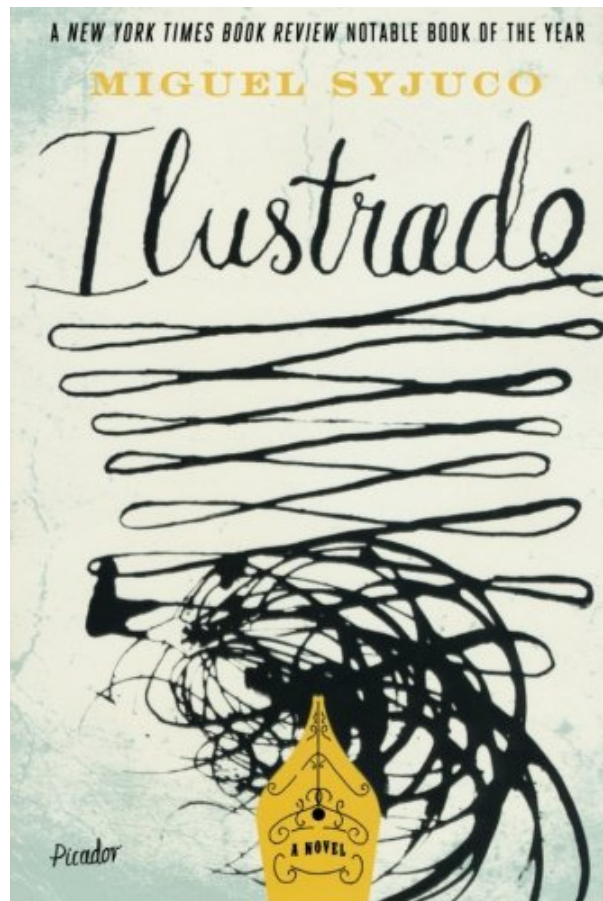
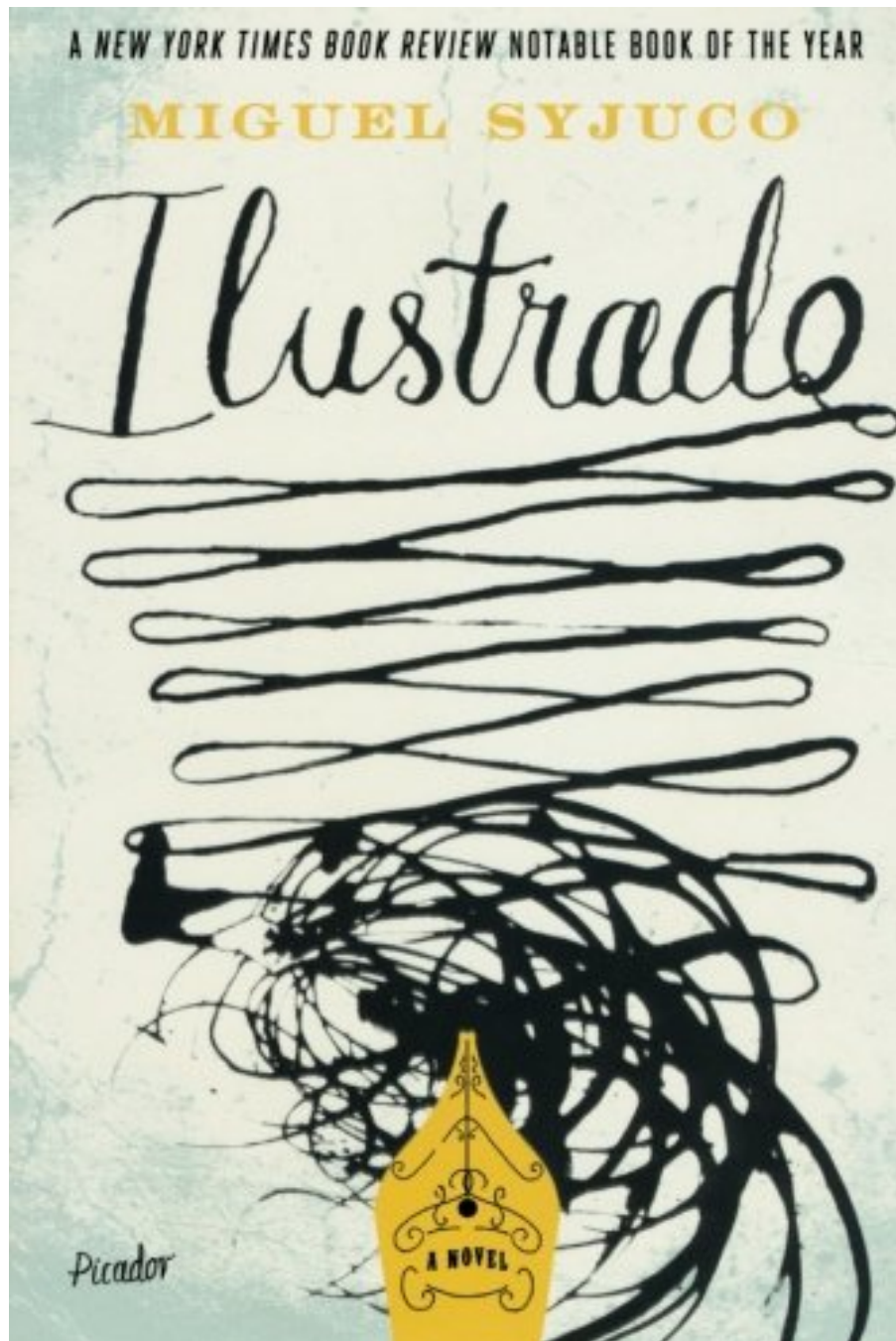


ILUSTRADO: A NOVEL BY MIGUEL SYJUCO



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WINNER OF THE 2008 MAN ASIAN LITERARY PRIZE

A NEW YORK TIMES BOOK REVIEW NOTABLE BOOK OF THE YEAR

It begins with a body. On a clear day in winter, the battered corpse of Crispin Salvador is pulled from the Hudson River. Gone, too, is the only manuscript of his final book, a work meant to rescue him from obscurity by exposing the crimes of the Filipino ruling families. Miguel, his student and only remaining friend, sets out for Manila to investigate.

The result is a rich and dramatic family saga of four generations, tracing one hundred and fifty years of Philippine history forged under the Spanish, the Americans, and the Filipinos themselves. Exuberant and wise, wildly funny and deeply moving, *Ilustrado* is a daring and inventive debut novel that "begins as a murder mystery and develops into an ambitious exploration of cultural identity, ambition, and artistic purpose." (The New Yorker).

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- Dimensions: 9.00" h x .72" w x 6.00" l, .70 pounds
- Binding: Paperback
- 336 pages

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Most helpful customer reviews

41 of 46 people found the following review helpful.

My Elbow's Lebensraum.

By Nicole Del Sesto

I guess this is sort of an epistolary novel, and as I'm already struggling with what to say, I'm also going to go with "hard to describe".

The story begins with the death of a Filipino author (Crispin), and our narrator and pupil of the dead author (Miguel) decides to write his biography. The story is definitely more about Miguel and his journey, and about the Philippines, than about Crispin.

The tale is told in a number of different ways. There's the biography of Crispin, snippets from Crispin's writings and interviews, the narrator's story, narrative about the narrator, but not told by the narrator, and some random blogs and other errata.

For me, the book gets extra points for the way in which it told the story. In many ways, it reminded me of *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao*, where a modern day tale is told, but facts of the history and politics of a country are woven in. In *Oscar Wao*, the historical bits were told in dull, excruciating detail, in microscopic print, via footnotes. This book definitely approached the history and politics in a more interesting fashion. Even still, at times it got a bit wearying.

For the most part, the writing is stellar. Though I certainly felt that the author suffered a bit from 'new-author-itis' where they want to convey every idea they've ever had in their first novel. We start the book with Crispin's bibliography and that goes on for several uninteresting pages, and there's another point in the book where Miguel is flipping through the television channels and describing what's on every channel. 3 1/2 pages worth. Granted, some of it was more of that clever "slipping the history/politics in", but mostly the bit was overdone.

At times I found the writing pretentious and overwrought. Though "my elbow's lebensraum" is clever, (once one has looked the word up in the dictionary), things like "...he was more avuncular than pederastic" felt like he was trying too hard. But then he'd come up with something like this ... "Her hair, dyed such a bad brown it was orange, was pulled severely into a bun on her head like a tangerine," and all the author's other irksome

things were forgiven.

I can understand how the literary community loves this book. It's a book about books and writers. It is done in a way that I personally don't think I've seen done before, so I think I loved it too. The epilogue almost made it a 5 for me, but there were too many other little things that kept it from a 5 star read. I won't even allude to how the book ends, only just to say that in keeping with the theme of the book it was creative and perfectly suited to everything that had gone before.

Less could have been more with this book, but it is absolutely a worthy read and I would definitely read another book by this author.

And now I'm off to pursue my goal for the day: To use the word lebensraum in a sentence. Now if I could just figure out how to pronounce it.

35 of 40 people found the following review helpful.

Humdrum and not up to the marketing

By Peter G. Keen

This novel just doesn't work for me. It is one of those intentionally kaleidoscopic, hypermodern riffs that provides multiple snapshots on an enigmatic figure, in this case a Filipino author/political activist and all-around out of his skull nomad, whose death is equally enigmatic. It is very hard to make such a style build a coherent narrative. It's not enough to be hip in the writing. Here, kaleidoscopic becomes just episodic. The multiple snippets of scenes, voices and settings do not build to anything. At the end of the book, I felt no more connection to the mysterious Salvador Crispin nor to his narrator-disciple who is searching to reconstruct his life than at the start. The scattershot mixing of styles - blog snippets, in-the-narrator's head commentary, reminiscence, history summaries, press clips--are initially intriguing but in the end tiresome.

An attraction for me in trying out this unfamiliar author was that the book was the winner of the Man Asia prize. I assumed that this had a stature comparable with the Booker Prize and that it signaled the recognition of literary achievement. Without in any way wanting to be dismissive of this worthy initiative, it needs to be placed in context. It is a small competition aimed at bringing attention to new Asian writers, ones with promise that may become sustained achievement. It is sponsored by the Man Group plc, a Hong Kong investment management company. It has a limited number of submissions and is very much for the unpublished to get attention in "literary circles" (its specific target). So this is a book by a new young author. That's it. It is very much a nifty first novel and that is reason enough to try it out. There are some good points to raise. The author is smooth with words but words are not enough to compensate for lack of cohesion, thematic structure and characterization. It's OK-ish but not at all a major work.

16 of 17 people found the following review helpful.

Literary exhibitionism

By Keris Nine

From an outline description, there's a story here - the murder or suicide of a once famous Philippine writer, Crispin Salvador, found dead, floating in the Hudson River, murdered or perhaps a suicide. His final novel, one that he has been working on for twenty years, an exposé that is going to blow apart the whole corrupt system in his home country in literary and critical circles as much as political ones, has disappeared. His closest friend, the author Miguel Syjuco, is given access to his notes and documents of this fictional writer, attempts to build up a picture of the brilliant and controversial writer but in the process of interviewing friends and colleagues for a biography of Salvador, Miguel discovers that he never really knew him.

That's the premise in outline anyway. What else there is of this book is somewhat random and smothered in words and irrelevancies. Short biographical incidents are related of the fictional author's life, illustrated but

not illuminated, by seemingly random paragraphs from his fictional works, imaginary interviews, stories related to his brilliance, his notoriety and his exile. Between this and the author's singularly uninteresting reminiscences on his own bourgeois US émigré background, his journey back to the Philippines, dropping in the odd blog posting and running joke along the way, there is of course an attempt to consider in a very post-modern way modern notions of the role of the author, of fiction, of nationality, one's background and the influences of place of birth and family that make a writer singular and potentially a revolutionary.

All of this is all so very literate and clever, and all of it so much deeply tedious rambling. That's not to say that there aren't moments of brilliance and clever observations on the nature of writing and revolution - albeit from a pampered middle-class émigré literary background rather than from a genuine Filipino perspective - but most of them are lost in a morass of references and narrative trickery designed to impress the literati ('Winner of the Man Asian Literary Prize!'). For anyone looking for the next Roberto Bolaño, this could be for you. For anyone who thinks one is quite enough then you would do well give *Ilustrado* a miss.

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Review

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?Roberto Ontiveros, *The Dallas Morning News*

“Ambitious . . . In a daring literary performance, Syjuco weaves the invented with the factual . . . *Ilustrado* is being presented as a tracing of 150 years of Philippine history, but it's considerably more than that . . . Spiced with surprises and leavened with uproariously funny moments, it is punctuated with serious philosophical musings.”
?Raymond Bonner, *The New York Times Book Review*

“A dazzling and virtuosic adventure in reading . . . The narrative is organised with immense confidence and skill . . . The author's post-modernist bag of tricks also contains a whip-crack narrative skill that's as reminiscent of Dickens as it is of Roberto Bolaño . . . There's a capaciousness that makes the book richly attractive to wander into . . . [This] novel . . . fizzles with the effervescence a large book can have when its author is in total control of the material. This isn't a story; it's the unfolding of an entire world, a mirror-land that seems familiar but is always ineffably strange . . . Syjuco is a writer already touched by greatness . . . This is a remarkably impressive and utterly persuasive novel. Its author . . . may one day succeed with the Nobel committee.”
?Joseph O'Connor, *The Guardian*

“An exuberant, complex, and fascinating ride through 150 years of Philippine history . . . Syjuco's writing is playful, smart, and confident . . . An inventive and exciting debut.”
?Grace Talusan, *Rumpus*

“An extraordinary debut, at once flashy and substantial, brightly charming and quietly resistant to its own

wattage . . . Syjuco's gifts for pastiche, his protean narrative energy, are in particular evidence in these pitch-perfect fictions of the fictions of his fictional author . . . An exuberant, funny novel that neither takes its grand ambitions too seriously, nor pretends to be measuring itself by any less a scale of intent. How Syjuco . . . has done this is foremost a testament to his prodigious gifts . . . With his dazzling first foray, Syjuco suggest how his new Asia, his new identity, must 'look' on the page and between the covers. That look is unexpected and fresh, quite unlike anything that has been seen before.” ?Charles Foran, *The Globe and Mail*

“Wildly entertaining . . . Engaging . . . Absolutely assured in its tone, literary sophistication and satirical humor . . . Syjuco is only on his mid-30s, and he already possesses the wand of the enchanter.” ?Michael Dirda, *The Washington Post*

“*Ilustrado* will provoke audible oohs and ahhs from readers . . . The writing is gorgeous. Plus, there's an O. Henry twist in the epilogue. This is a great book. Read it.” ?Luis Clemens, Senior Editor, *Tell Me More*

“Syjuco's exceptional novel exceeds its heightened expectations, serving notice that a brilliant new talent has arrived, somehow fully formed.” ?Jared Bland, *The Walrus*

“Dazzling . . . It is a virtuoso display of imagination and wisdom, particularly remarkable from a 31-year-old author; a literary landmark for the Philippines and beyond.” ?Michele Leber, *Booklist* (starred review)

“This imaginative first novel shows considerable ingenuity in binding its divergent threads into a satisfying, meaningful story.” ?*Publishers Weekly* (starred review)

“Through his vivid use of language, Syjuco has crafted a beautiful work of historical fiction that's part mystery and part sociopolitical commentary. Readers who enjoyed Junot Díaz's *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao* will enjoy this literary gem.” ?*Library Journal* (starred review)

“An ambitious debut novel, winner of the Man Asian Literary Prize, introduces an author of limitless promise . . . It dazzles as brightly as Jonathan Safran Foer's *Everything Is Illuminated* . . . First novels rarely show such reach and depth.” ?*Kirkus Reviews* (starred review)

“Miguel Syjuco's dizzyingly energetic and inventive novel views his native Philippines with a merciless yet loving eye, its many voices a chorus illuminating the various facets of this chaotic, complicated country. An ambitious and admirable debut.” ?Janice Y. K. Lee, author of *The Piano Teacher*

“Vulnerable and mischievous, sophisticated and naïve, *Ilustrado* explores the paradoxes that come with the search for identity and throws readers into the fragile space between self-pursuit and self-destruction. A novel about country and self, youth and experience, it is elegiac, thoughtful, and original.” ?Colin McAdam, author of *Fall and Some Great Thing*

“From the ruckus of rumors, blogs, ambitions, overweening grandparents, indifferent history, and personal crimes, Miguel Syjuco has innovatively reimagined that most wonderfully old-fashioned consolation: literature. *Ilustrado* is a great novel.” ?Rivka Galchen, author of *Atmospheric Disturbances*

“Brilliantly conceived, and stylishly executed, [*Ilustrado*] covers a large and tumultuous historical period with seemingly effortless skill. It is also ceaselessly entertaining, frequently raunchy, and effervescent with humour.” ?2008 Man Asian Literary Prize Panel of Judges

“A daring literary performance.” ?Raymond Bonner, *The New York Times Book Review*

“Short, sharp and funny. . .” ?Joyce Hor-Chung Lau, *The New York Times*

“Winner of the 2008 Man Asian Literary Prize while still in manuscript form, *Ilustrado* is a hip and secure first novel about the urgency of art and regret. Confident and quirky, with passages that recall early Phillip Roth and a structure not unlike the best M. Night Shyamalan films, the book actively seeks to provoke its audience with bathroom humor and sexist stabs at superficial melodrama. Such scenes are bookended by passages of profundity that somehow manage to always say something about life as well as literature.”
?Roberto Ontiveros, *The Dallas Morning News*

“The book *Ilustrado* most recalls is Junot Diaz's *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao*. Though stylistically the two writers couldn't be further apart, the way Syjuco places his characters in the political pressure cooker of the Philippines's political history achieves the same disorienting mix of breadth and claustrophobia. The book picked up the Man Asian Literary Prize in 2008 and will likely be nominated on our shores, as well.” ?Jonathan Messinger, *Time Out Chicago*

“The thing about wildly inventive novels that play with form and voice and style is that they're often easier to praise than to read. Even the ones that feel like a rewarding accomplishment to finish can be tough sledding to get through. That's one reason why Miguel Syjuco's debut novel, “*Ilustrado*,” is so rare, rich and rewarding . . . Syjuco has talent and style to burn--he's a dynamic and funny writer who uses every tool at his disposal to create a narrative. The result is literary fiction that will keep you up all night thrilled, laughing, enthralled and amazed. Don't miss it.” ?David Daley, *The Courier-Journal*

“This is a big, bold, cunning, impassioned, plangent and very funny book. . . Although there are riotously satirical parts to this book, there is an emotional core as well: the comedy would lose its tang without the characters' blasted hopes and self-aware inadequacies. Like Steve Toltz's *A Fraction of the Whole*, another epic comedy from the southern hemisphere, it deftly negotiates between the absurd and the all-too-real, the cosmopolitan and the local, the nature of failure and celebrity.” ?Stuart Kelly, *Scotland on Sunday*

“Beyond *Ilustrado*'s furious skewering of Filipino elites is writing that bristles with surprising imagery. Life with a girlfriend, Miguel says, ‘was like walking naked around a cactus with your eyes closed.’ Miguel notices how an old woman's skin ‘sags on her as if she were a child wearing her father's sweater.’ An unruly and energizing novel, filled with symmetries and echoes that only become apparent in its closing pages, *Ilustrado* pushes readers into considering matters of authenticity, identity and belonging. Despite its various comic turns, it is ultimately a tragedy--a raw reminder of the fact that we can never, really, find our way back home.” ?Financial Times

“*Ilustrado* is built like a carousel, revolving between first- and third-person commentary, news reports, interviews, extracts from Salvador's work and a Crispin Salvador biography the narrator is writing. Nonetheless it is all held tightly together, focused on the returning son's difficulties with his family and his efforts to acclimatize. Manila is conjured as a dystopian black hole. Civil unrest crackles at the edge of the narrator's vision as he explores the metropolis, reaching critical mass when a typhoon hits the city near the novel's climax.” ?Times Literary Supplement

About the Author

Miguel Syjuco received the 2008 Man Asian Literary Prize and the Philippines' highest literary honor, the Palanca Award, for the unpublished manuscript of *Ilustrado*. Born and raised in Manila, he currently lives in Montreal.

Book fans, when you need a brand-new book to check out, discover the book ***Ilustrado: A Novel By Miguel Syjuco*** here. Never stress not to discover just what you need. Is the *Ilustrado: A Novel By Miguel Syjuco*

your needed book now? That's true; you are really a great reader. This is a best book *Ilustrado: A Novel* By Miguel Syjuco that comes from terrific author to show you. *Guide Ilustrado: A Novel* By Miguel Syjuco supplies the best encounter and also lesson to take, not only take, yet also learn.