



PRESS RELEASE

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The Philippine Consulate General in New York Honors National Artist for Literature, Jose Garcia Villa



Topmost: Admirers of the National Artist for Literature, Jose Garcia Villa, pose for a souvenir photo with Consul General Claro S. Cristobal, Luis H. Francia, and some of the relatives of Villa. *Bottom, from left to right:* Consul General Cristobal opens the event with his own reading of Villa's poem; Stefano Ortiz, and Jack Lynch read excerpts of Villa's poems. (Photos by NYPCCG).

29 October 2018, New York –

*“First, a poem must be magical,
Then musical as a seagull.
It must be a brightness moving
And hold secret a bird's flowering
It must be slender as a bell,
And it must hold fire as well”¹*

And so it was that Consul General Claro S. Cristobal recited one of the most beautiful lines of poetry by Philippine National Artist for Literature, Jose Garcia Villa, during a night

¹ “First, a Poem must be magical,” by Jose Garcia Villa

of poetry held on 24 October 2018 at the Philippine Center, in celebration of the Filipino-American History Month.

“And it is thanks to literary geniuses, such as Jose Garcia Villa - who has revolutionized poetry through his ‘comma poems’ and ‘reverse consonance’ rhyme scheme - that we continue to be invigorated in both mind and soul,” stated the Consul General during his welcome remarks.

During this night of poetry, Mr. Luis H. Francia, professor of Hunter College and New York University, who learned poetry in workshops with Villa at Greenwich Village, gave a brief lecture about the “Pope of Greenwich Village.” He narrated how Villa disliked the use of the word “soul” at all costs. Francia also remembers Villa discouraging the reading of fiction, as it confuses the poet, and rather urging his students to be single-minded and faithful to their own views.

Francia further learned from Villa that in poetry, meaning was in a sense an enemy, and that it is not the purpose of poetry, stressing that in poetry, language shapes the meaning. He also stated that lyric poetry was what Villa favored, as his poems were written not with ideas but with words. Another important principle that he mentioned was Villa’s pleasure principle, citing that a good poem entices the reader to be receptive to the inner poem.

Ms. Elda Rotor, Vice President & Publisher at Penguin Classics introduced Jose Garcia Villa’s book, *Doveglion: Collected Poems*, which was published by Penguin Random House in 2008 for the Centennial of Jose Garcia Villa’s birth. She recalled how a postcard, showing a photograph of a group of literary artists in the 1940’s, which included Jose Garcia Villa, has fascinated her entire career.

Ms. Rotor shared that until 2017 only eight percent (8%) of the children’s books reviewed were authored by Asian-American author, and added that the children and young adult books are more progressive than adult book industry, making it very rare to have Asian American literary authors, much less poets, published. She stressed that it is remarkable that there was a Filipino poet who thrived in various literary circles more than 75 years ago, as represented by Jose Garcia Villa, who was also considered twice for the Pulitzer’s prize. She applauded the Filipino and Asian-American scholars and writers who have worked to keep Jose Garcia Villa’s works relevant. She urged the support of Filipino writers to preserve the rich artistic literary history of the Philippines.

Mr. Stefano Ortiz, a new graduate of New School where Jose Garcia Villa taught from 1964 to 1973 and Mr. Jack Lynch, professor, emeritus of City of New York and was a student of Jose Garcia Villa both read an excerpt from *Doveglion: Collected Poems*.

Mr. Lance Villa, son of Jose Garcia Villa, was invited to the event. He sent his three cousins to represent the family to the event namely, Misses Mila Villanueva, Mary Villanueva and Ms. Maria Cohen.

The night ended with the audience being serenaded with *Kudiman* songs by soprano, Joy Abalon Tamayo accompanied by guitarist, Chaitanya Sangco Tamayo, both of whom are graduates of the UP College of Music. **END**