



Books from  
other cultures  
communicate new  
perspectives to  
readers.

by Kim Pettit

# Gripped

## By FILIPINIANA

On a flight from Manila, I was delighted to learn my seatmate and I had common interests. A Chinese Catholic, he works on new business acquisition for one of the world's largest printing conglomerates. We exchanged business cards and shop talk, but once the plane was underway we barely spoke. Why? Both of us book lovers were eager to get at our newest treasures. My friend pulled out a book on Buddhist theories on gardening. I pulled out a novel. We read in companionable silence all the rest of the way.

My novel, *Farah*, by the late Edilberto K. Tiempo, secured a prestigious literary prize last year for New Day Publishers, in the Philippines. It is the story of a Muslim girl who embarks on a journey of personal transformation when she sets off a family feud prior to joining an international dance troupe. Facing discrimination from her companions, she seizes the opportunity to become a model. The book details Farah's steps to independence, her struggles with her sexual orientation, the resolution of the feud, and her growing alienation.

*Farah* does not have a happy ending. Written for a secular market, the book is gritty, raw, and powerful. It communicates concepts alien to my experience of culture and faith—*martabbat*, a Tausug concept of retributive justice. The relentless practice of a *tinikling* dancer, who risks injury between clapping bamboo poles. The life of a model. A Muslim's perspective on faith. A discussion of Filipino identity. *Farah* was not always pleasureable, but it was compelling. The story gripped me.

I brought other books home from my trip. (I would have brought many more if I'd just had room in my suitcase!) One, an award-winner from OMF Lit.'s Hiyas Children's Collection, was *Sandosenang Sapatos* (A Dozen Pairs of Shoes). Written in both English and Tagalog, it was a gift from the author, Luis P. Gatmaitan, a pediatrician.

I enjoyed *Sandosenang Sapatos*. Told by the sister of a girl born without feet, the book is a lovely, moving story of a father's love for his daughter. Though the girl's disability is central to the story, she is not reduced to becoming an object for our pity. She is treated with dignity. The plot is not predictable or saccharine. It intrigued me. It inspired me. It led me to prayer.

I showed the book to Madeleine, my eight-year-old daughter. I did not tell her I had already read it. She took it to her room, and read it twice through. Then she came to my room, sat on my bed, and read the book aloud again. She liked it so much she did not want to put the book down until she had shared it with me. My daughter is an avid reader, but few of the books she reads provoke *that* reaction!

I share these personal anecdotes because they communicate a portion of what Filipino literature can bring to persons from other cultures, to readers like my daughter and myself. I was challenged by Farah's story, within which no Christians ever give witness to the life-changing gospel that could transform this Muslim girl. My daughter was blessed reading *Sandosenang Sapatos*, which communicates compassion and love in a startling, fresh way.

Reading books like these, *your* books, reminds me of why publisher development is important. Your books are unique. They communicate new, fresh perspectives. They are the voice of the Church, the testament, the contribution that only *you* can give to build up the body of Christ.

Thank God for Filipino books. Indian books. Australian books. American books. British books. Brazilian books. *Your* books. May their message exhort and challenge us to a closer walk with Him. ❖