

Simoun” at ipamahagi ito sa mga tunay na nangangailangan—ang mga Pilipinong sumama sa pakikipaglaban para sa bayan at sa kanilang mga naulila.

Bagaman may tila “pilit” o minadali ng mga tagpo gaya na lamang ng naging pagwawakas nito, higit pa ring nangingibabaw ang mga positibong katangian ng akda. Mapapansin ang husay at bisa ng paggamit ng wika ni Pineda. Mula sa tila matulain at nakapagpapalipad ng guniguning mga pahayag—“pakikipagsugal sa kamatayan” (135); “nagsisilbing kalasag sa puso ng dalaga” (142)—matagumpay ring naipakita sa pamamagitan ng mga diyalogo ng mga tauhan na sila ay kapani-paniwalang produkto ng isang partikular na panahon o sitwasyon: “Hina-*hunting* daw tayo ng *Big & Gang*, tsip. Tetepokin daw tayo sa sandaling tayo’y matagpuan ng pangkat na iyon?”(133). Idagdag pa ang mala-salawikaing pahayag sa bawat pagsisimula ng kabanata na tila pagbubuod na sa kabuuang nilalaman nito. Kahanga-hanga rin ang disiplina at ingat ni Pineda sa paglilipat-lipat ng pananaw o punto de bista na nakatulong upang hindi kainipan ang bawat tagpo.

Dahil sa mga nabanggit, masasabing mahalagang hakbang para sa Panitikang Filipino ang paglilimbag ng nobelang ito ni Pineda. Malaking tulong sa mga kabataang mag-aaral o mambabasa ang introduksyong binuo ni Reyes kung saan nabanggit din niya ang halaga ng nobela sa kasalukuyang panahon, hindi lamang sa panitikan kundi sa kultura at lipunan (xxiii). Idagdag pa ang *gabay sa pag-aaral* na matatagpuan sa huling bahagi ng aklat na higit na magpapalawig sa pag-unawa o maging sa talakayan kung pagpapasyahan itong gamiting bahagi ng leksyon sa silid-aralan.

Claudette M. Ulit  
Kagawaran ng Filipino  
Ateneo de Manila University  
culit@ateneo.edu

Rosario Cruz-Lucero. *La India, or the Island of the Disappeared*. Quezon City: University of the Philippines Press, 2012. 156 pages.

The sense of searching for something missing—an explanation, a background, or a person, whether in history or myth—is strong in this collection of stories. Familiar tales, legends, and historical scenes are re-woven to expose the threads that may have been forgotten, ignored, or rarely touched; hence, the book is aptly titled *La India, or Island of the Disappeared*.

The stories are interrelated and are set in the island of Negros. All contribute meanings to the “map” of Negros, which Diego Lope Povedano allegedly once drew

and which author Rosario Cruz-Lucero now is re-drawing in her book. In following the book's "map," one journeys through stories situated in different periods in the history of Negros, starting with her contemplation of a myth or a legend set in pre-colonial Philippines and continuing to the more familiar realities of the present.

"Conundrums" puts us in the mood for a fairy tale, as it starts with the magical "once upon a time, five stars fell into a lake by a village" and then jolts us into an awareness of something historically amiss if we are made to believe that stars, sampaguitas, and swans can be one and the same. This prologue serves as a springboard for the subsequent stories. It introduces us to the mapmaker Povedano and to the settings of Sitio Guinlaharan and Pueblo Adelinte. As the setting becomes clearer, with the map of Negros more and more vividly drawn and time concurrently framed, we begin to get glimpses of characters who will play significant roles in the succeeding stories.

"Inventing Datu Calantiao and His Code" is Lucero's act of "re-claiming" Datu Kalantiaw for the Negrenses. This Datu and his Code, once revered in historical textbooks, have for decades been taken as a mere hoax, hence deleted from our national consciousness. Lucero, however, is not concerned with the debate regarding the authenticity of the code, but is interested in the influences leading to the birthing of that code. The story ends with a twist, which must not be revealed here. But is the ending really a surprise, the reader will ask, or is it rather what the story is all about, after all?

In this story, as in this whole book, time not only goes forward and backward but also loops in dizzying spirals and repetitious circles. Thus does Lucero question the historian's process of transferring the past to the present, always trying to fill gaps but never to everyone's satisfaction. In Lucero, what is obscured, or even erased, underneath hard evidence is brought to the surface, and what may perhaps be waiting in the future is—at times comically—revealed in the present.

Sharing certain characters, the stories "San Roque's Miracle," "The Razing of Guinlaharan," and "White Lady in the Forest," explore faith, pride, politics, and economics. "San Roque's Miracle" dramatizes the conflict between ancient and colonial beliefs. San Roque's beardless sculpture reminds the indios of their epic hero Labaw Donggon; they can only comprehend the "miracle" of San Roque within the logic of their own indigenous beliefs. Padre Duertas, on the other hand, clings to his belief in a "just and jealous God," who, "with His terrible swift sword," will "strike down" the iniquity of this blasphemous icon pretending to be San Roque (22). Meanwhile, Susana the india, holds on to her faith that whenever San Roque's thigh bleeds, her husband Amador's heart is "bleeding for her and their son" (22).

In "The Razing of Guinlaharan," Padre Duertas shouts from his pulpit that the smallpox epidemic is punishment for the recalcitrance of the indios. Two skirts

become prominent in this story. There is “Our Lady’s skirt,” the hem of which Susana’s son Juan, and her fellow weaver Peling’s son Pedro, lift. Pedro’s death from the first epidemic is said to be a punishment for the sacrilege. The second is Don Lucio’s “many-colored *malong*” (31), woven by his wife. Knowing that the tributes he has collected fall short of the quota, Don Lucio expects the *alferez*’s whip. But his *malong* hides a knife with which he extracts justice.

Three types of faith are shown in “White Lady in the Forest,” intertwining with the three types of people populating the margins: the pagans who do not abandon their ancient faith, the baptized indios struggling between two faiths, and the fugitives longing to regain their former privileged positions in the village. With the apparition of the Virgin Mary to three children—a datu’s daughter Sina, Susana’s son Juan, and Peling’s daughter Maya—the political and economic planes are reflected, over and above the spiritual dynamics of the milieu.

The centerpiece of this collection is “The Courtship of Estrella.” Being the only female hacendero on the island, and an india at that, Estrella is constrained to submit to the conventions of the time, even as she manipulates events so that the love between her and her Juan will prevail. The woman is at the forefront, symbolizing the land that nurtures and protects. And there is an endearing subplot involving a monkey and a crocodile.

“Papa’s Field,” “A Living Will,” and “A Stain of Blackberries” are stories about the human need to confront past hurts. In “Papa’s Field,” a woman comes to terms with her past pains in the echo of her dead father’s gentle reminder: “The door opens from the inside” (127). In “A Living Will,” Nurse Garcia tries to reunite her octogenarian ward Choleng with her childhood sweetheart Ernesto. “A Stain of Blackberries” takes us back to a chapter in Dolores’s childhood, where she befriends and betrays an Aeta girl.

Mining the many implications of “disappeared,” *La India* is a book thick with insights. Each story seemingly springs from between two temporal points and then fluidly runs through the island’s history, while those who have disappeared in between these distance-points are now found in the author’s creative imagination.

Layeta Bucoy  
 Humanities Department  
 University of the Philippines Los Baños  
 layeta123@yahoo.com