

LITERARY SECTION

INTERVIEW WITH GINA APOSTOL

Daryll Delgado
darylljds@hotmail.com

About the interviewee

Gina Apostol's second novel, *The Revolution According to Raymundo Mata*, came out in 2009 from Anvil Publishing. Her first novel, *Bibliolepsy*, won the National Book Award for Fiction in 1998. Her short stories have appeared in the Anvil anthology, *Catfish Arriving in Little Schools*; the Penguin anthology edited by Jessica Hagedorn, *Charlie Chan is Dead*, Volume 2; and Factory School's *The ThirdestWorld*, which contains essays and fiction by Eric Gamalinda, Lara Stapleton, among others. She has just finished a third novel, *Gun Dealers' Daughter*.

A fellowship at Civitella Ranieri, in Umbria, Italy, allowed her to do research for her fourth novel, tentatively titled *Rizal's Sucesos*, about the Philippines in the 1600s, the Arezzo paintings of Piero della Francesca, Jack the Ripper, and Juan Luna's wife. She is currently based in New York, and has a daughter, Nastasia.

About the interviewer

Daryll Delgado trained as a journalist, finished an MA in Comparative Literature, and now works full-time with the international NGO, Verite. She is also a lecturer at the English and Creative Writing Departments of the Ateneo de Manila University, and regularly contributes fiction and literary criticism pieces to local print and online publications in the Philippines.

The author and critic Luis Francia describes Gina Apostol's new novel, *The Revolution According to Raymundo Mata*, as "not just a Rabelaisian parade of real and imagined characters ... a display of puns, double ironies, an irreverent take on so-called history, but as well a deft, and daft, construction of the past that is still there, not as a Big Bang but as a series of smaller, some deliberate, many accidental, explosions: history as much farce as it is tragedy." This, according to Francia, "widens the textual field."¹ Eric Gamalinda calls it a "fearlessly intellectual novel ... where perception is always in question, and memory and the Filipino identity are turned inside out." *The Revolution According to Raymundo Mata* is Apostol's second novel; the first one, *Bibliolepsy* (UP Press, 1997), won the Philippine National Book Award for Fiction in 1998.

Here, Daryll Delgado engages the author in a conversation about, among other things, the impulse behind the Raymundo Mata project; the implications of the sense of

¹ <http://services.inquirer.net/print/print.php?article_id=20100420-265363>

play on which it is anchored; the significance of viewing history from the standpoint of humor; and the liberating practice of fictionalizing the criticism of literary criticism.

DARYLL DELGADO: In your essay, you mention that it took you nine years to complete the book. How different is the final product from the one you originally conceptualized/conceived of?

GINA APOSTOL: This novel began as a straight narrative in the limited third person—with Raymundo and Miong going off in the calesa in a comic moment of redundant blind man's bluff—the katipuneros are blindfolding the blind guy and he's protesting their idiocy. There's description of horseshit, rats, etc.—the entire novel was supposed to be about the comedy of errors that was the revolution—making the quotidian the stuff of narrative, rather than the heroic. I just wanted to have fun after finishing *Gun Dealers' Daughter*—which is a novel absolutely without humor, as far as I could tell. It was a killer. I wanted to get out of the narration of the teenage annoying Maoist (the gun dealers' daughter who helped to kill an American soldier for an urban Sparrow unit [of the New People's Army] in 1980—that was the plot of that novel). So I just wanted to write a comedy about the revolution. You know those incidents of absurdity—like when the Manila katipuneros kind of forgot to give the signal to the Cavite people looking down upon the Luneta for their midnight sign to start the war, so the Cavitenos had to go back to bed instead. I imagine they were really hungover—*walang tulog*, no sleep at all—the next day when they went to war. I did not end up putting that incident in the novel but comedy was the idea.

Those first chapters were stillborn, though I patched Entry #25 with some of its bits—the clop-clop of the calesa ride, etc. Fastforward many years later. The next stab at writing it was a first person narration by an expat translator in New York, unnamed in the draft, a woman mourning someone dead who returns to Manila at the instigation of Trina Trono, an actual character who appears as a manipulative moneymongering publisher trying to get her friend to translate the work (for free of course) as a way to get over grief. That draft was plodding, and I do have trouble with straight narration, I get bored; but I did keep a description, I think, of some tin-can journals buried in an old *baul* [chest]. I hated the grieving first-person draft—I could not sustain sorrow. I have no words for sorrow.

The structure of that draft (I did quite a bit of it) was an alternate narration going back and forth from the personal story of the expat translator and her growing fascination with Raymundo Mata's story. A rival translator named Estrella Espejo, a delusional nationalist, had already done a botched-up job of the journals; the idea was that the expat

translator would be roused out of her stupor by the linguistic dementia of Estrella Espejo. So the novel would slowly move into the emendations by one translator of another's version, with Raymundo's text as the absent bone of contention. The actual text would be absent, and you'd just have the contention. It would talk a lot about language, the vagaries of a country that lives in translation. When I decided to put Estrella in the footnotes instead of in the main text, the novel was more interesting to me.

DARYLL DELGADO: How did you sustain your interest in it, your energy for it?

GINA APOSTOL: Basically, when you write a novel, you have to find a voice—the one that will sustain you. Stop writing when you're bored. So I took out everything that was boring to me—the dead drowned brother, the back story of the translator—and I stuck with the crazy critics. I put Raymundo back in—but a fractured Raymundo—just his journal—not the unified consciousness that was the first draft. So I had Raymundo Mata and the critics. I kept going back to the critics a lot, and because my boyfriend had all this Lacan in his home, I also put a Lacanian in, just for fun.

So for me the thing about writing a novel is that you play with perspective—you have to figure out your perspective, and when you get it right, that's when you have a novel—and it can take a while for you to figure it out. With *Gun Dealer*, for instance, I wrote it first in a kind of Austenian third (as in Jane Austen, an ironic free indirect style, with an editorial smirk), then I switched it all back to first, and it worked better somehow that way. With this one I really tried out a lot of things—maybe too many—but one has to be patient. Writing a novel is an exercise in error and arrogance, and you just have to be confident that at some point things have to go right. You just do not take no for an answer. I do not like abandoning any novel that I have started. So with this next novel I am doing, about Juan Luna, Paz Chiching Luna, and Jack the Ripper, I've still refused to write a word, though I've been thinking about it for some time already. Once I commit myself—to even a sentence, a word of the actual novel—I know I'm kind of doomed.

DARYLL DELGADO: What about the novel, as it is now, are you most pleased? What parts, if any, would you have changed, if you could?

GINA APOSTOL: I've quite forgotten Raymundo Mata already—I have been thinking about something else for a while. So I have to go back and reread parts of it to give you answers. (But the minute I wrote this, I felt guilty. Of course I have not forgotten Raymundo—how

could I forget him? I really like Raymundo Mata himself, to be honest—he's my favorite—he's an addled bookworm with misplaced priorities—for a revolutionary. I also like Segunda, the weird cook's wife. I like imagining them coupling beside a cow in the hold of a ship while the charlatan Don Pio is walking above them with a walking stick up his ass. Or something like that. I also like Orang, Urag, Ora[n]gon. I like the description of the wooden surgical chair in Rizal's clinic. I like the italicized portions interlaced in *Makamisa* in Entry #46—I like the description of Ysagani working on the Minerva press. These are just offhand recollections.

I would, of course, change something about the meeting with Rizal. It's what I built up to in this novel—and I knew if it did not work, the novel would die. In general, I am happy with it, but I wish Rizal had been more funny. There's something humorless about Rizal—or my stance of devotion toward Rizal. Could not help it. I have this fantasy of one day rewriting the novel with a completely refigured Rizal—transfigured—but even that term has holiness about it. Oh well. And then at the same time I felt a lot of sacrilege in that section—even though I was absolutely kowtowing to the guy. Bowing down in devotion. Could not help it. Raymundo would not I think have had it any other way.

The thing is, Raymundo is already the comic Rizal—that's why Rizal is that way, he gets to remain the *idolo*, the idol. It's Raymundo who is the nutty, unheroic version of the hero—I guess he's the Rizal I wanted to write. The deconstruction of my devotion.

I know I was deliberate about erasing the voices in footnotes as Raymundo got closer to his narration of his meeting with Rizal—because the main text (the journal, Raymundo's voice) had now become the deconstruction of the history. I felt that was what was happening, so I kept the footnote voices down, tried to keep them silent. I am probably wrong, of course, to think this was effective. I still do not know. But I know I went back and deliberately narcotized those voices in those sections.

DARYLL DELGADO: The novel, its structure, the multiple narratives and narrators, invites multiple readings and multiple ways of reading. Is this something that you had set out to do, from the very inception of *The Revolution*...?

GINA APOSTOL: I wanted multiplicity. At the very least, I wanted triangulation—a triad. A strangulating triangulation. You know the katipuneros recruited in triangles—have no idea exactly how, but they recruited in 3s—it was supposed to keep the conspiracy secret. But a triad was good in the footnotes, because every time one speaker made sense, the other could make nonsense out of it, and a third could twist the last one step further and make

a synthesis—and you could concatenate that ad infinitum of course. It was fun to do, like braiding, except you're braiding voices. One voice automatically becomes the overlay, but the nature of the story is that, like sliding signifiers, each is always vulnerable to being overlaid by the other—and in this way each voice is real for a moment, then empty, just like speech. It's the nature of language, or even of self, or of "meaning," apparent in this trinity. I guess that's why God is empty: because he exists in 3s.

Don't get me wrong, though: the voices, when they are on stage, are very real: they have something to say when it is their time. Except that to someone else, at the same time, it might be hogwash, or bullshit, or some other form of ungulate residue.

DARYLL DELGADO: What process did the shaping/structuring of this novel go through? How difficult, or easy, was it to decide on the narrators? Was it always your intention to write it this way?

GINA APOSTOL: For me, in terms of writing, the key to the voice of Raymundo Mata is Entry #22. It's my translation of Rizal's Ateneo diary (written probably much later than his Ateneo days)—except that in my version the narrator keeps making hand puppets or something; one of the few things Rizal did not do was papier-mache. And sock puppets. Anyhow, I had a hard time trying to stabilize Raymundo's voice. You'll note the "gestational texts"—including Voltaire (duh), epistolary etiquette manuals, *moro-moro*, *abakada* [alphabet] games, etc.—all these unstable snippets of Filipino texts. No unity. There was a point to that, of course. This inversion was always part of the novel's design: the inversion of a whole within a part, including vice versa—that is—the whole of the nation's texts within a part of it, that is, this novel. Very Tlon Uqbar. (Ed.: "Tlön, Uqbar, Orbis Tertius" is a short story by the Argentine writer Jorge Luis Borges.)

But for the purposes of a story, let's face it, Raymundo needed to gain a self. He had to stop masturbating his semen of words [the gobs of seminal text] into the ether and get a life. My problem was that I had no idea how he would speak once he became himself. You know he existed in the late 19th century. I have no idea how they spoke. But once I ventriloquized Rizal and plagiarized him, I was fine. Basically, I literally crawled into Rizal's syntax by translating him—but included finger puppets—and that is how I was able to find Raymundo's self. He's a shadow-text of Rizal's texts. Even the names of women are names of Rizal's women. Segunda Katigbak. Orang, the other Leonor (he had two Leonors, the other one being possibly an entire Freudian slip). The Dapitan Shrine has a list of the

names of his so-called mistresses by the way, preserved under glass—very funny. They are devout even about the *queridas* [mistresses].

The phrase “noamla berlema” etc. is in Rizal’s *Miscellaneous Writings*, the section called Profiles, part of which really is in some kind of *codigo*, a secret code—he’s making sarcastic comments about a lying friend of his, etc., and hides his *chismis* [gossip] in code.

So there is the bricolage of texts that have made us, which include not just *Lam-Ang* but also the French novel; the bricolage of Rizal texts; the braiding of multiplicity; and other things I’m forgetting here, please remind me what they are—readers know better—all gathered under the problem of translation.

The fact that the novel is cobbled from disparate pieces does not mean, of course, that it did not have an integral deliberation. It’s just that the deliberation is derived from cobbling, accidentally on purpose, and the hijacking of one text leads to kidnapping another, etc., etc.

So the other part of the design—always intended, by the way, and in fact quite central to my impulse in writing this novel—was a personal wish to resurrect Rizal in some way—as a writer, not a hero. I mentioned this in another interview actually in 1997, published in *Pen & Ink*. Ubaldo Stecconi interviewed me about *Bibliolepsy* and asked what my next project was. I said it was something about Rizal and a blind guy—I didn’t quite know what I would do—about the blindness of the Filipinos to the writer’s art. What I said was that our sanctifying Rizal has killed him a lot more effectively than the Spaniards did. We misread him as a hero when in fact maybe he just wanted to write a novel, but the country kept knocking on his goddamned door, annoying him. That is my fantasy of Rizal.

So I have no idea why, in my novel, his novel is stillborn; Rizal the writer is only a figment in Raymundo’s mind. Instead, the hero plants abaca or something; he never appears in the act of writing. He’s most potent as a writer in his reader’s mind. Otherwise, he prefers to raise chickens. So a novel I wanted to write about writing turned out to be a novel about reading. Again. The other thing I do not understand is why I left out the *Fili* from Raymundo’s knowledge of Rizal. The *Fili* is my favorite among the Rizal books. Raymundo keeps wanting to read the *Fili*, and as far as I can tell, he never does. I have no idea why, and I would like to know, actually.

It’s a funny idea that we are not Rizal’s first novel the *Noli* (that is our misreading of ourselves); instead we are his aborted one, the one he failed to finish. That just occurred to me, so I guess one makes up answers as one goes along.

Please know that, already, what I am saying here is very dangerous, because people might think what I am saying is definitive. I would just call myself one of the readers, a

good one I hope, of my novel; but my readings, as we know, are all quite provisional, and I imagine sometimes I am wrong.

The other way I tried to create Raymundo's voice was to read only books written before 1896. Raymundo only read texts Rizal would have read, that would have been available to the public at the time, and in some dumb biblioleptic Method way, I did the same thing. I do not know if that torture was a good idea. So it was always a reprieve to get back to the footnotes and speak in the voice of the critics. Making those shifts from footnotes to main text allowed me to finish the novel—when I was bored with one thing, I could always speak in another. Again, do not get me wrong—I loved doing Raymundo's voice; I mean, as I said, in my mind, he was Rizal without the overcoat, carrying a *banig* [mat]. The other kind of Rizal—the one who farts, etc. I mean, he literally takes a shit in the beginning. You know Zizek talks a lot about shit and the unconscious, but sadly Rizal did not read Zizek.

He did have that dog take a piss, however, in the cemetery of San Diego. So maybe, on the other hand, you can find, also, Raymundo Mata in Rizal.

DARYLL DELGADO: Did you have a clear readership in mind for this particular novel?

GINA APOSTOL: Obviously, no.

There was an agent in America who wanted me to go back and revise the novel because "it was so well-written!" and maybe I could twist it for an American audience. Obviously, I said, no.

DARYLL DELGADO: What is your take on the notion of the burden of representation, the anxiety of influence?

GINA APOSTOL: I don't quite understand this question. Or, maybe see fiction as having no burden of representation. It is made up. A novel makes its own rules as it is being written, and the burden of representation it carries is maybe the burden of its singular requirements, whatever it needs to complete it. I needed to read history books, but only because I needed to know if the revolutionaries wore *chinelas* [slippers], or something. A novelist is very selfish, I guess; the entire world is around only so you can write your novel.

DARYLL DELGADO: Who, what were you reading when you were writing this novel? How

do you shuttle from the book project to functional living while in the middle of a book project like this?

GINA APOSTOL: I was on sabbatical. I watched soccer games in between writing. I had no other commitments that year. Soccer games were really useful, because I could focus and be wholly into the game, and yet it meant nothing. So soccer really allowed me to relax and stop thinking about my novel. I would write in the morning, around 9-12, then read in the afternoon, history books, Rizal, etc.—I think I mention the kinds of books I read in the Acknowledgments—there's also a select bibliography at the end. As I said, I did not read any prose written before 1896. Except Borges. I cheated with Borges. Then I watched soccer.

Just as an aside—it was so startling to read this story in *The New Yorker*—one of those usual innocuous ones about a bourgeois person having a revelation in a grocery store or something—and I was so enthralled by it, I did not know why—until I realized it was the first piece of fiction I had read in a long time that was written in the 21st century. I had just finished my novel and was out of the prison of my self-imposed exile from modern prose. It was so weird how absolutely engrossing that bad story was—the prose was so different, so fresh to me. It was so gripping. Haha.

DARYLL DELGADO: You were mostly in the US when this novel was being put together, right? Did the physical distance from the Philippines help, or did it complicate the process?

GINA APOSTOL: I went home to do research and find books in 2005. Then I returned a few months later to visit Dapitan. I don't know if I think much about space or geography when I am actually writing. I did have a problem finding books in America; then going home, it was a haphazard thing finding books in bookstores. Most of my books I found in Manila. So no, I do not know if geography complicated anything except for the books. And talking to historians. I needed to talk to historians, and I found some of them at home. They were very funny. What really complicated the process was the process itself—I mean, I had to read medical books on optics. That was not nice. I had to read entire books on the Propaganda Movement (two Schumacher texts) to write what ended up being a paragraph on page 165. I mean, I could footnote many paragraphs with the shadow work that possibly went into them. It was absolutely fun—but maybe because the complication of this process had to do with texts, it did not even occur to me that geography was an issue.

I am not sentimental about geography anyhow, I think. I am sentimental about books. I am very sentimental about Santiago Alvarez's *Katipunan and the Revolution*. That book helped me put this entire novel together.

DARYLL DELGADO: In a conversation we had, when I visited you in New York, you mentioned that one of your discoveries about Rizal was that he was very postcolonial, that he was thinking already in postcolonial terms. Please elaborate. (Or, correct me if I'm wrong).

GINA APOSTOL: Did I mean the Morga? His annotations of Morga's *Sucesos de las islas Filipinas* is postcolonial in many ways. It's also a postmodern text in some way. He's revisiting the Philippines in 1600 in the 1880s, and he is triangulating Morga's views against Chirino's views against Pigafetta's (he reads and quotes Pigafetta in Italian) and against the Malay chroniclers—so the text has a postmodern patchiness to it—plus, of course, the main text—Rizal's—is in footnotes; the minor text, Morga, is the main text; so it is inverse, like Poe's purloined letter. And then he uses gaps revealed by the past to comment on the impoverishment of the present (for instance, evidence of native boatbuilding in the 1600s, apparently absolutely absent so says Rizal in the 1880s), and by these gaps he indicts the Spanish regime. Historians say, well, you know he made many mistakes in the Morga, we have to understand Rizal could be wrong, blah blah blah. But that is beside the point. Of course Rizal could be wrong; that goes without saying. But I think his criticism in the Morga is a very early postcolonial text.

He is especially vitriolic against the Church, of course, so in that sense he is old-fashioned. It's in his rabid anticlericalism, I think, that he sounds dated. So 19th century. Because of course for us, the corruption of the Church is a truism. The idiocy of Catholicism (for me anyway) is so patent there's no point mentioning it. So in that sense Rizal keeps disappointing me—he froths at the mouth over friars, and for a modern reader, that's boring. Too obvious.

DARYLL DELGADO: Were you consciously addressing postcolonial concerns/conscious of postcolonial discourse when you wrote this novel? What, if any, are these concerns, in particular?

Much of the novel seems to be about a struggle among discourses, but it seems also to be much about laughter. That is, laughter in the Bakhtinian sense, as Nino De Veyra has pointed out. At several times, in the novel, mockery wins over criticism. I mean, the critics

are made to sound ridiculous. But then, so is the position of Raymundo Mata, which, I suppose is pro-Art; Art over and above everything. There seems to be at least three projects simultaneously going on, fighting for and with themselves, in this book. Does any one position [have to] win? Is anyone's integrity protected?

GINA APOSTOL: Wow—nice big good point. I think all of the above are excellent points. Clap clap. If I might add, somehow in that novel, I was reflecting on something about language but I do not know if I can fully articulate it, really. I was trying to position our relationship to language—all the time, throughout this book, I was conscious of that. How could I write about the country's history given all the mediations required to grasp it? I wrote it in English. It is always my dilemma that I write in English. But I am always *myself* writing in English—that is, I am a Waray educated in Tagalog grammar writing in English. My speech is always multiple; I am always multiple; all of these tongues are always latent in me, simultaneously occurring; there is something obscene in the fact that English is the language that comes out, the language of surface. It's the language of the fuck-you, the imp of the perverse. It is obscene to write in English. Of course, writing in English is the sign of the perversions of our history, our mutilated selves. Writing in English is always a dagger in the heart, postcolonially. And yet why do I feel no guilt at all? Why does it make sense that I write in English? That is my dilemma. The book was a way to resolve that question, I think, by making translation the heart of our sense of ourselves. The fact that we are translated is what is true of ourselves. I imagine that this is the postcolonial crux. That we exist as translated beings, footnotes within footnotes, grasped only by a series of mediations, braid upon braid of voices with relentless multiplicity—and in this way we symbolize what is human. So you go back to Lacan and language.

So it is no horrifying calamity but simply the tragedy of the every day that I write in English. To unquote Freud, writing in English is just one of the facts of our ordinary unhappiness. Do I lose something by not writing in Waray? I lose something, as we know, merely by having language, by using words.

There has to be a way for us to live without rancor and yet consciously and not passively with the fact of who we are, a raped nation that likes to make puns. I mean, punning is a survival mechanism.

So the interesting carnival to me is the carnival of speech—the puns, the plagiarisms, the word games, the codes (such as Case G, the coded letter O, in Entry #23), the texts within texts within texts (*Makamisa* is within the book that is also possibly *Makamisa* that in turn contains within it *Makamisa*, etc., etc.), the quarreling about who wins in the contest of

vulgarity (Cebuanos!). The reason why this kind of discourse is so funny is maybe because it is what we do everyday—Filipinos are always playing with words. We're just punny—we're always extremely aware of words.

The idea of texts within texts is not original, but what is important is that it persists.

DARYLL DELGADO: The novel—I guess, like all real novels, according to Kundera—also espouses an *ars poetica*. Or, at least, Raymundo Mata's *ars poetica*, which is strikingly still very much in place, here in Manila, in the Philippines, I guess. Do you subscribe to this *ars poetica*?

Raymundo Mata is very UP Iskolar ng Bayan. He is set up for tragedy. Given so much but so little, while inside the ideal world of the academe, he becomes too smart for his own circumstances; he is forever misplaced. (*Kairo!*)

GINA APOSTOL: Well, as long as Raymundo can make his case (against whomever), he's luckier than most. He's written his text *and* purloined it; he should be happy.

DARYLL DELGADO: But why isn't there a formalist among the critics interacting with Mata's text? Does this mean that you didn't want to critique that position? Or, is this your criticism of that position?

GINA APOSTOL: I hate to say this categorically, but I do not know if I am critiquing anyone in the novel. I really like everyone, except that so many of them turned out nuts. (I intended at first Dr. Diwata to be a voice of reason; essentially, I agree with many of her points, especially when she brings up grammar and desire; but then the design of the novel required, it seems to me, that no position be tenable; her sanity had to go.)

The thing is, I couldn't have four people—four's a square. As I said, I wanted a triangle.

A writer has to be a formalist in the sense that that is what you do—you are dealing with problems of form. For me, theory was only a way to create a novel—for a writer, as I said, everything is, as Barth used to say practically every day, grist for the mill. The world is just grist for the mill. The world is just a problem of form, for me. I use it for my needs. I know I read writers now, Borges or Austen, also to get ideas about how to structure things; I get similar ideas from a receipt, from a nutrition list on a label. One scavenges everything for form. When you are working, you're always in a desperado, magpie mode, finding out ways to finish.

I imagine it is hard to put theory before form. It's like having sex with a manual, instead of a man. It could be very unsatisfying. And please do not note the heteronormative in that play on words.

At the same time, you have a concept for what you have in mind that might fit with theory; the fact that I say a writer deals primarily with form does not mean, at the same time, that the writer disclaims theory. But when I am writing, my problem is form. And I am very interested in knowing how people understand how it is constructed.

I have to say, though, that I am annoyed by writers who insist that theory has no claim on their work at all. That's ignorant. The creationist who says Darwin is a crock is still descended, you know, from the monkeys. Ideology informs us, theory has its place. It's just that a writer, by nature of one's work, has to think like a formalist first of all. Formalism is our default mode; and that fact makes us think sometimes that it is the only one—and the rest, as they say, is theory. You will note that my formulations above bear that out—when I speak, I separate formal considerations from theory. That makes sense for a writer, I think. Because that is our overlaying braid.

DARYLL DELGADO: I, like everyone I talked to who has read the novel, love the ending. Or, one of the endings, the final chapter of Raymundo's journals which introduces a new text, new texts; new narrators. The lyricism is disarming. This chapter has the effect of subverting the entire project from the inside. You must have enjoyed writing this book, enjoyed bringing it to this point.

GINA APOSTOL: I'm so glad you liked that. I really like rereading that section (though I notice I never choose it when I read it in public). It's odd because very early on I had this idea in my head that the ending would wind back to Rizal's "lost" third novel *Makamisa* somehow, but I did not quite know how. I knew it would be a loop. I knew I would use the circle structure—meaning the beginning would be the end, etc. Borges in *The Garden of the Forking Paths* talks about a few of the possible structures of a story. A circle is one of them. But it seems even serendipitous that Ysagani (in *Makamisa*) turned out to be literally the nephew of a priest, like Raymundo Mata. That was really odd, since I had read *Makamisa* many years before I began writing the novel. Maybe you just have little worms in the brain sitting there and they hatch. Yuck. I particularly liked writing the italicized sections of those passages—the ones interlaced with the actual sections of *Makamisa* (*Makamisa* is the unitalicized passages of course—my translations of *Makamisa* anyhow). It was a stroke of luck that Rizal wrote such interesting fragments that I could then use to make my own

pieces of his book's puzzle. And by that time in the novel I was in a writing fever—I think from the time I began writing about Dapitan, I was in some kind of daze. I was just writing furiously and happily every day. It was, yes, absolute fun. There's no fun like it. It's hard to describe that kind of fun.

I barely revised the language of that chapter. Very very little revision. I guess at that time I was ready. And of course I cheated since Rizal had already given me words. But you have to understand Rizal must also gain by the juxtaposition. That's why multiplicity is good.

DARYLL DELGADO: Have you recovered from the Raymundo Mata project? Do you have plans of coming home, promoting the book? What are you working on now?

GINA APOSTOL: First I have to finish another draft of *Gun Dealer*. I want it to come out this year. I just have to do something with the ending. That is what I am doing this summer. If I go home it will be in August; but the thing is I am moving from New York, and that's a chore.

As I said, I have been researching Rizal, Juan Luna, and Paz Pardo de Tavera Luna, plus Jack the Ripper. Plus Morga, plus Chirino, plus Pigafetta, etc. I call it my atheist novel; I'm reading friar chronicles like Chirino and trying to figure out that moment when the Philippines became Spanish—the slips of the tongue that made us shift into the Spanish and become this altered thing, alteration being the way of things. I will also be reading material on the indios—in South America; and the Indians, in North America. Something about the prehispanic. The melancholy of that shift, with outrage in decent numbers on the sidelines. I still have no idea what this novel is going to look like, but I hope it is simple. I imagine a lyrical novel in the voice of someone dead.

You know I am moving to a town where Indians were massacred in some famous gruesome way. I'll be living in a New England house from the 1780s in an Indian-killer town. Everyone says the town has ghosts of dead Indians. Looking forward to that.