, a Brody Arts Fund Fellowship, and an Outstanding Individual Award from Cebu, among others.

Jose Wendell P. Capili is Professor 12 and Vice President for Public Affairs, the University of the Philippines (2009-2023). He graduated from UST, UP Diliman, University of Tokyo, the University of Cambridge, and The Australian National University, where he earned his Ph.D. He has received a Palanca, a Cultural Center of the Philippines, and National Book Awards for Literature. He has authored seven books and over 300 articles and received fellowships in Australia, Europe, North America, and East and Southeast Asia. He is one of the seven Achievement Awardees for 2020 of the Department of Science and Technology-National Research Council of the Philippines (DOST-NRCP). He is a Life Member of Clare Hall, University of Cambridge.

Alma Anonas-Carpio is a freelance journalist and writer. She is the treasurer of the Manila Critics Circle and a judge of the National Book Awards. Alma is also the author of the erotic novel *How to Tame Your Tikbalang Without Even Trying*.

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Loreta L. Fajardo has been teaching in the Mindanao State University-Iligan Institute of Technology for 40 years. Her fields of specialization include literature, folklore, culture, and language studies.

James Fallows wrote the controversial 1987 article in the Atlantic Monthly about the Philippines' "damaged culture," which was actually a profile of F. Sionil Jose as a writer, author, and public intellectual. A journalist and author, he was chief speechwriter of US President Jimmy Carter (1977-1980), the youngest in US presidential history. He won the US National Book Award in 1983.

Maria L.M. Fres-Felix is a U.S.- educated economist turned fictionist. She has written four books. Her stories have been included in several anthologies here and abroad. Her latest book, *Crimetime* is a collection of linked crime stories featuring kick-ass lady crime fighter SJ Tuason. Fres-Felix has won

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Rita B. Gadi continues to write poetry, handles a regular social media program, is drafting a brief and simple new Philippine Constitution, has completed three books which are ready for publication, and is finishing her first novel.

Amado Cabus Guinto, Jr. has a bachelor's degree and a master's degree in English Language Studies from the Mindanao State University-Iligan Institute of Technology (MSU-IIT) where he now teaches Language and Literature. He was a fellow in the Iligan National Writers Workshop of MSU-IIT and in the J. Elizalde Navarro (JEN) Workshop on Critical and Cultural Heritage Studies of the University of Santo Tomas. Presently, he is pursuing a doctorate degree in Comparative Literature at the University of the Philippines Diliman. His research interests include Philippine folklore, theater and performance studies, translation, and literature. He is currently the Director of the MSU-IIT Center for Culture and the Arts.

Cristina Pantoja Hidalgo is a writer of fiction and nonfiction, a critic and a literary scholar. She has published more than 40 books, some of which have received national awards, like the Carlos Palanca Grand Prize for the Novel, and several National Book Awards (given by the Manila Critics Circle and the National Book Development Board). She has also received the Dangal ng Lahi Award from the Carlos Palanca Memorial Awards and the Gawad Balagtas from Unyong ng mga Manunulat sa Pilipinas. Her latest book is *What I Wanted to Be When I Grew Up: Early Apprenticeship of a Writer* (UP Press, 2021). At present, Hidalgo is Director of the UST Center for Creative Writing and Literary Studies, and Professor Emeritus of UP Diliman. She continues to teach graduate courses in Creative Writing and Literature at UST and UP.

Angelo R. Lacuesta is a novelist and short story writer, and also writes screenplays and essays. He has won many awards for his writing, among

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Shirley O. Lua is an associate professor of literature at De La Salle University (DLSU). She sits on the board of the Manila Critics Circle, which hands out the National Book Awards annually to the best books published in the Philippines; and the Manunuri ng Pelikulang Pilipino, the film critics group that confers the annual Gawad Urian on the best Philippine movies. She co-edited *Direk: Essays on Filipino Filmmakers* (with Clodualdo del Mundo, Jr., DLSU Publishing House and Sussex Academic Press, 2018), which garnered the 2020 Gintong Aklat Award for Best Book in the Arts and the Humanities. She is former director of DLSU Bienvenido N. Santos Creative Writing Center (2011-2017).

A winner of the National Focus Literary Awards (1st prize Fiction category, and Special Award for the Essay), **Geraldine C. Maayo** is the author of four collections of fiction: *The Photographs and Other Stories*, *A Quality of Sadness*, *The Boys in the Boarding House* and *The Sorrows of Rowena*. A story from the first collection was included in a German anthology titled *Women*

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Alma Cruz Miclat is a freelance writer and president of the Maningning Miclat Art Foundation, Inc. (MMAFI) which has held the Maningning Miclat Trilingual Poetry Awards during odd-numbered years since 2003 and the Maningning Miclat Art Award during even-numbered years since 2004. She is a contributor to *Philippine Daily Inquirer* and *The Diarist*, and author of the books *Soul Searchers and Dreamers: Artists' Profiles* and *Soul Searchers and Dreamers, Vol. II*. She is co-author with Mario I. Miclat, Maningning Miclat and Banaue Miclat of *Beyond the Great Wall: A Family Journal* (Anvil), which won the 2007 National Book Award for biography/autobiography. She co-edited *Fairground: A Literary Feast* with Gémino H. Abad, and is a contributor to the books, *The Writers' Wives* (Anvil), *The Fallen Cradle* (Anvil), *To Be in History: Dark Days of Authoritarianism* (Langham, UK), and *In Certain Seasons: Mothers Write in the Time of Covid*.

Writer-historian **Ambeth Ocampo** is former chairman of the National Historical Commission of the Philippines. He writes the very popular history column, "Looking Back," in the *Philippine Daily Inquirer* aside from authoring several best-selling popular-history titles.

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Journalist and writer **Manolo Quezon III** is the grandson of President Manuel L. Quezon. He was presidential assistant for history of President Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo and press undersecretary of President Benigni C.

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John Jack G. Wigley is the author of seven books: *Pag-ibig sa Panahon ng Kolera* (a Filipino translation of Gabriel Garcia Marquez's *Love in the Time of Cholera*, Lampara Books, 2022); *Kadenang Bahaghari* (Pride Lit Books, 2019); *Hantong: Mga Kuwento* (UST Publishing House, 2018), a finalist for Best Book in Fiction in Filipino in the 2019 National Book Awards; *Lait (pa more) Chronicles* (Visprint Publishing, 2017); *Lait Chronicles* (Visprint Publishing, 2016), a finalist in the 2017 National Book Awards for Best Book in Nonfiction in Filipino; *Home of the Ashfall* (UST Publishing House, 2014) and *Falling into the Manhole* (UST Publishing House, 2012), winner of the Best Book (Gawad San Alberto Magno) in the 15th Dangal ng UST and a finalist in the 13th Madrigal-Gonzalez Best First Book Award. He has also co-authored a number of textbooks on literature and creative writing. Presently, he is the chair of the UST Department of Literature, a literature professor at the Faculty of Arts and Letters and Graduate School, a resident fellow of the Center for Creative Writing and Literary Studies, and

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Robert Yeo is a poet, fictionist, and playwright, and he wrote probably Singapore's most famous drama, *The Singapore Trilogy*. He has received, among many significant awards, the Southeast Asia WRITE Award in 2011. Ethos Books published his memoirs, *Routes: A Singaporean Memoir, 1940-1975* also in 2011.

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Ralph Semino Galán is a prize-winning trilingual poet, literary and cultural critic, translator and editor in English, Filipino, and Cebuano. He is the Assistant Director of the UST Center for Creative Writing and Literary Studies, and an Associate Professor of Literature, the Humanities and Creative Writing in the UST Faculty of Arts and Letters. He is the author of four books, and is currently working on a research project sponsored by the UST Research Center for Culture, Arts and Humanities titled "Labaw sa Bulawan: Translating 300 Mindanao Poems from Cebuano into English," as well as a book of poetry written in Cebuano, "Mga Kalag nga Nahisalaag, Mga Dili Ingon Nato."