



Three Filipino Women

F. Sionil José

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The American debut of "the foremost Filipino novelist in English" (The New York Review of Books)--three passionate, eye-opening novellas of the Philippines. Advertising in Hungry Mind Review.

Three Filipino Women Details

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From Reader Review Three Filipino Women for online ebook

Shweta Ganesh Kumar says

Lovely, memorable and heartbreaking.

Must read for anyone interested in reading about the Philippines.

Alesa says

I read this book, because the author is supposed to be the best living Filipino writer. I did learn a bit about Filipino culture. However the three novellas were oddly similar. They were each written by a male journalist who fell in love with a woman who was not his romantic partner. One was a big politician. One was a prostitute. Interesting, but not really memorable for me.

Patrick says

Three Filipino Women

Paula says

Phenomenal novella that truly captures the cultural and political spirit of the Philippines during the middle decades of the twentieth century. Many of the themes and lessons of the book are still relevant today, a must read for any Filipino or anyone interested in the intertwinings of politics, religion, and culture.

Nick says

F. Sionil Jose is the best-known modern Filipino novelist. Some time ago, I read his "Sins" and did not much like it, but now I think that was a matter of having overdosed on Latin American novels of great amoral politicians -- Carlos Fuentes' "The Death of Artemio Cruz" comes to mind. "Three Filipino Women" is something different -- three male narrators, each of them struggling uneasily with the nexus of education and power, reflect on the great loves they have lost. Each of the women who are the subject of these narrations struggles to find a modern road in the post-war Philippines, as traditional roles for women are challenged without being completely supplanted. One of the women is a rising politician in her own right, another a revolutionary, a third, perhaps inevitably, a prostitute. One of the stories is titled "Obsession", but these narrators seem less obsessive than puzzled in their sorrow, unable to understand precisely what kept these non-traditional women from, basically, forming a more traditional relationship with them, even marriage. That puzzlement is a problem that Jose does not entirely solve -- the failure of these narrators to understand these women makes it that much more difficult for the reader to comprehend them. Still, the women come across as vibrant characters, committed to what they most want for themselves, their families and their people, and in that way more compelling than the men who in sadness tell their stories.

Sheryl says

3 stories. 3 women. Narita, Ermi and Malu.

Despite being flawed, each woman stood for what she believed in with fervored conviction. Partly enslaved by their personal ideals and principles and yet very much shaped by the society they live in, these women show a glimpse of the independence we often do or don't associate with the Filipino woman. Political in a sense as we get a taste of the state the Philippines was in during the period going the Martial Law era.

More a 3.5 read on the average.

2016 Book Riot's Read Harder challenge: Read a book about politics about your country, or another (fiction or non-fiction) -20/24

Tracy says

I read this for school. I enjoyed it a little, but not enough to want to read it again.

Patrick says

Overall interesting vignettes of how 3 different women used their individual strengths to make a futile attempt to change the machismo culture in the Philippines. Candor de Amor used her innate intelligence and beauty to become part of the elite in Filipino politics. Obsession showcased the traditional way female gained power and influence was to be a mistress of powerful man. Platinum showcased a revolutionary view of how people can change government by a misguided idealist.

CADENA DE AMOR:

Narita and Eddie loved to read. She daydreamer about leaving Sant Ana for the big city. She had the belief that the strong devoured the weak. She was valedictorian of her class and Senator invested in her b/c his own family was a failure. He was a big believer in meritocracy as oppose to hereditary. She saw Lopito as her way out of the poverty she was in. She was majoring in political science and economics. The Senator sent her to Assumption while Eddie ended up in UP Diliman. Even with her accomplishments, she was not accepted by the monied Assumption families. Eddie had a scholarship @ Harvard which he took advantage of, he also ended up with a Cebuano who made it easy for him to forget Narita.

Narita and Lopito quarreled a lot. She had innate taste of the things she liked. Lopito wanted to own Narita but she had her own mind. Lopito seemed to be gay which Narita took advantage by having the Senator divide his estate while he was alive and then go to the Senator when Lopito was caught with a boy so that the Senator disowned Lopito after which he committed suicide leaving the property to Narita, all within 5 years. Lopito was gay b/c he was not interested in touching Narita when they were married.

She went into politics even though her children were not Lopito she gave them his last name. She was well

versed in Far East Asian studies b/c she got her masters from Colombia. Although she dated the Colonel after Lopito died, she wanted to be independent in her own right. The older son is the Colonel's. Apparently, Narita lost her virginity to the Colonel and not Lopito.

Eddie believed that he should have studied American history while in America but @ the same time acknowledging there is a certain cache in getting a PhD in America and that people had to pay for that privilege. The Ambassador was the father of her second kid. She admitted that the Colonel gave her orgasms but was boring besides his ability to give her orgasms. So she used him and left him. Narita uses Eddie for her pleasure too. Eddie felt like a human dildo. She wants to go into politics just as her "papa". She wanted to get into politics to show-up her old rivals not b/c of some deep conviction or wanting to serve the public. She had a plan to win and wanted to try new ideas that young people had to shake the political structure. She wanted to break the Negros sugar monopoly. She knew all the major Washington power brokers. She was in the cover of American magazines. Guardia attributed it to her beauty, wit, circle of friends, gracious ways. She parted ways with the Ambassador which devastated him. She was a rising star in Filipino politics using her brain and beauty as a hook to get exposure.

She asked Eddie to start a think tank to see if the new breed could come up with new ideas not present in the old order of things. She was not concerned with what she stood for just the strategy which her campaign would engage in. Eddie thought that was the night he should have quit but having invested his self-importance into the campaign, he could not quit. He thought technocrats were delusional in thinking that they are needed for government to function.

Senator Reyes wanted the advisors to cheat in order to win votes including violence, intimidation, pork-barrel funds, and blackmail. The press are politicians lackeys. The opposition mayor was killed, vote-buying, bribery were down b/c they believed in overkill. Eddie saw that in the US spreading of wealth lifted all boats. Power corrupted her though she started out like that as a social climber. Eddie was an avowed scholar not a "Filipino politician". Narita and the President became lovers during the campaign.

Narita was killed by students who inadvertently gave her tetanus and the doctors gave her anti-tetanus shot that made her go into anaphylactic shock. Eddie realized in hindsight that he was fooling himself into believing his programs were going to make a difference in Narita's presidential bid when she eventually becomes president.

OBSESSION:

The protagonist, a pimp, is in love with Ermi Rojo, a prostitute. He set up a marketing consultancy firm that was funded by a Yale classmate investor who wanted an inside look into a Filipino economy. He decided to look @ the Filipino sexual business trade to see how it influence perceived status. B/c he separated from his wife since he was a workaholic the protagonist was looking for no-strings attached sex.

Didi was a pimp who belonged to the Negro's hacendero elite but preferred the "raw" life of selling women b/c she liked the emotions present in these women.

Ermi is direct and straight to the point. Ermi was an intellectual and good conversationalist who is auctioning her virginity for 10000 pesos. She state she will neverloose her mind to a boy and she will keep all her earnings. A rich foreign businessman who was the protagonist client eventually paid for Ermi Rojo's services. From the Sultan of Brunei, she got a Forbes Park home. She was on call for 3000 pesos. She did not want to retire from entertaining men even though she was financially secure. He was vexed that Ermi

persisted in being a prostitute despite her financial security. Ermi laughed @ the protagonist trying to give a sermon to her on morality. He states that they are alike in selling their services to the highest bidder. The protagonist says his business is to sell to corporations relevant information to make as much profit as possible for a given venture.

Martial law ushered a new set of oligarchs who ruled without regard to the old order.

The protagonist is still in love with Ermi. Ermi went to the US to see her mother. She did not care much for the past just the present. The protagonist wanted to teach her Filipino history which she acquiesced. Since he paid for sex, he decided that was not the best way to express his love for Ermi. The protagonist felt that ironically that he was still the clerk to the Japanese whom they defeated during WWII. Her father was a Japanese soldier who probably raped her mother.

She had a goal of getting out of the prostitution business. From the protagonist dealings with sex slaves, they always did it to support family members. He rails on the obscenity that the oligarchs make on the poor making the environment more conducive to poverty including not being able to pay for hospital or medicines. He was working for the multinationals which existed solely to make profits. He said that he was fortunate that he was older or else he would have gone mad thinking about the various men she had been with.

He held back sleeping with her b/c he wanted to be different in her mind. He wanted to be a man who loved her for his heart. For her part, she wanted to be held by him since she has a fear of unknown place. She was unhappy with her position in the world which the protagonist enjoyed hearing this b/c it was the real Ermi speaking. Roly liked Ermi's melancholy demeanor underneath her businesslike exterior. Roly told her that he loved her which she gleefully responded. She woke up with simplicity in her essence. Roly is making headway with Ermi in the love department by not sleeping with her he signaled that he cared for her.

Roly no longer slept with the other Camarin women out of loyalty and love for Ermi. She finally opened her dream restaurant which was spotless b/c of her personal hygiene which she kept spotless. Roly's mistake is to be in love with a prostitute and thinking that she would stop her lucrative profession b/c he loved her and her restaurant business was thriving. He decided to quit her cold turkey but could not do it. After awhile, she showed her love for him by unexpectedly showing up to his door.

When they finally had sex, she did not charge him and he wanted to know the sincerity of her love towards him. She went to him every night and he waited for her to enter her apt. In their relationship, they had conflicts b/c of his candor and openness and her hypersensitivity and volatile temper. She was in love with Roly but decided to marry Andy b/c he would give her the American dream she always wanted away from the squalor of her past.

He felt that he sold his country to foreigners along with Ermi.

PLATINUM:

Jose protagonists all have complacency issues, they all have @ their core comfort issues that disables them to change. The specific protagonists in Platinum asks whether his inability to change was due to the fact he did not love the woman enough or due to his comfort of the status quo. He is in love with a woman named Malu who he met in his senior year working @ a journal finishing up his business and economics degree. He believed in economic nationalism. Malu thought he was just being a nationalist bourgeoisie who wanted

economic power for himself instead of foreigners. Malu was a liberal elite political activist who was majoring in clinical psychology and lived in Dasma.

Malu's father was a brilliant real estate investor. Even though they are rich now, they were not always that way. She was close to her family, the youngest and the favorite. She was headstrong and had a way with anyone. The poor lack interest in politics since they were hungry. She was radiant working with the poor of the land.

He wanted her to see the other side that progress did not have to do with class war and individual motivation could be as important as class stasis infrastructure in determining a person mobility. The protagonist think it is laziness that keep people from escaping poverty while Malu blames the after effects of colonialism for the poor's ills. They met a boy named Charlie who organized his neighborhood to clean it up and stopped school to pay for his father's medical bills and helped out in vegetable stands to feed his family but was still poor. She likes to help people that is the only thing that gives her peace of mind. She wanted to live life to the fullest and not waste her time in life.

Malu is a virgin and will only lose it to someone she loves not simply likes, like the protagonist. She wanted to marry for the right reason. It was deeds that mattered to her not words. The protagonist tells Malu that only education can get the Filipino's out of the mess they are in not guns nor demonstrations. The father wants Malu's idealism to be grounded and is happy that the protagonist is grounded. The father thinks that Malu is a "spirit" or healer. She does not want to be a conventional house wife and live in peace.

Her high school teacher awakened her to the world's injustice and felt guilty buying stuff that could feed a family in the slums for 3 months. B/c of the exposure to the poor, she no longer thought of herself which led her to meditation. She became a faith healer whom wanted revenge on the rich, a sort of liberation theology involving faith healing.

The government shot and killed Charlie for opposing the bulldozing of their squatter existence. The army forces killed her friends and the leader raped her which she allowed b/c she wanted to live. Despite her rape, the protagonist is so in love with her that he still wanted to marry her. So they "lived-in" together and decided to be married to each other with nothing but the name of being married. After awhile, they finally had sex which both of them enjoyed. He planned to domesticate her so she would never be in danger again. They permitted each other one night apart and if they should end their relationship she insisted that they should be friends.

At first, he slept around since she gave the green light for him to do that but later his love for her was too great and he gave up sleeping around but she kept going out on Sunday on her own. He wanted her pregnant so she would organize massive protest that have become dangerous. It turns out that she was indeed involved in revolutionary activities. She believed in her cause much more than to her "marriage" to the protagonist.

He became despondent with psychological issues that also effected his health. He pretended that she was there with him constantly. When she phoned him 4 yrs later, she was killed by the commandos that were after her.

Annie says

At first I was offended. A prostitute, a political prostitute and a revolutionary tease--stories told through the eyes of men who loved them. Was this the only representation of Filipino women the author could come up with? But halfway through Platinum I got over all that and began to appreciate the fabric of the time that wove the stories together as well as the perspective of someone deeply in love with a very strong person who is unable to reciprocate, while dealing with national changes and questioning where he fits in.

Ayban Gabriyel says

Narita. Ermi. Malu

Three stories of three women told each by their lover.

Cadena De Amor -4 Stars

Platinum - 4 Stars

Obsession - 3 Stars

Aloysius Lionel says

In Three Filipino Women (1999), three novellas in one book by National Artist for Literature F. Sionil Jose, we have seen three particular faces of strength. These “faces” do not refer to skeletal frame or skin enveloping a human being. These faces are geographies that stand as allegories for all Filipino women meant to endure life amidst its disappointments, so in the process and more so in the end, they could overlook, with tenacity and sense of victory, the pivotal role they have played in the making of a nation devoid of discrimination and oppression.

The Face of an Intellectual

In “Cadena de Amor”, Narita Reyes, known for her beauty and wit, is an epitome of a woman leader, who longs to break the chains that bind her – being a woman – in the world of politics. Where men in their starched barong and audacious loins reign, politics is important to women, for in this arena they have the chance to prove their worth and power as they come in equal footing with men in acquiring and embracing wealth and influence. But Narita, surprisingly, was portrayed as an intellectual willing to cheat and bribe to get what she desires, as what she had learned from her power-that-be father-in-law.

The use of Lopito, Narita’s late husband, in his suicide act, appears to be intentional to blend with the attempt to elevate Narita’s political inclinations and sexuality. Women, as implied by this story, do not only yearn to parallel with men’s intelligence and skills in politics but make everything possible so their craving for domination is quenched and served. However, the tape recordings of accounts of people around Narita intervening the course of narration prove that in woman’s poisonous passions, there still lie vulnerability and poverty of spirit. Given the history of her childhood, the rise and fall of Narita dazzles us with the truth that the past has never stopped haunting us. It lurks in the shadows, ever ready to strangle and pounce.

On the other hand, cadena de amor, which literally meant “chain of love”, contradicts the nature of the chain

muddling the female protagonist. It is not love that obstructs her from doing what she wants. Instead, love pacifies her in the immensity – I should say wickedness – of her strategies to get into power. It is love that, like the vines clambering over the brick walls of their old house, waits for her return. Love withers its leaves but does not fade in itself.

The Face of an Activist

The title of the story “Platinum” came from Malu’s term of endearment to the narrator who was then called as “Teng-ga” or lead. The platinum’s weight and luster reflect not on the male narrator’s personality but on Malu herself. The strength of will, as shown in her efforts to reach out to farmers and other marginalized sectors, does not wane until she breathed her last. The stereotype of a woman in a Filipino society – a woman expected to rear children and to submit to her significant other – melts away in Malu’s characterization. Add to her aura her endowed ability to see and communicate with supernatural entities.

“Did it ever occur to you that revolution is not just shooting and dying? It is also cooking, typing, keeping files, planning, teaching – and organizing?” Unlike Narita Reyes, Malu engrosses her life to take actions to help the poor and society’s outcasts alleviate their own sufferings, not on parading haute couture gowns upon speaking in commencement ceremonies. A covert member of a rich family, Malu steps out of her lair filled with chandeliers and telephone showers and fought for a cause, risking her life which was then surrounded by the horror of Martial Law.

“Flashes of fire spurted from the snouts of their guns and the bullets winked like fireflies as they hit the asphalt. Malu, my dear wife, crumpled and even when she was already dead, they still fired at her.” This brutal and gory ending scene stylized the horror women, up to this day, experienced: that in their dramatic defiance of senescent double standards, they are still shot not with guns but with recurring statements of ignorance and humiliation.

The Face of a Courtesan

I encountered Ermita Rojo in a longer version of her story in Ermita (1988). With this condensed equivalent “Obsession”, F. Sionil Jose has excellently laid the character of Ermi on the table for us to scrutinize and ponder on by centering on Rolando Cruz’s POV filled with obsession over the most celebrated prostitute. Roly admits his being masochist, the deliberate pleasure he feels whenever Ermi was accompanied by any influential and wealthy man. An ultimate form of obsession is personified through Roly’s voice: the willingness to be hurt and left behind for the joy of seeing the woman he loves sojourning her field of happiness.

Ermi’s beautiful face is not victimized at all. Rather, she finds an overwhelming amount of power in these “pursuits of the flesh”. She does not feel vindictive whenever Roly, who serves as an educated pimp, introduces her to businessmen and politicians who drool over tearing her apart. These hedonists are not cognizant of how Ermi compensates the privilege she gives them with a form of revenge to the society ravaged, and continuously grappled, by the war and the Japanese occupation.

The Face of a Narrator

The three individual narrators share the identity of being a pacifier of a woman in the surge of her success and significance. With their keen observations of the women’s bodies, language, and perceptions on society, culture, and politics, these three narrators help us see the truth in our country drenched in condemnation and subservience, and enable us to heed the call to partake in the societal discourse. The sword-pen of F. Sionil Jose, his repertoire deserving a much wider readership, sparks the flame. And this flame for sure waits to be

clustered around by moths willing to die for the sake of exuberance brought by the light.

Heyz Zelle says

The story of Plat brought me into tears.

The story of Narita awakened me to see the story behind politics.

And of course, the story of Ermita...I'll be biased because the book about her is one of my all-time favorite.

She made me reinvent myself in my own tiny way.

Hannah says

I followed his works in college.

There's a lot to learn from this big daddy of his words!

I'm still searching his library in Manila.

Ivy Catherine says

After reading Platinum... I was like, "what in the world happened?!"

Femi says

F. Sionil instructed me to skip the second novel of this book- Obsession, and just read his other book Ermita. Of course, as a good reader, I obliged.

Cadena de Amor - 3/5 stars. I hate Narita and her obsession with power.

Platinum - 5/5 stars. Oh, the things you do and ignore doing for love and love of country.
