
Book Reviews

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Isaac Donoso. Ed. 2008. **More Hispanic Than We Admit.**
Quezon City: VIBAL Publishing House, Inc., 410 pp.

Taken as a given, the book's title does just that – adopts its (un)compromising stance, much less adheres to its premises: the Filipinos – past, present and future generations – cannot, but acknowledge how the Spanish (and for that matter, American) influences/hegemony have helped shape their sensibility, better yet, their cultural construct.

To prove this thesis, some 12 Filipino scholars/4 Spanish professors/researchers expound on issues/topics that cut across disciplines – from anthropology, historiography, religion, philology to sociology, literacy criticism, political science, economics even film and art studies “in tracing the manifestations and paradoxes of hybridity by exploring the processes of cultural interaction and transformation”.

The interdisciplinarity of the texts makes the book a must reading, if only to soberly, objectively unravel the interfacing, or underpinnings of Filipino culture, as brought about by myriad of forces – socio-historical-political and religious – that must have conspired or undermined indigenous culture before the western imperialists had set foot on Philippine soil. But the insights the book offers appear teasingly intriguingly fascinating (or excoriating?) from both post-colonial and new historicism perspectives. Shedding more light than sweetness, to use an Arnoldian construct of culture, the book offers readers much discernment in revisiting and revisioning Philippine history.

Consider some of these insights, for instance:

- Manila would have remained the bastion of Islamic culture, had not Rajah Sulayman been subjugated by the Spaniards.
- Iberio-Asian relation must have flourished even before the Spanish conquest of the Philippines, as evidenced by Al-Andalus Arab presence in Southern Philippines, as posited by Isaac Donoso.
- The Pampangos, Bisayans and Tagalogs were conscripted to aid the Spaniards wage war against the Dutch colonizers
- With the flourishing of the galleon trade that plied between Acapulco, Mexico and Manila, the governance of the Philippines via Mexico ushered in the use of Mexican currency.
- The elite Filipino women whose parents were Spanish mestizos (*peninsulares*) were educated in *beaterios* – schools run by nuns – to adequately prepare them for a virtuous, Christian married life in the future.
- Rizal, motivated more by his passionate patriotic sense, rather than historical acumen, annotated Morga's *Sucesos*. He, however, despite this flaw, wanted to (re)write Philippine history from the Filipino perspective, not from the vantage point of Westerners.
- Corollary to this construct, the historical accounts recorded by the Spanish friars were distorted, if not colored by their religious fervor so that miracles and legends interspersed their renderings of events to indoctrinate or proselytize Christianity.
- In fairness to these Spanish preachers, however, their dictionaries recorded for posterity the old, classic vocabulary in the native languages, even if they failed to propagate the use of *español* among the populace.

- Interestingly, film and art studies- particularly the retablo – in churches ornate, baroque architectural designs, proliferated due to, by and large, to distinct Spanish influence in the 17th century.
- The self-representation, better yet, the Filipino pre-occupation for Malay self-hood rose to prominence in the late 19th century, as explored by Resil B. Mojares, a Cebuano scholar.
- For his part, Julian Go contends that the “Filipino elite political discourse marked an absence of meaning or a lack defined in relation to an ostensibly superior Western political modernity.”
- Notably, Fernando Zialcita of Ateneo de Manila University uses the Bourdieu’s phraseology – indigenous *habitus* - a principle which generates and organizes practices and representations which cause pressure of addressing the interest of a small group of Filipinos (the rich and powerful), as opposed to the welfare of the wider group – the town, municipality, even the whole nation.
- An Italian scholar, Andrea Gallo, holds that Hispanophilippine literature, though languishing or perhaps lost forever, may yet revive “as long as people cling to that (idea) literature as the true expression of the meaning of their experience.”
- Gloria Cano of Barcelona questions Schumacher’s assessment of Wenceslao Retana, the Spanish historian, as “duplicitious, insincere” to the effect that the latter “reconciled with his former (Filipino) adversaries, in fighting for a common cause, the perpetuation of Hispanic culture in the Philippines in the face of American colonization.”
- Political revolt (Tamblot’s and Dagohoy’s) went on along religious fervor in Bohol during the Spanish

regime which subsequent American colonizers could neither “de-hispanize nor de-catholicize”.

- In the era of globalization, says Pedro Aullan de Haro, Spanish professor at the University of Alicante, to synthesize “the double Asia/West weave”, the former must, first, theoretically “resolve the issue of its lag in comparative studies with respect to the West,” and second, on practicality, “resolve the issue of individual freedom.”
- As Ma. Dolores Elizalde, a Spanish scholar aptly puts it: “the Philippines can play her role as a bridge in connecting Asia, the Pacific, America and Europe to find her place internationally.”

Admittedly, the compilation of these critical essays stands to benefit both professors and students in the academe, moreover, quenches the Filipino thirst for deepening our perspectives, after revisiting the Filipino past to grasp the heavily nuanced national psyche.

Tom Butler Brown. Ed. 2008, **Fifty Spiritual Classics**. London, Boston: Nicholas Brealey Pub., 320 pp.

For ages and ages eternal (wo)men have tried to reconcile the conflict between religiosity and materiality, possibly in an attempt to strike a happier balance between professing faith with much greater conviction, but straddle as well in attaching themselves to possession of material things for mundane, physical comfort. Yet the happier few prefer spirituality to religiosity to (re)define their sensibility, to give meaning or purpose to their existence, even to preoccupy themselves with a soulful self- transcendence, instead of merely working out their faith (in an omnipotent Being) doing corporal acts of mercy with the significant others- the lowliest of the poor, the victims of injustice, “the

salt of the earth.” Seemingly, the former appears deeper, nobler; the latter more rigid, if not less spontaneous or constricting.

In these trying, commodified times when accumulating non-essentials (accidentals) is equated with influence, power, money, or fame, people tend to consider spirituality or religion, for that matter, as old-fashioned, irrelevant, and therefore, could be dispensed with, or so they think, to put it mildly. Butler, now considered as “an expert on the personal development literature” has come up with a listing of some 50 spiritual books that would heighten our self-discovery so as to enrich our interior lives. Rightfully, he refers to them as classics (in the Greek construct of universality, balance, order, harmony, endurance or St. Beuve’s notion of nobility, grandiousness of thought, timelessness or contemporaneity).

The writers represented in the book are either secular or spiritual thinkers – from Eastern and Western thought, regardless of creed: Muhammad Asad (*The Road to Mecca*, 1954), Gary Zukav (*The Seat of the Soul: An Inspiring Vision of Humanity’s Spiritual Destiny*, 1990), Neals Walsch (*Conversation with God*, 1998) to St. Augustine (*Confession*, 400 A.D.), Epictetus (Euchiridion, 1st century), even to Mother Teresa (*A Simple Path*, 1994). Each spiritual classic is presented first with the author’s *vita*, followed by salient points each individual title features, and ends with a final commentary. For intertextuality, Butler lists the related titles for his chosen representative works.

If only to whet your appetite to read them, consider these selected readings for the equanimity of the soul by matching the titles in Column A with their corresponding authors in column B. Write only the letters for your answers.

Column A	Column B
_____ 1. <i>Memories, Dreams, Reflections</i> (1955)	a. Richard Bach
_____ 2. <i>The Alchemy of Happiness</i> (1097)	b. Herman Hesse
_____ 3. <i>The Prophet</i> (1923)	c. Ram Dass
_____ 4. <i>Jonathan Livingston Seagull</i> (1970)	d. Carl Gustav Jung
_____ 5. <i>The Tao of Physics</i> (1976)	e. Rick Warren
_____ 6. <i>Siddhartha</i> (1922)	f. Ghazzali
_____ 7. <i>Be Here Now</i> (1971)	g. Khalil Gibran
_____ 8. <i>A Purpose-Driven Life</i> (2002)	h. Emanuel Swedenborg
_____ 9. <i>Zen and the Art of Motorcycle Maintenance</i> (1974)	i. Fritjof Capra
_____ 10. <i>Heaven and Hell</i> (1758)	j. Teresa of Avila
_____ 11. <i>Cutting Through Spiritual Materialism</i> (1973)	k. Richard Maurice Bucke
_____ 12. <i>Autobiography of a Yogi</i> (1946)	l. William James
_____ 13. <i>The Varieties of Religious Experience</i> (1989)	m. Yogahanda
_____ 14. <i>The Way of the Peaceful Warrior</i> (1989)	n. Dan Millman
_____ 15. <i>Cosmic Consciousness</i> (1901)	o. Robert M. Pirsig
_____ 16. <i>Interior Castle</i> (1570)	p. Chogyon Trungpa

Gary Marcus. 2008. **Kluge**. Boston, New York. Houghton Mifflin Co., 211 pp.

The word **Kluge** (n. slang), “a clumsy-yet effective at times-or inelegant solution to a problem,” rhymes with *huge*. It is equally enormous in its effect, almost analogous or tending to committing or

resulting in a *goof*, a *blunder*, *boo-boo*, a *gaffe*, *lapse in judgment*, an *oversight*, a *howler*, a *slip*.

Marcus, professor of psychology at New York University, views human nature or the human mind for that matter, haphazardly or bizarrely constructed. He thus presents his ideas about Kluge with much apprehension, but not with jaundiced eyes, so to speak. At times, his objectivity is given at man's and woman's expense all done for arriving at the "inconvenient", telling truth. Yet he succeeds in making his readers reconsider (re) weighing the nature of **homo erectus**—egotistical, more emotional than rational, addictive, susceptible to judging people by appearances, wasteful, though resourceful, heuristic, negative towards the minority group. Virtually the list is endless, but his observations, comments, insinuations are backed up by more than 200 references, studies, research, scientific papers, articles.

To clarify his points, he analyzes and explicates such pivotal, teasing concepts as evolution, memory, belief, making choices, implications of the pleasure principle, tendency to depression. He claims, for instance, that our ancestral reflexive system is "only partly responsive to the over all goals of the organism (such as finding food and predators in a specific location)" in contrast to our deliberative reasoning "that helps us think outside the box." To him, furthermore, memory becomes "labile", that is, subject to change, dodgy, once assessed, reconstructed, repressed, disappointed, or its opposite-contextualized, triggered other related memories, even interfered.

More Kluges lie in language where ambiguities (cf. Empson's seven types of ambiguity) abound, quantifiers exist, recursion (building larger structures out of smaller structures) heightens (e.g. How do you know that you know what you know?), snap judgment, arbitrary associates, tongue-twisters, inconsistencies thrive.

On pleasure, with tongue-in-cheek rebuttal, Marcus contends that "we do everything in our power to make ourselves happy and comfortable with the world, but we stand perfectly ready to lie to

ourselves if the truth doesn't cooperate." After all, he adds, "pleasure giveth, and pleasure taketh away."

On making choices, he avers that the brain mechanisms that govern choices might be as Kluge as those that govern memory and belief. Ironically, we tend to believe, goes on Marcus, in just about anything due to "contamination of belief" – on account of peripheral and/or irrelevant information; confirmation bias, despite discomfoting evidence; or motivated reasoning (e.g. smoking is better than excessive drinking or eating.)

Finally, Marcus comes up with 13 handy suggestions for us to think more deliberately to mitigate our Kluge-y inclinations, all based on *a posteriori*:

- Whenever possible, consider alternative hypothesis.
- Reframe the question to counter biases.
- Always remember that correlation does not entail causation.
- Never forget the sample size in drawing conclusions.
- Anticipate (your own) impulsivity and pre-commit.
- Don't just make goals. Make contingency plans.
- Whenever possible, don't make important decisions when you are tired or have other things on your mind.
- Always weigh benefits against "opportunity costs".
- Imagine that your decision may be spot-checked.
- Distance yourself; irrationality often dissipates with time and complex decisions work best if given time to steep.
- Beware the vivid, the personal, and the anecdotal.
- Pick your spots- reserve decision making for the choices that matter most; and
- Try to be rational.

Key to Answers

1.d 2.f 3.g 4.a 5.i 6.b 7.c 8.e 9.o 10.h 11.p 12.m 13.l 14.n 15.k 16. j