



The Umbrella Country

Bino A. Realuyo

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"Certain things are better kept than said. . . .
But certain things you have to find out now. . . ."

On the tumultuous streets of Manila, where the earth is as brown as a tamarind leaf and the pungent smells of vinegar and mashed peppers fill the air, where seasons shift between scorching sun and torrential rain, eleven-year-old Gringo strives to make sense of his family and a world that is growing increasingly harsher before his young eyes.

There is Gringo's older brother, Pipo, wise beyond his years, a flamboyant, defiant youth and the three-time winner of the sequined Miss Unibers contest; Daddy Groovie, whiling away his days with other hang-about men, out of work and wilting like a guava, clinging to the hope of someday joining his sister in Nuyork; Gringo's mother, Estrella, moving through their ramshackle home, holding her emotions tight as a fist, which she often clenches in anger after curfew covers the neighborhood in a burst of dark; and Ninang Rola, wise godmother of words, who confides in Gringo a shocking secret from the past--and sets the stage for the profound events to come, in which no one will remain untouched by the jagged pieces of a shattered dream.

As Gringo learns; shame is passed down through generations, but so is the life-changing power of blood ties and enduring love.

In this lush, richly poetic novel of grinding hardship and resilient triumph, of selfless sacrifice and searing revelation, Bino A. Realuyo brings the teeming world of 1970s Manila brilliantly to life. While mapping a young boy's awakening to adulthood in dazzling often unexpected ways, The Umbrella Country subtly works sweet magic.

The Umbrella Country Details

Date : Published March 2nd 1999 by Ballantine Books (first published 1999)

ISBN : 9780345428882

Author : Bino A. Realuyo

Format : Paperback 320 pages

Genre : Fiction

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From Reader Review The Umbrella Country for online ebook

Vincent says

What sticks out most in my mind about Bino Realuyo's *The Umbrella Country* is that somewhere towards the end of the book, after page 200, there is this incredible "boy cabal." It was like a scene out of William S. Burroughs' *The Wild Boys*. The bloody murder that followed shortly after made it even more Burroughsesque.

However, the book is far from Burroughsesque. Where Burroughs adopts a persona of observer/agent/reporter, Bino is much more lyrical(?)/dreamy. What stuck for me about Bino's book is how he poetic writing effectively conveys such brutal scenes. His word choices are engaging and effective in creating an atmosphere of innocence in the face of great pain and violence.

I should say now that I know Bino from my early days at the Asian American Writer's Workshop. That was over a decade ago! I had the pleasure of seeing Bino and Ed Lin again at a book launch for Ed's new book, *This is a Bust*. It was great to see them and I am really relishing catching up on their writing again.

Autumn says

very intense!

Kim says

it was similar to the kite runner I think but was good

Alessia says

Dear reader: Get ready for a rant....cuz this is gonna be good! (AND THERE WILL BE SPOILERS, but this book is shit so honestly I see no point in recommending anybody further to actually pick it up and read it)

Right on the back of this book it says that Gringo (the main character) uncovers a dark secret from his family's past...and that secret turns out to be that his older brother was conceived out of wedlock from a one night stand....wtf am I reading here? Am I reading a book or watching a shitty reality TV movie on the lifetime network?? And of course ppl are gonna say that it brings shame on the family....yeah do you know HOW many books I have read about Asian migration or Asian family lifestyles and how babies or sex out of wedlock brings shame on the family!? (I can count that number on both my hands and feet, and at least the hands and feet of 15 other people) I'm sorry but I am SICK of the big reveals in these books all being the same and that this baby out of wedlock is the source of all the problems in the book. It's overdone, unoriginal, and frankly doesn't interest me anymore. When I read "discovers a huge secret" I expect the secret to be shocking, and not something that I have read about in about 60+ books previously.

Following up on that last statement, the mom makes it very clear that she never asked to have the children and therefore doesn't really care for them like a mother should and pretty much neglects them throughout the book, even going so far as to send them away to live in America BY THEMSELVES....so she pretty much abandons them because she thinks they will be better off without her....Do you know how many plots start off that way!? Kids are NEVER better off without their parents and it only leaves years of resentment towards the parents and usually directly resulting in children never taking care of their parents when they get older as a result. If anything, (and I can attest to this) I know a book like this will never have a sequel, but in a sequel, the children will grow to resent and hate the mother because she left them, and they won't come back to the Philippines all "Oh yes you were right mother! That WAS the correct path for us!" No you dumb ass fuck! I know what it is like to be neglected as a kid, and actions like this do NOTHING to help children. It only alienates them further.

Finally, the elephant in the room, and the thing that infuriated me even further, what is it with all these books I have been reading recently and their overt hatred towards gay characters? In this book, the only openly gay boy Boy Manicure is violently murdered and has his hands cut from the wrists, and when anybody mentions him afterwards it is seen as a "sin to mention the dead". In another book I read, a gay couple is violently murdered after their place is robbed, and then they are just forgotten almost if they never existed and weren't important.....I'M SORRY!? Did I miss something here? What the fuck is everyone's problem with gay people?? I have read so many books that treat gay characters as people with rights and feelings, but for some reasons all the books recently I have been reading by Asian authors all include violent acts against gay individuals for no other reason than them being gay. It's almost as if all these Asian authors are just admitting that they themselves have an issue with gay people and therefore see no issue with putting such scenes in their novels.....yeah go fuck yourself.

And I am not religious at all, but the characters in this book blaming Boy Manicure being gay for the reasons he died is the dumbest shit I have ever heard before. It's apparently a "sin" and "against god's wishes" for the existence of Gay people, so of course they are all getting what is coming to them.....uuuhhh whut the fuck did I just read!? Why can't all these religious folks accept that the problem here isn't with Boy Manicure coming to terms with who he is and choosing how he wants to live his life, but instead see that the real problem is their own fucked up ideals!? I swear to fucking god this shit pisses me off to high hell and I can't even begin to say how much of a problem I had with this book.

1 star. That's it! Goodbye I can't talk about this fucking piece of shit anymore

Michael Nelmida says

It started boring but the last few chapters are surprising.

K.D. Absolutely says

I saw a copy of this yesterday in the Manila International Book Fair. I remembered that I read this a many years back prior to joining Goodreads in 2008.

This is about an 11-year old boy who grew up in slums of Manila during the 70s then migrated to the US. It is a poignant coming-of-age novel that reminded me of *Kite Runner*. The only differences are: that there are

no kite flying scenes here, the boy here is a homo and there is no real war in Manila except the opressions of the lower class due to Martial Law.

However, what fascinated me about this novel was that this was the first ever novel I read which was written in English by a Filipino-American writer.

Neil says

I would always remember that this book actually made me cry while I was riding the LRT.

This book has been written perhaps haphazardly because of its weak presentation of events and underdeveloped characters. The story itself is fine, but it is the writing that actually digresses the plot. But nonetheless, this would stay as one of those books I would always remember and reread.

This book tends to be "canonized" as gay literature but I would like to argue it is more fitting to be "young adult" for the reasons of identity crisis, social experimentation, and the obvious portrayal of maturation in the web of social realities. It is grounded contextually in the imperial reign of the Marcoses where poverty made itself as a rampant figure of oppression and where the American dream is very visible as a construing element of the greener pastures. I loved how American brands were "Tagalized" which made me resort to Google to know certain unfamiliar terms. Also, there is a lot of metaphors and images presented, as well as memorable quotes that are really lovely.

Also, this tends to be an Asian-American literature! And I loved how it used the avenue or Queens, "Nuyork" which is the Filipino area according to a lovely Asian-Am friend, Angela :-)

Overall, this is an interesting read! i recommend greatly :-)

Rannie says

This book of working class Manila focuses on the propagation of hardheartedness from the state enforcing martial law, to the tolerance of bullying, to the date rape of a beauty queen, to cruelty by parents in denying the husband his birthright when he married below his class, to beatings of sons the fathers feared were homosexual, to the mother's emotional distance from her sons, to the seduction and rape of children, to the tacit acceptance of violence behind closed doors by neighbors who routinely ignored screams. Bring in sexual awakening by a young Peter Pan figure, in the person of an orphaned newspaper boy who leads our young hero to the enchanted world of loving homosexuality at the cave. Strengthened and warmed by this encounter, Gringo is able to protect his brother Pipo and to take charge when their mother abandons them to their violent father.

Tess says

WOW! I know life in many parts of Philippines was tough and difficult to accept it exists. This book shows a boy's life in a very tough part of the country and living through its harshness is absolutely intense!

Janet says

brilliant

read this

Kim at Divergent Gryffindor says

Interesting, although some parts are a bit ambiguous and vague.

!Tæmbu?u says

KOBOBOOKS
