



Cecilia Manguerra Brainard

Biography

Born in 1947, Cecilia Manguerra Brainard grew up in Cebu City, on the island of Cebu in the Central Philippines. In an interview with Dana Huebler, she describes her childhood as “paradise” (98). She lived with her family in a Spanish-style villa, tended by servants and surrounded by gardens containing orchids, star apple trees, jasmine, and frangipani. This city appears in her short stories and novel as Ubec (Cebu spelled backwards). Her idyllic childhood is associated with her father, an engineer who was already in his 50s when Cecilia, the youngest of four children, was born. When she was nine, her father, and she thus lost the stabilizing influence of her family. One way she coped with the loss was writing a diary, which later evolved into a journal. She attended Maryknoll College in Quezon City from 1964 to 1968, where she received a BA in Communication Arts.

In 1969, Brainard immigrated to the United States to study film at UCLA graduate school. Like many Filipinos at this time, Brainard emigrated to flee the dictatorship of Ferdinand Marcos. She reestablished her friendship with Lauren Brainard, whom she had met in the Philippines when he was serving in the Peace Corps. They eventually married and settled in Santa Monica where they had three boys-- Christopher, Alexander, and Andrew. From 1969 to 1981, she worked as a documentary scriptwriter and as a fund-raiser for a non-profit organization. In 1981, when she was pregnant with her third child, she took writing classes and began a serious career in writing.

Quick Facts

- * Born in 1947
- * Raised on the island of Cebu, in the Philippines
- * First novel published was *When the Rainbow Goddess Wept*

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Brainard wrote a bi-monthly column, “Filipina American Perspective,” for the *Philippine American News* (a now-defunct newspaper published in Los Angeles) from 1982 to 1988. This column gave her the opportunity and stimulus to explore ideas about living in the U.S. as a Filipina, and jogged her memories about growing up in the Philippines. The essays have been collected and published as *Philippine Woman in America*. At the same time, she started publishing short stories and essays in various magazines and journals, first in the Philippines and subsequently in America. Her works can be found in periodicals such as *Focus Philippines*, *Philippine Graphic*, *Mr. and Mr. Magazine*, *Katipunan*, *Amerasia Journal*, *Bamboo Ridge Journal*, *The California Examiner*, and others. Her stories have been included in anthologies, such as *Making Waves* (1989), *Forbidden Fruit* (1992), *Songs of Ourselves* (1994), and *On a Bed of Rice* (1995).

In 1989, Brainard was awarded a California Arts Council Artists’ Fellowship in Fiction. She won the Fortner Prize in 1985 and the Honorable Mention Award of the Philippine Arts, Letters, and Media Council in 1989 for her stories. She was recognized by the Los Angeles Board of Education in a Special Recognition Award in 1991, and she received the Outstanding Individual Award from the City of Cebu in 1997. Brainard was a founding member and past officer of PAWWA (Philippine American Women Writers and Artists). She is a member of Pen America and teaches creative writing at UCLA Extension.

What makes the fiction of Cecilia Manguerra Brainard interesting is her creative use of Filipino legends and her rewriting and revisiting of Philippine history. In her short stories and in her first novel, *Song of Yvonne*, which was republished in the United States as *When the Rainbow Goddess Wept*, Brainard integrates the folktales, native traditions, and superstitions which she had heard and seen as a child into twentieth-century settings and contemporary characters. She is concerned with what postmodernist call historiography, or the ways in which narrative form, strategies of representation, and point of view influence history. In her fiction, as well as in her essays, Brainard attempts to find a distinctive voice and style as a Filipina living in America through her handling of these elements.



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Brainard says that her novel is her “way of documenting the triumph of the Filipino spirit over foreign oppression” (*Yvonne* 3). She wishes to record the “collective wounding that Filipinos experienced” in the Second World War (3); she gives vignettes of Japanese cruelties, such as the rape and mutilation of a nurse, the killing of Doc Mendez’s family, the massacre of entire towns, and the bayonet beating and killing of prisoners. As Leonard Casper notes, “Brainard prevents the novel from descending into either melodrama or polemic by maintaining young Yvonne as her singular narrator throughout” (252). Yvonne tells her version of the events, and “her share of . . . pain is naturally scaled down” (Casper 252). Eventually Yvonne takes over the role of epic singer. Her stories and singing become the means by which the nation and tribe recover. As an author, editor, and teacher, Brainard is like the epic storyteller in her novel: she promotes Filipino American writers and Filipino American literature so that other readers may learn, recover, and remember.

Selected Bibliography

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Song of Yvonne (New Day Publishers, 1991)

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