

UPCOMING EVENTS

NOTE: NO THURSDAY MEETINGS IN JUNE, JULY, OR AUGUST. The Thursday planning meetings will resume after summer break on September 28.

Tuesday, August 8, 7:30–9:00 PM. *Letter writing meeting* at Caltech Athenaeum, corner of Hill and California in Pasadena. In the summer we meet outdoors at the "Rath al Fresco," on the lawn next to the building. This informal gathering is a great way for newcomers to get acquainted with Amnesty.

Sunday, August 20, 6:30 PM. *Rights Readers Human Rights Book Discussion Group.* This month we read a mystery set in the Philippines, "*Smaller and Smaller Circles*" by **F. H. Batacan.**

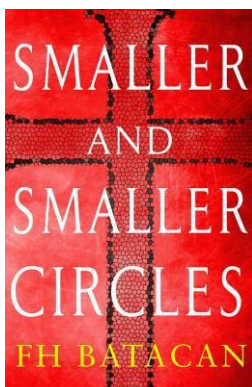
COORDINATOR'S CORNER

Hi everyone

We were saddened to hear that Chinese democracy activist, Liu Xiabo, who was only 61, passed away from liver cancer on July 13. Who knows if he would have survived had he been allowed to receive medical treatment abroad while he was imprisoned. He was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in 2010, but wasn't allowed to leave China to attend the ceremony - an empty chair represented him.

His wife, Liu Xia, is under house arrest in China (see action in newsletter regarding her). Please read the New York Times article in this newsletter to learn more about his life and death. Vigils were held in Hong Kong, Los Angeles and other places. Group 22 member Stevi attended and took photos at the LA memorial.

Con Cariño, Kathy



Next Rights Readers Meeting

**Sunday, August 20,
6:30 PM**

**Vroman's Bookstore
695 E Colorado Blvd.
Pasadena**

***Smaller and Smaller
Circles***

by F.H. Batacan

BOOK REVIEW

By J. Daniel Elam,

Aug 18, 2015, L.A. Review of Books.

<https://lareviewofbooks.org/article/too-much-light/>

Smaller and Smaller Circles

By F.H. Batacan

WHEN F.H. BATACAN'S *Smaller and Smaller Circles* was first published in the Philippines in 1999, it was heralded as inaugurating a new genre in Filipino literature — one that, sixteen years later, appears to be as large in Manila as it is in the United States. Batacan had allegedly written the first "Western-style" crime novel in the Philippines. The belatedness of the country's entrée into the genre was diagnosed in the book itself. Early in the novel, the protagonist detective receives an admonition from police generals: "You've been watching too many foreign movies, Father Saenz; there are no serial killers in the Philippines." This sentence was longer in the original 1999 Philippine version than in the 2015 US version and ends: "and if there were, they would be white males in their thirties." Serial killers, according to popular belief, could not exist in the Philippines. (There are a number of articles online, as recent as 2013, with titles like "8 Reasons Why There are no Serial Killers in the Philippines," that argue these points in exhaustive detail.) In a culture with too many gossips and too much family time, how could anyone find the time to meticulously kill multiple people without being caught?

Serial killers, though, don't make themselves. Serial killings without a robust investigative agency — or a dedicated rogue detective — are just individual crimes. The Philippine National Bureau of Investigation's notorious inefficiency and the chronic underfunding of police forces around the country mean that there are no resources to link any one individual crime to another. Due to the mere fact of bookkeeping, the Philippines have murderers, but rarely multiple offenders. Batacan herself worked in the intelligence community in Manila and has suggested in interviews that her frustration with bureaucracy eventually produced the 1999 novel. Father Gus Saenz, the rogue detective at the center of the novel's investigation, is stifled by police corruption, intelligence bureaucracy, and a perpetual lack of resources.

It's difficult to disentangle these elements from the standard legacy of Raymond Chandler — working around or against the system — but Filipino critics have praised the novel's uniquely Filipino sensibility. Where Chandler's Los Angeles was an endless stretch of amorality, *Smaller and Smaller Circles* takes place in an urban society saturated in Catholicism. Saenz is a Catholic priest whose side project is an ongoing investigation into child abuse in the Catholic Church. Unsurprisingly, a Catholic infrastructure similar to the National Bureau of

Investigation exists to shunt, silence, and dismiss Saenz's investigations. Saenz's double-duty intersects: by day, he investigates a serial killer of small teenage boys; by night, he continues to press at an abusive priest in power. Fighting the state and the church at once means Saenz and his obedient protégé Jerome Lucero are, for the most part, on their own.

Smaller and Smaller Circles takes place in Payatas, a massive landfill northeast of Quezon City, which lies northeast in the sprawling Metro Manila. Today, like in 1999, the landfill is home to a significant number of people whose livelihoods depend on sorting the city's refuse into increasingly unusable bits. In 2000, a landslide of trash killed up to 1,000 people. Payatas is part of the "Planet of Slums" geographer Mike Davis traced in 2007, and it is firmly within a geography of landfills that dot South and East Asia. These landfills process not only the waste of the cities they border on, but they also serve as the location of outsourced waste management from the United States and other countries wealthy enough to export their trash. Life in and around these dumpsites is Hobbesian — poor, nasty, brutish, and short — but actually sanctioned by a global social contract that has guaranteed protection against such conditions by pushing them onto a population that has been almost entirely ignored. The victims in *Smaller and Smaller Circles* are malnourished preteen boys from Payatas; their individual deaths, let alone serial deaths, would have likely gone unnoticed by police were it not for Saenz and Lucero, who apply scientific police procedure and theological Catholic compassion in equal measure in their hunt for the killer.

The Church and the police make a great pair, Michel Foucault reminds us, and they make a particularly great pair for the sake of the crime novel. The success of *Smaller and Smaller Circles* is its adept negotiation of Catholicism and institutional forensics, which intersect in the Philippines in actual ways, rather than the theoretical ways they do in the United States. But the Catholic Church and the police share more than crippling bureaucracy and corruption. They are also the shared inventors and tinkerers of a long-lived genre that Batacan cashes in on: the confession. The literary genre of confession emerges at the intersection of police interrogation and Catholic purging of guilt, and holds dear its investments in truth-telling and the transparency of the subject.

Thus in an exciting twist, Batacan opens the novel on the confession of the serial killer. True to the crime genre, the killer remains unidentified until much later, and yet these revelations are scattered throughout the otherwise procedural plot. (In a somewhat ham-handed decision, the Soho Crime edition layout features these confessions in circles that grow smaller as the detectives grow closer.) It is one thing to know at the beginning that there is a serial killer lurking in the pages of crime novels; it is another to have him confess before we know his crimes.

The killer comes from similar dumpsite conditions as his victims. Saenz and Lucero, whose lives are hardly luxurious but relatively comfortable, express only sympathy with him — perhaps a theological twist on the Chandler-esque empathetic relationship that Marlowe and his criminals share. Saenz and Lucero save their true disgust and disdain for Manila's faux-philanthropic elite and self-serving bureaucrats, who thwart their efforts to find the serial killer. In a fairly exhausted plot device — but one that would have likely aligned well with scandals in the Catholic Church in the late 1990s — the serial killer's motives are rooted in the psychological damage caused by a pedophilic male school teacher. This is offered as the explanation for why the killer carefully removes boys' genitals after killing them. It strikes me as a somewhat cheap if not vaguely homophobic explanation, but it causes Lucero to have a nightmare of his own boyhood; when Saenz finally catches the killer, his first response is to forgive him.

One of the most common justifications for the belief that there are no serial killers in the Philippines is that family life dominates the social world, which splits into two related explanations: first, that no one could find enough time to come up with a repeatable, meticulous way of killing a person; second, that no one in tight-knit families could develop the sociopathy conducive for cold-hearted murder. (The famous Filipino serial killer who murdered Gianni Versace in 1997, Andrew Cunanan, was — according to common argument — a result of his being born in California instead of Manila.)

Without completely collapsing into cultural essentialism, there's something compelling about this line of thought. There are surely serial killers in the Philippines. But the social connections in Filipino life make detectives' work look a lot different. Naomi Hirahara, the Los Angeles-based crime novelist, has made a similar argument as a critique of Raymond Chandler. How does Chandler's Philip Marlowe, she wonders, not bear "the weight of family or community"? In ways similar to Hirahara's protagonists, Batacan's Saenz and Lucero are simultaneously rebels against the system and also fully enmeshed in their family and community. Even the serial killer has a family whom he calls semi-regularly. Batacan offers us the hard-boiled detective and the loner murderer, but without the cynical isolation of Chandler.

Despite early critics' celebration of the book as the "first Filipino crime novel," there is something inextricably American about the type of crime novel *Smaller and Smaller Circles* is, too. "Hybridity" is an easy term to apply here: it is both LA-noir-but-not-quite and Filipino-but-not-quite. Although Americans have been slow to fully account for the implications of the charge, the Philippines is certainly a postcolonial nation from the still very extant American Empire, and it remains the center of American imperial desires in the Pacific Ocean.

Smaller and Smaller Circles emerges from the particularly American genre of crime and noir because the Philippines emerged from the particularly American style of imperial control.

One of the reasons that the “first Filipino crime novel” emerged as late as 1999 — making it seem like a fairly belated response to its American counterpart — is that the American dominance of the Filipino literary market meant that most Filipino publishing houses focused on textbooks and instructional manuals. This left very little room for either Filipino prestige or pulp genres to flourish and likely quashed literary output on the islands for most of the 20th century. This was one of the issues Jessica Hagedorn challenged in the early 1990s with *Charlie Chan is Dead*, a book that remains one of the most important collections in Asian American and American Pacific Empire writing. If *Smaller and Smaller Circles* is “Filipino” in some essential way, it is because it marks the Philippines on the traditionally exclusionary map of the world republic of letters, even if it does so by way of an American pulp genre.

The first edition, published by the University of the Philippines Press, won the Philippine National Book Award, the Carlos Palanca Memorial Awards, and the Madrigal-Gonzalez Best First Book Award. These are surprising awards for a novel in a genre not generally affiliated with prestige — indeed, one that more often than not shirks the confines of literary prestige. There was clearly popular and critical demand for an American-style Filipino crime novel. For her American debut, with Soho Press, Batacan expanded the novel from 155 pages to 355, an extension that helps draw out the tension of the hunt and slow down the increasingly smaller circles that Saenz and Lucero trace around their suspect. The 2015 edition retains the taut pacing of the 1999 edition, but expands the social world of the novel to give the reader a sense of the wide range of Manila denizens, from aggressive investigative journalists to cocktail party elites, from dedicated secretaries to well-meaning health workers in Payatas.

One of the more curious justifications given to prove the Philippines has no serial killers is that there is too much sunlight: not only is everything transparent, but everyone is too busy enjoying the weather. In contrast, everything in *Smaller and Smaller Circles* feels claustrophobic, opaque, and dark. Saenz and Lucero, in response, attempt to shine light on corruption and crime. Batacan, similarly, has turned our attention to the shady underbelly of Metro Manila, where the sun only helps increase the stench of trash.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Maria Felisa H. Batacan is a Filipino journalist and a writer of crime and mystery fiction. Her work has been published in the Philippines and abroad under the name F.H. Batacan.



She was a fellow at the 1996 Dumaguete National Writers' Workshop. Batacan worked in the Philippine intelligence community and then became a broadcast journalist. She attended the University of the Philippines, where she pursued a master's degree in Arts Studies. In 1999 her manuscript, *Smaller and Smaller Circles*, won the Don Carlos Palanca Memorial Awards for Literature Grand Prize for the English Novel. This novel was published in 2002 by the University of the Philippines Press. Although most Filipino English-language fiction works garner a single print run of only 1,000 copies, *Smaller and Smaller Circles* had been reprinted four times by the year 2006, for a total of 6,000 copies. The novel was one of the first Filipino works of crime fiction.

DEATH PENALTY NEWS

By Stevi Carroll

William Morva

Despite numerous requests from individuals, the European Union, and even Rachel Sutphin, the daughter of one of the victims, Eric Sutphin, Governor Terry McAuliffe declined to halt William Morva's execution.

The main reason many people believed Mr. Morva should not have been executed was because his delusional mental state was not fully disclosed to the jury during his trial. Examples of his delusional behavior included odd eating habits, showing up at his father's funeral barefoot, and being found half naked on the floor of a campus bathroom. The latter caused him to be banned from the school. The changes in his behavior started in late adolescence, which is often when the signs of schizophrenia begin to appear. He was diagnosed with a delusional disorder that is a more severe mental illness than schizophrenia.

The question, of course, is was justice served with the execution of William Morva?

Decline of the Death Penalty

Often times when I think of the death penalty and especially death sentences that are carried out, I think of the southeastern part of the United States. What's happening in South Carolina contradicts my notion.

William Henry Bell was convicted and sentenced to die for the 1989 murder of an elementary school principal. After 30 years, his death sentence has been reversed because of his intellectual disability. Because the state's attorney general lacks the grounds

to appeal the court's decision, Mr. Bell faces resentencing with life without parole as his maximum penalty.

South Carolina's last execution was in 2011 and only one person has been sentenced to death since then. One of Mr. Bell's lawyers said, "It is increasingly hard to justify retaining the death penalty in South Carolina. Prosecutors rarely seek it, juries more rarely impose it, and even when the rare individual is sentenced to death, the odds are that the defendant will not be executed. We can no longer afford the financial and social costs of such a broken system."

Perhaps this is a wisdom the people and governments of all 50 states could come to understand.

Ohio

After not executing anyone for more than three years, Governor John Kasich is ready to begin again. What caused the delay was the drug protocol used in the executions. The executioners in Ohio will again use midazolam. The US Supreme Court ruled that "midazolam was constitutional because it likely did not induce pain that rose to the level of "cruel and unusual punishment."

Ohio's first execution is set for July 26, 2017, when Ronald Phillips is scheduled to die.

To see a list of the upcoming executions in Ohio through the Spring of 2018, go to <http://kasich-updates-execution-schedule-5-1-17.aspx>

Kevin Cooper

I'd never heard of Kevin Cooper until I read Nicholas Kristof's June 17, 2017, column, "On Death Row, but Is He Innocent?"

Kevin Cooper sits on death row in San Quentin. He is convicted of murdering most of a family and a family friend in 1983.

The DNA proof used to convict him came from a shirt that was found to have his blood on it. One problem with this blood sample is that it also contained test tube preservative. The blood probably came from the blood that was drawn from Mr. Cooper and kept after he was arrested. Additionally, when the test tube was examined, blood from two other people was also found. The police perhaps topped off the test tube to hide what they had done.

And there is more. One of the victims, 10-year-old Jessica Ryan, died with a clump of light hair in her hands. Her brother, Joshua, who survived told investigators the attackers were three or four white men. Kevin Cooper is black.

But there is more. At the time of the murders, a woman told police her housemate, a convicted murderer, came home wearing bloody overalls, overalls the woman gave to the police who threw them away. The man had a tool chest that was missing a hatchet like the one used in the murders

Mr. Cooper walked away from a minimum-security prison where he was serving time for a burglary. A court thought that Mr. Cooper killed these people to steal their station wagon that had been parked outside their home with the keys in it. When the car was found, there was evidence that three people in bloody clothing had been riding in the vehicle.

When the case was brought to then Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger, he refused to act. Unfortunately, state Attorney General Kamala Harris was also unhelpful. Presently, Governor Jerry Brown is reviewing the case - with little interest.

Mr. Cooper's lawyers are not, at this time, asking for him to be pardoned, but rather to find out if he's innocent. There is new DNA testing that has never been done that the pro bono lawyers are willing to pay for, but the government will not allow the testing.

If you are so moved, please contact Governor Jerry Brown.

Governor Jerry Brown
c/o State Capitol, Suite 1173
Sacramento, CA 95814
(a reply may take up to 90 days)
Phone: (916) 445-2841
Fax: (916) 558-3160
email:

<https://govapps.gov.ca.gov/gov39mail/index.php>

Recent Exonerations

Shaurn Thomas - State: PA - Date of Exoneration: 6/13/2017

In 1995, Shaurn Thomas was sentenced to life in prison for participating in a murder and robbery in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania that occurred five years earlier when he was 16. He was exonerated in 2017 after a co-defendant admitted that he falsely implicated him, and the prosecution concluded that Thomas was elsewhere at the time of the crime.

Ledura Watkins - State: MI - Date of Exoneration: 6/15/2017

In 1976, Ledura Watkins was sentenced to life in prison for murder. He was exonerated in 2017--40 years and nine months after his conviction--because the hair analysis in the case was flawed and the only witness against him recanted.

DeMarlo Berry - State: NV - Date of Exoneration: 6/28/2017

In 1995, DeMarlo Berry was sentenced to life in prison for murdering the manager of a Las Vegas fast-food restaurant during a robbery. He was exonerated in 2017, after the real killer confessed to the crime and a jailhouse informant admitted he falsely testified that Berry confessed to the crime.

Stays of Execution

July
19 Mark Pickens OH

Stay granted by Ohio Supreme Court until exhaustion of all state post-conviction proceedings.

19 Kosoul Chanthakoummane TX
Stay granted by Texas Court of Criminal Appeals on June 7, 2017, to review claims of discredited forensic science.

26 Robert Van Hook OH
Rescheduled for November 15, 2017 by Gov. John Kasich on February 10, 2017.*

26 Raymond Tibbetts OH
Rescheduled for October 18, 2017 by Gov. John Kasich on May 1, 2017.**

Execution

July

6 William Morva VA
Lethal Injection 3-drug (midazolam)

*On February 10, 2017 Governor John R. Kasich issued a statement revising the schedule for eight upcoming executions. This revised schedule is in response to the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Sixth Circuit’s denial of a motion to stay enforcement, pending appeal, of a federal magistrate judge’s order declaring Ohio’s execution procedures unconstitutional.

** On May 1, 2017 Governor Kasich issued another statement revising the schedule for nine upcoming executions. This revised schedule was in response to the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Sixth Circuit’s order setting a briefing schedule for the Court’s *en banc* rehearing of the state’s appeal of a federal magistrate judge’s order issuing a preliminary injunction barring Ohio from carrying out 3-drug executions using midazolam or any execution using a paralytic agent or potassium chloride.

Liu Xiaobo
Submitted by Joyce Wolf

Amnesty International Press Release, 13 July 2017.

Responding to the news that Nobel Peace Prize Winner Liu Xiaobo has passed away, Salil Shetty, Secretary General of Amnesty International commented:

“Today we grieve the loss of a giant of human rights. Liu Xiaobo was a man of fierce intellect, principle, wit and above all humanity.

“For decades, he fought tirelessly to advance human rights and fundamental freedoms in China. He did so in the face of the most relentless and often brutal opposition from the Chinese government. Time and again they tried to silence him, and time and again they failed. Despite enduring years of persecution,

suppression and imprisonment, Liu Xiaobo continued to fight for his convictions.

“Although he has passed, everything he stood for still endures. The greatest tribute we can now pay him is to continue the struggle for human rights in China and recognize the powerful legacy he leaves behind. Thanks to Liu Xiaobo, millions of people in China and across the world have been inspired to stand up for freedom and justice in the face of oppression.

“We stand in solidarity with his wife Liu Xia and other members of his family, who have suffered an immeasurable loss. We must do all we can to end Liu Xia’s illegal house arrest and surveillance and ensure that she is no longer persecuted by the authorities.”

Amnesty petition to free Liu Xia

<https://www.amnesty.org/en/get-involved/take-action/china-free-liu-xia/>

Memorial at LA City Hall

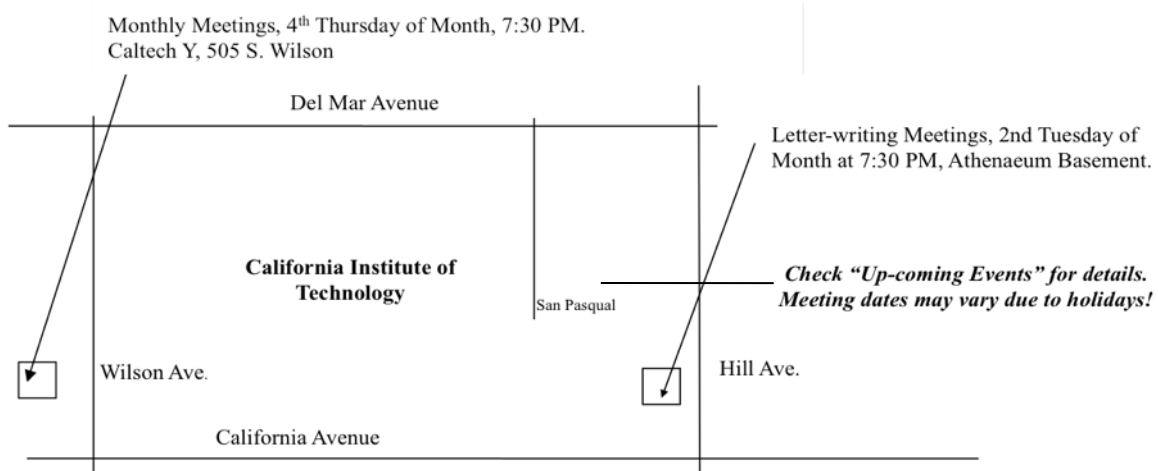
Group 22 member Stevi attended the memorial for Liu Xiaobo at Los Angeles City Hall on July 13. See more photos here:

<https://www.facebook.com/stevi.carroll/posts/1809606595721355>



Photo by Stevi Carroll.

GROUP 22 JULY LETTER COUNT	
Urgent Actions	28
POC	7
Total	35



From the 210 exit on Lake Avenue, head south, turn left on Del Mar
 From the 110 continue on Arroyo Parkway north, turn right on California
 Street parking is generally available.

Amnesty International Group 22
 The Caltech Y
 Mail Code C1-128
 Pasadena, CA 91125
www.its.caltech.edu/~aigp22/
<http://rightsreaders.blogspot.com>



Amnesty International's mission is to undertake research and action focused on preventing and ending grave abuses of the rights to physical and mental integrity, freedom of conscience and expression, and freedom from discrimination, within the context of its work to promote all human rights.