



## Manila Noir

*Jessica Hagedorn (Editor) , Lourd Ernest H. de Veyra , Sabina Murray , Angelo R. Lacuesta , Budjette Tan , Kajo Baldisimo (Illustrator) , F.H. Batacan , José Y. Dalisay Jr. , more... R. Zamora Linmark , Gina Apostol , Marianne Villanueva , Eric Gamalinda , Jonas Vitman , Lysley Tenorio , Rosario Cruz-Lucero ...less*

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"While certain cities in past Akashic volumes might appear to lack an obvious noir element, Manila (like Mexico City, which shares many of the same problems) practically defines it, as shown by the 14 selections in this excellent anthology. As Hagedorn points out in her insightful introduction, Manila is a city burdened with a violent and painful past, with a long heritage of foreign occupation. The specters of WWII (during which the city suffered from U.S. saturation bombing), and the oppressive 20-year reign of dictator Ferdinand Marcos live on in recent memory. The Filipino take on noir includes a liberal dose of the gothic and supernatural, with disappearance and loss being constants."

--*Publishers Weekly* (starred review)

"This Southeast sampler is unique, possessing an overall gritty tone. Each slice of supernatural splendor pulls the reader in with their nontraditional heroes...Ultimately, readers get a strong taste of the real Manila and all her dark secrets, wanting more of while being slightly afraid of what she might do next. Manila is the perfect place for noir scenes to occur, and it is easy to get sucked into its deadly nightshade of doom."

--*Criminal Class Press*

Brand-new stories by: Lourd De Veyra, Gina Apostol, Budjette Tan and Kajo Baldisimo, F.H. Batacan, Jose Dalisay Jr., Eric Gamalinda, Jessica Hagedorn, Angelo Lacuesta, R. Zamora Linmark, Rosario Cruz-Lucero, Sabina Murray, Jonas Vitman, Marianne Villanueva, and Lysley Tenorio.

Manila provides the ideal, torrid setting for an Akashic Noir series volume. It's where the rich rub shoulders with the poor, where five-star hotels coexist with informal settlements, where religious zeal coexists with superstition, and where politics is often synonymous with celebrity and corruption.

From the Introduction by Jessica Hagedorn:

Manila is not for the faint of heart. Built on water and reclaimed land, it's an intense, congested, teeming megalopolis, the vital core of an urban network of sixteen cities and one municipality collectively known as Metro Manila. Population: over ten million and growing by the minute. Climate: tropical. Which means hot, humid, prone to torrential monsoon rains of biblical proportions.

I think of Manila as the ultimate femme fatale. Complicated and mysterious, with a tainted, painful past. She's been invaded, plundered, raped, and pillaged, colonized for four hundred years by Spain and fifty years by the US, bombed and pretty much decimated by Japanese and American forces during an epic, month-long battle in 1945.

Yet somehow, and with no thanks to the corrupt politicians, the crime syndicates, and the indifferent rich

who rule the roost, Manila bounces back. The people's ability to endure, adapt, and forgive never ceases to amaze, whether it's about rebuilding from the latest round of catastrophic flooding, or rebuilding from the ashes of a horrific world war, or the ashes of the brutal, twenty-year dictatorship of Ferdinand Marcos . . .

Many years have passed since the end of the Marcos dictatorship. People are free to write and say what they want, yet nothing is different. The poor are still poor, the rich are still rich, and overseas workers toil in faraway places like Saudi Arabia, Israel, Germany, and Finland. Glaring inequities are a source of dark humor to many Filipinos, but really—just another day in the life . . .

Writers from the Americas and Europe are known for a certain style of noir fiction, but the rest of the world approaches the crime story from a culturally unique perspective. In *Manila Noir* we find that the genre is flexible enough to incorporate flamboyant emotion and the supernatural, along with the usual elements noir fans have come to expect: moody atmospherics, terse dialogue, sudden violence, mordant humor, a fatalist vision.

## Manila Noir Details

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## From Reader Review Manila Noir for online ebook

### Sam Sattler says

Manila Noir is my fourth experience with the intriguing noir short story series published by Akashic Books (following Boston Noir, Mexico City Noir, and Long Island Noir), a series now numbering something like fifty-six titles. Much like the first three collections I read, Manila Noir is a bit of a mixed bag. When it is good it is very, very good. The good news is that when it is "bad," the stories only sink to the level of mediocrity, not to awfulness.

The fourteen stories in the collection were written (in English) by writers, several of which now live in the United States, who were born in the Philippines. It also includes an excellent introduction to set the mood for what is to follow, one that clearly defines the elements of Manila-style noir that give the Filipino version of the genre a special edge. Also from the introduction, I particularly like editor Jessica Hagedorn's list of what she calls "the noir essentials:"

"...alienated and desperate characters, terse dialogue, sudden violence, betrayals left and right. And of course, there's plenty of mordant humor. And of course, there are no happy endings."

Three of the short stories particularly stand out in my memory. The first of these, by Rosario Cruz-Lucero, is an atmospheric gem entitled "A Human Right" that involves Manila death squads, childhood friends, and family loyalty that will stay with me for a long time because it considers so many questions in only seventeen pages. This is the stuff of the best coming-of-age novels.

"Comforter of the Afflicted," by F.H. Batacan (a woman who worked for Philippine intelligence for several years) is the tragic story of a woman who died, almost anonymously, in the service of others. I am particularly taken with the story's central character, an elderly priest who lends his investigative skills to an overburdened police department that depends greatly on Father Saenz's help. I believe that this priest is one of two Jesuits featured in the author's 2002 novel, *Smaller and Smaller Circles*, a book I am now looking to add to my To-Be-Read stack.

The third story I want to mention is Sabina Murry's (yes, if you are wondering, the collection does include stories by male authors) "Broken Glass." This is the story of a little girl who, while visiting her rich aunt, makes a grisly discovery in the walled home's lush garden. It is a highly atmospheric story that explores the relationship between Manila's rich and those who depend on them for their own survival. It is also a coming-of-age story of sorts in which a bright little girl learns a lot about the world she lives in.

**Bottom Line:** This is a worthy addition to a thriving series that seems to have no end (the publisher already has announced an additional fifteen titles in the works). I will, I hope, be reading more of them. If noir-styled fiction is to your liking, this just might be the series you were hoping to find.

Rated at: 3.5

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### Allie says

3.5. The overall feel is definitely noir, gritty and realistic, definitely in a good way, but some of the stories

don't feel as genuine. They're still quite good, don't get me wrong, but it kind of lacks a certain familiarity. Maybe because the authors have not spent as much time in Manila as the others, given that a whole bunch of them don't actually live in Metro Manila anymore, but who knows. Some stories stand out, and, again, while the others don't seem to be familiar about Manila's peculiarities(anymore, perhaps), they're still pretty solid on their own, but as a collection, I guess it's not as cohesive as it could be.

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### **Ian Cruz says**

Metro Manila is a city that never sleeps. She (as Hagedorn fondly calls this city) is a parent to millions of Filipinos striving to survive their daily ordeals. By day, she is productive at keeping her children at bay and ever-watching them pursue their daily professions, whether it be a "tambay sa kalye", a balut vendor or a senator of the government. By night, she is a witness to other outrageous acts that would seem to be beyond comprehension done by many of her sons and daughters. Hence, it can be said that she has, like many of the cities' of the world, an affinity for the "Noir".

Noir is the French word for "black". In many movies or T.V. shows, Noir contains detectives, thieves, murderers, sultry mistresses, prostitutes, gangsters and basically normal people unleashing their pent-up dark sides. The setting is mysterious, if not sinister. There will often be a fog or a mist that clouds the distance as a lone stranger walks under the dimming light of a street lamp or a congruence of sorts where gambling and prostitution are both rampant. Literature, however, takes the concept of Noir in a whole new level. If not, into another reality.

The novel "Manila Noir", edited by Jessica Hagedorn and given life by fourteen literary masters--she one of them--is a treat for the Filipino bibliophiles. It is rare for one to encounter a work of fiction that sticks to the harsh realities of life experienced by many of us, the struggling Pinoys in the cover of night. Of course, Filipino Literature, for the most part nowadays, deals with social issues. However, the way by which various essayists or poets or novelists do this type of analysis falls more on the critical level, never truly giving the reader a concrete idea of what they are experiencing. Showcasing the genius of people like Lourd de Veyra, Eric Gamalinda. F.H. Batacan and R. Zamora Linmark, the book touches every type of malady and imperfections of the Filipinos at a more personal level. One would see how finely tuned the details for every scene shown and how intricate and fragile every presented character seems to become at the turn of every page.

The book itself is quite short. "Adequate" as most would judge it. Each story would span at an average of 10 to 25 pages. If one has read the collection of Eros S. Atalia's dagli (stories unique to the Filipinos that tells of short scenes viewed in everyday life) in his book entitled "Wag Lang 'Di Makaraos", one gets to acknowledge the feeling of sudden contemplation over simple tragedies and melodrama of every day living similarly unique to "Manila Noir". True. Crime and corruption have been a part of the Filipino culture. Ironically, one may find it impossible to live without any one of them hovering over as they eat pan de sal and watch the news of various murders on T.V. In short, the Filipinos have become numb to these various atrocities. Numb in the sense that their minds have conditioned themselves to think that this is a normal way of life.

"Manila Noir's" objectives are not to stir one into action to do something about these dire situations. God forbid, we, Manilenos, have had enough of that. Rather, it shows the products or the consequences of our actions in the past and how these have shaped the future we now call the present. Through the showcasing of fictitious events in Manila, Filipino readers are exposed to the other side of their motherland, her being the

ultimate femme fatale. It also inculcates the aesthetic value with the unique Pinoy socialist view in a way that makes one appreciate and love the flawed beauty of this bustling and lively city many call their home.

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## Lynai says

My cravings for noir were satisfied. More thoughts soon.

\*\*\*UPDATE\*\*\*

Also posted in It's A Wonderful Bookworld.

Until I learned about this book, which was sometime early last year, I wasn't aware that what I love reading – what had actually got me hooked to reading – may be aptly called *noir*. French for “black”, noir in fiction would refer to those stories which are bleak and dark, often about crime, with sinister and cynical characters. Perfectly my cup of tea.

I grew up in a place located several miles (which usually requires air travel) from Manila. The first time I ever set foot in my country's capital city was when I was 25 years old, and until then, or even until now, what I know about Manila consists of what I usually see on TV and read in the news – a favorite setting for both petty and serious crimes. Why Akashic Books, the publisher of the noir series, chose Manila as the setting for one of its numerous noir anthologies is pretty much understandable.

All the fifteen stories in *Manila Noir* are delightful reading, although the first couple of stories didn't immediately catch my interest. It was fascinating to read stories by Filipino authors, some unheard of, but of great writing nonetheless. My patriotic heart was full to bursting, and it didn't matter that the stories I was reading weren't exactly uplifting.

Unlike other anthologies that I've read where I only pick my top 3 or 5 favorite stories, with *Manila Noir*, I tried to rate each of the stories, and here are my ratings and a short line (or two) about how I felt about them:

*Aviary* – 3 stars. This is a story surrounding Glorietta Mall, one of my favorite malls while I was staying in Makati. Not too “noir” for my taste, but the ending was full of meanings.

*A Human Right* – 3 stars. This one is set on Intramuros, a place I have long wanted to visit. I loved the romance angle.

*Satan Has Already Bought You* – 4 stars. Written by Lourd De Veyra who is known as a ruggedly intellectual pop icon, this one of my favourites in the collection. There's a hint of cynicism and angst in the dialogues between the main characters, and of course that ending.

*Broken Glass* – 4 stars. This one is very socially apt. I can't help imagining the scenes as a TV show/telenovela.

*After Midnight* – 3 stars. This one's a bit hazy for me. I have to re-read it now to get a feel of the story but I can't still fully comprehend it. But I liked the flashback scenes of how the narrator met the girl and how they ended up where they were after midnight.

*Trese: Thirteen Stations* – 3 stars. Now this. I've heard a lot about Trese before but did not actually try to read it because I am not a big comic fan (I tend to get distracted by the words so I just don't focus at the drawings, which actually defeats the purpose of comics, right? Right.) But after reading this, I decided to read at least the first Trese book.

*Comforter of the Afflicted* – 4 stars. Written by the same author who wrote *Smaller and Smaller Circles* (which I have yet to read), I was actually surprised to learn that F.H. Batacan is a “she”. This is one good piece of crime fiction and written by a woman at that, when male authors dominate the crime story genre. My second favorite story in the book.

*The Professor's Wife* – 4 stars. Another favorite, this is the story where I felt closer to the (dead) character. History major? Yes.

*Cariño Brutal* – 3 stars. Really sleazy, this one. A story fit for a TV show, although the ending was a bit abrupt.

*The Unintended* – 3 stars. This is one story that I still cannot fully comprehend. It's about Ali Mall, Muhammad Ali, and Leyte, I felt lost while reading it. Maybe I should do more research on the Thrilla in Manila.

*Old Money* – 4 stars. I've long wanted to read Jessica Hagedorn's *Dogeaters*, but I'm glad to have a taste of her writing in this collection. I loved her style and the social relevance of the story.

*Desire* – 3 stars. This is a sad story of a man who was broken-hearted and the things he did to forget his misery, even to the point of wasting away his dreams.

*Darling You Can Count On Me* – 4 stars. If I were to pick a top favorite, this would be it. I loved the “chop-chop lady” concept and the complexities that surround the crime. I loved the different versions of the story told by the suspects and how the story wrapped up in the end.

*Norma From Norman*. 4 stars. This is the story that stayed long with me, maybe because this is the last in the collection. I loved the strength and resilience of the main character and how he/she was changed by the circumstances.

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All in all, ***Manila Noir*** is one compelling read. I enjoyed most of the stories, and they were just the perfect break I needed after reading several literary books. I missed reading stories like this, and what's more, they really felt so close to home. I am one proud Filipino.

### **Nikka Calindas says**

I really don't like sad or graphic endings, after all, the real life is already full of those. It is too much to ask of anybody to enjoy those kind of endings creeping up on your fiction too. Of course, of those stories, 'Manila Noir' is an exception.

True to its nature, 'Manila Noir' tells gripping, horrific tales set on the dark streets of Metro Manila. From

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simple vandalism of a posh mall in Makati down to the Catholic gay butcher, each story holds you and takes you unwillingly on a macabre ride until the last page.

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### **Nenette says**

I rated each story and the average came up to 2.5, and I am rounding it down to 2.

I thought I'd try this genre but it's not just for me. Too dark, too cynical, too noir for my taste.

Some of the stories I liked: Aviary; The Professor's Wife; Norma From Norman; Comforter of the Afflicted - to this one I gave 5 perfect stars.

These are the ones I totally went "bleh!!!" - After Midnight; Cariño Brutal; Trese; Darling, You Can Count On Me; and the story I least liked: The Unintended. The author has got a flair for words, lots of it actually, but it did not translate to a good story. I got totally lost. For a while, I wanted it to end already, and when it did, it was so abrupt it was like I came out of a trance without having a recollection of what happened.

One thing for sure, I'm not picking up noir again.

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### **Maria Ella says**

Perfect for the Buwan ng Wika. Perfect feel of the pause, being at standstill, only hearing the hums of the feet, the buses, trains and of speeding life - escaping from the harsh realities of it.

What a goodread.

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### **Gena Myrtle says**

Favorites:

1. Darling, You Can Count on Me
2. Trese: Thirteen Stations
3. Aviary
4. Norma from Norman
5. After Midnight

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### **Judie says**

Simply no place like Manila, as the song goes. I love this collection of stories.

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### **Ellie says**

I won Manila Noir from LibraryThing's Early Reviewer series. I was particularly wanting this book because a) I'm a big fan of the editor, Jessica Hagedorn and b) I've enjoyed some of the other "\_\_\_\_\_ Noir" series of Akashic books. I have already read and enjoyed (inconsistent quality notwithstanding) Bronx Noir, Long Island Noir, and Brooklyn Noir—yes, I live in the area [the Bronx]. I love noir as a genre and I love reading place-centered stories. I have never been to the Philippines but know many people from there and so was very interested in the place.

The book was quite satisfying in its place descriptions. By the end, I definitely felt like I knew a little bit about the country, at least certain parts (and certain kinds of people). I found the stories more consistently readable than is sometimes the case, and several were outstanding. I found the story told in graphic form especially entertaining, despite the fact that is not my preferred style. The stories are written in English by authors born (although not necessarily living) in the Philippines.

There are 14 stories and a very satisfying introduction by Hagedorn (an exceptionally talented and skilled writer). True to her definition of noir, there are "no happy endings" but many satisfying ones.

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### **Rise says**

My thoughts on this book here.

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### **Ivy Catherine says**

This book has a nice collection of stories from various Filipino authors. Manila Noir showcases both the supernatural and the darkest side of the Philippines. If you like Stephen King's short stories, you'll definitely love this one too.

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### **Mimi says**

There were two ways in which this book disappointed me: first, in being a book about Manila, and second, in being noir. Setting seems largely inconsequential in a lot of these stories, often taking a backseat to other aspects of narration. This is forgivable of course, however, when the title itself advertises a city, one would expect that space and place would be much more prominent than it is here. The differentiation between the different cities in the stories just isn't pronounced enough to warrant the subheadings. Many of the stories could very well have been set anywhere else because Manila isn't a big feature in them.

As a noir, it just doesn't have the bite I hoped it would have. There are no charming Marlowes to provide the reader with snappy one-liners. Oddly enough, it doesn't deliver on the seedy locations either. As a former

long-time resident of Metro Manila, I know how absolutely sordid some of these places are ye it seems these stories are oddly sanitary. Manila is a perfect setting for noir--an oppressive urban landscape, corrupt politics, brutes, criminals, tricksters...all are present in Manila and yet are conspicuously absent from a good portion of the book. Where is the grit?

Many of the authors are Filipino-Americans, some of whom have been living away from the Philippines for quite some time now and it shows. The first story set in a mall especially reeks of this. They just seem either out of touch with the setting (and its occupants) that they've been given to work with, or are fondly nostalgic of it. My personal tastes lean toward noir that butchers its city as well as its murder victims. Manila Noir did some butchering, indeed. Just not the kind it should have.

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## **AennA says**

*"I like to think of Manila as a woman of mystery, the ultimate femme fatale, sexy, complicated, and tainted by a dark and painful past. She's not to be trusted." – Jessica Hagedorn*

Manila – I guess the selection of the focal place for the anthology suits it best. Manila, no matter how lively it appears has its dark side, too.

Manila Noir has the right amount of crime, violence and sinister enough to bring life to Manila's dark facade. An anthology of 14 short stories by different Filipino authors, written in English, the book offers the readers stories sited in different areas in Metro Manila, giving us a glimpse of the horrid and the dubious side of the city. It speaks of the obvious that in most places, but not only in Manila, there are untold stories of hatred, greed, violence, and, at the same time, complacency on what's happening around us. These stories really fits the noir genre.

At first, the stories did not appeal to me much, for a reason that I think it's too close to home that there's no need to write about it, but as I read each story, I appreciate it more. For, I see the transparency, the attempt not to conceal reality and it does speak from a Filipino heart – though not necessarily greedy and in such menace.

Subdivided into three parts – Us Against Them, Black Pearl of the Orient, and They Live By Night – Jessica Hagedorn gave a very fitting contradictory to the expected glossy surface of the city, and the other unhidden side of it. Each author, in their short stories, has their own style. Every story came out fresh and each brings a new flavor to the reading senses.

Let me share a line or two about the 14 stories in the book.

### *1. Aviary by Lysley Tenorio, Greenbelt*

A story about discrimination between the poor and the rich. Situated in Greenbelt mall, this talks about the rumors that went viral online regarding Greenbelt management's assumed decision not to allow "poor" people enter their establishment. The rumor however was eventually denied and was considered a faux one but this became a good topic in Tenorio's story, bringing the right emotion and disturbing character to the readers.

### *2. A Human Right by Rosario Cruz-Lucero, Intramuros*

A story of Isabel and her meeting with the alleged killer of her father. The killer is said to be a member of

Davao Death Squad. Here's a story of an effort to seek redemption and revenge at the same time.

*3. Satan Has Already Bought You by Lourd De Veyra, Project 2 Quezon City*

If you have read De Veyra's Super Panalo Sounds, you'll notice the similarity of the theme. I've read the aforementioned title, so it's easier for me to visualize the mood of the setting. But no, it's not a prerequisite to read SPS, they are not interconnected stories anyway – but it is as edgy as the other.

*4. Broken Glass by Sabina Murray, New Manila*

A glimpse at the world of the upper class strata, and how some people can just shrug off the news of someone's death, and apparently, concealing it at the same time.

*5. After Midnight by Angelo R. Lacuesta, J.P. Rizal*

The story appears to be a mundane scenario that happens on any of the roads of Manila. This tells us the story behind a seemingly simple narrative of a guy on his way home.

*6. Trese : Thirteen Stations by Budjette Tan & Kajo Baldisimo, EDSA*

The only story in the compilation rendered in graphic comics format. As other stories in the anthology is focused on one location, the duo – Budjette and Kajo – took advantage of MRT's different stations along EDSA to cover a wider range of subject venue, thus giving the readers more story points to appreciate. This is an offshoot of the two's successfully published "Trese", a paranormal investigative themed comics.

*7. Comforter of the Afflicted by F.H. Batacan, Lagro*

The main character of the story didn't need much of an introduction for me, since Father Augusto Saenz made a comeback from Batacan's first novel, Smaller and Smaller Circles. I realized it's easier to appreciate stories with recurring characters from another story.

*8. The Professor's Wife by Jose Dalisay, Diliman*

I don't know exactly how to describe what I felt after reading this story. I just think this is wicked and a bit too tragic. Well-written, indeed.

*9. Cariño Brutal by R. Zamora Linmark, Tondo*

What I like best in this story is the characterization, and the story flow is just so easy to follow. Isn't too complicated in terms of its narrative, but it didn't fail to disturb me.

*10. The Unintended by Gina Apostol, AliMall, Cubao*

Admittedly, amongst all the stories, this one comes unclear to me in terms of the character's interconnection. I think I miss something with the story when I read it. The emotions it's trying to give me, is a blur.

*11. Old Money by Jessica Hagedorn, ForbesPark*

Uhm. This brings a 90's feel for me. The way I visualize the story as I read it keeps bringing me some nostalgia. I don't know why. Here's about greed and vengeance, and I think this one is a bit high on emotions.

*12. Desire by Marianne Villanueva, Ermita*

Desire. Why does the word feels like it has something to do with anything carnal? Villanueva tells us a story of how a desire can make us do worldly things.

*13. Darling, You Can Count on Me by Eric Gamalinda, Santa Cruz*

I must say I am relieved I am no longer hearing any news about incidents of chop chop ladies, as this story tells us a story of Lucila Lalu, and the tracking of who killed her and who did chop her body in parts.

#### 14. *Norma from Norman* by Jonas Vitman, *Chinatown*

Violence begets violence. Witness the unexpected metamorphosis, not just physically, of Charmaine as she experience cruelty from the people around her, which eventually led her to commit the same.

Truly, this book is worth the time to read. It has the right dash of flavor of mystery and violence without having to be too bloody or graphically brutal. This anthology made me feel closer to Manila. It's like knowing Manila intimately, understanding its murky past, and loving the city despite of.

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### **K.D. Absolutely says**

"Noir" means crime fiction featuring hard-boiled cynical characters and bleak sleazy settings. Why did Akashic Books choose Manila as a milieu for crime stories? I wondered. So, I checked the The List of Cities by Murder Rate and Manila is not even in the Top 50 so it must be the *hard-boiled cynical characters and bleak sleazy settings* that made Akashic include us in their Noir series. Let's see...

My practice when I am enjoying an anthology of short stories is to jot down my thoughts right after reading a story or two and that was what I did for the last 3 days:

#### 1. **Aviary** by Lysley Tenorio. *Greenbelt Mall, Makati* - 5 STARS

The story of street children who are so poor they are not allowed to enter Greenbelt, a mall for the rich people. One day, they donned their best clothes and trooped to the mall and scared the hell out of the rich families inside the mall's chapel. I did enjoy the crisp storytelling and the unexpected twist (lame, yes) in the end that reminded me of *El Fili*. Hah!

#### 2. **A Human Right** by Rosario Cruz-Lucero. *Intramuros* - 4 STARS

Surprisingly, this is a love story. Well, for me. Crime noir as a love story. Story of a poor boy who is sort of adopted by a rich family like Emilie Bronte's *The Wuthering Heights*. The comparison stops there though because Isabel is more gutsy than Catherine.

#### 3. **Satan Has Already Bought You** by Lourd de Veyra. *Project 2, Quezon City* - 3 STARS

This is a good reminder for people to stop using drugs because according to "some Christian station" the meaning of S.H.A.B.U. is **Satan Has Already Bought U**. It is not "us" for I don't use prohibited drugs hehe. There is a twist in the end of the story but I just did not care so much about this one as I was not able to relate to it. NO TO DRUGS, says me.

#### 4. **Broken Glass** by Sabina Murray. *New Manila* - 2 STARS

Felt ordinary for me. The supposedly shocking revelation in the end did not have any effect on me. Parang okay, ganun? Fine.

**5. After Midnight** by Angelo R. Lacuesta. *J.P. Rizal* - 3 STARS

Short and sweet. Lacuesta's prose is crisp and succinct. If he writes a novel, I will surely give it a try. The way he describes that final scene is so vivid I think I will avoid remembering it when I go to sleep in the next few days.

**6. Trese: Thirteen Stations** by Budgette Tan and Kajo Baldisimo. *EDSA* - 3 STARS

The short story of Kambal is here. There is also a new character: Santelmo. What else will Tan and Baldisimo think of next? Still Alexandra has thinning hair. Time to buy a wig. The scenes inside the train station with all the souls are eerie. I am not a regular commuter of MRT so I can't picture the scenes in my mind especially at night though. The scenes when living human beings are being eaten is a bit too much though. But overall, this did not disappoint me. I am proud to have read and savored all the Trese releases. Thanks to my influential young friends.

**7. Comforter of the Afflicted** by F. H. Batacan. *Lagro* - 3 STARS

A story of murder that happened in the apartment of a single lady one New Year's Eve. The investigation is being done by a lady police and a crime-detective-priest that reminded me of *Smaller and Smaller Circles* that award-winning book of the author. The twist in the end tacitly reveals who the killer is.

**8. The Professor's Wife** by Jose Dalisay. *Diliman* - 4 STARS

I enjoyed this better compared to Dalisay's novel that I read a number of years ago, the Martial Law novel *Killing at the Warm Place* (3 stars). This is the story of a professor murdered at home that he shared with his young wife. The professor has an apprentice-driver and the couple has a plumber named Diego. The story is narrated by the apprentice-driver. The writing is skillful and direct to the point. I really enjoyed reading this as I was waiting for our number to be called at Globe SM Annex this afternoon.

**9. Carino Brutal** by R. Zamora Linmark. *Tondo* - 3 STARS

The story of two gay men who work as beauticians. Not sure if a policeman can fall for a gay beautician but Linmark says so so I don't really care. The telling is dark and sad. As usual, gay men are portrayed here as losers. Maybe they are the "sleazy" characters fit for noir?

**10. The Unintended** by Gina Apostol. *Ali Mall, Cubao* - 2 STARS

The story of a young filmmaker who is a daughter of another filmmaker during the 70's. Her father and mother got separated after the Thrilla in Manila, the boxing bout that ended the boxing career of Frazier and made Muhammad Ali a household name around the world. Ali Mall, the setting of the story was named after him. I did not feel anything sympathy for the daughter. I don't know what. The story felt a bit pretentious for me as it tried hard to incorporate so many things in the story and I thought it lost some needed focus.

**11. Old Money** by Jessica Hagedorn. *Forbes Park* - 3 STARS

My first time to read a work written by Jessica Hagedorn. Her style is nice. This is about a spoiled brat who is into drugs that he is turning crazy. The story's point-of-view is that of his friend that has to go back to the Philippines because he does not see any future in the US anymore. They seem to have an erotic relationship between the two young men but Hagedorn did not dwell on that and I don't know why.

12. **Desire** by Marianne Villanueva. *Ermita* - 2 STARS

The story of a seaman who is having a hard time getting a job - aboard a ship. He is running out of money yet one day he decides to go to a prostitution house. I am not sure if I understood this story properly because I was already tired standing the queue and I felt dizzy from reading too much today. Though if this was good, I would not missed anything, I think.

13. **Darling, You Can Count on Me** by Eric Galimanda. *Sta. Cruz* - 5 STARS

The story of Lucila Lalu otherwise known in the 90's as the "chop-chop" lady. In May 1967, she was murdered and her head, torso and appendages were found in the garbage cans around Metro Manila. I did not know the complete story behind that true-to-life landmark case and I don't have any interest even up to now to even look it up but the telling is very arresting that my reading had no letup. It was interesting and engaging through and through. Awesome because the story was told in different perspectives. It reminded me of Carlo Caparas' massacre films in the 90's but the clear prose of Galimanda awed me.

14. **Norma from Norman** by Jonas Vitman. *Chinatown* - 2 STARS

The story of a fortune teller who is saving money for his sex transplant operation in Thailand. The plot did not really interest me at all and I thought that this was the weakest story in the book. This is Vitman's first time to be published and I wish him luck.

Overall, I liked this book and I thought that we Filipinos should be proud of it. Almost all the authors here are published novelists and known Fil-Am writers and have made names for themselves. So, after reading this book, I thought that Akashic chose Manila to be part of the series because we have these talented writers and they would be able to complete a potentially great book.

Good job, Ms. Hagedorn! Why not have a Cebu Noir and Davao Noir?

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