



Abstract

Ferdinand Marcos Sr. employed ghostwriters to write the books that he “authored”—ranging from political tracts to the *Tadhana* history volumes—a “secret” known even when he was in power, at the very least by some members of the local intelligentsia. There is a tendency in scholarship on this subject to emphasize how such works were meant to nourish the notion of Marcos’s indispensability or to reify the metonymic relationship between Marcos (as “nation-builder”) and the nation—which assumes that a reading public, level of education notwithstanding, was at least imagined by the state to engage with “Marcos’s” writings and that the (open) secrets behind Marcos’s intellectual prowess were unknown at least to potential recruits to the bureaucracy or even would-be political rivals.

A few works have chosen instead to look into the various ways that the effort became remunerative to Marcos’s thinkers-for-hire—such as Adrian Cristobal and the spouses Juan Tuvera and Kerima Polotan—which do hint at how the resource-wasting “Marcosiana” industry was sustained. This paper attempts to contribute more to the latter stream: based, among others, on recently accessible archival sources and published personal accounts, what identifiable state resources were utilized to maintain the facade of Marcos’s genius? What concessions did the writers who contributed to and condoned the production of Marcosiana—some of whom even believed that they were actually directing Marcos or his powerful wife Imelda—(try to) exact from Marcos Sr.?

Furthermore, the paper tries to argue that the work of Marcos Sr.’s “creative collaborators” significantly contributed to the development of the sort of hyper-presidentialism still embedded in Philippine political practice: a popular but incorrect understanding of the limits of presidential prerogatives, maintained by a sycophantic state propaganda machine.

Keywords

Ferdinand
E. Marcos,
Adrian
Cristobal,
Juan Tuvera,
Kerima
Polotan

“CREATIVE COLLABORATION” WITH FERDINAND E. MARCOS SR.

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Introduction

AMONG THE DIGITIZED files of the Presidential Commission on Good Government (PCGG) is a curious document titled “A Political Autobiography,” signed by esteemed writer Adrian E. Cristobal.¹ Riddled with erasures and seemingly typed up in haste, the ten-page document takes a reader through a few key events in Cristobal’s life up to September 27, 1972, a few days after President Ferdinand E. Marcos Sr. placed the entire Philippines under martial law, setting up an almost fourteen-year-long dictatorship.

In the document, Cristobal said that he was considered rebellious even in high school, but, contrary to his reputation, he was supposedly never partial to Marxism, only immersing himself “in all available Marxist literature” for work purposes.² He was repeatedly drafted to participate in presidential campaigns of the Nacionalista Party (NP). Back in the 1950s, as someone “attached” to the Executive Planning Group of the Magsaysay-for-President Movement, he worked with Blas Ople, then a well-known journalist and public relations practitioner.³ Cristobal claimed that because of his youth (he was barely out of his teens), unlike his older colleagues, he was not appointed to any position under President Ramon Magsaysay, save for a brief stint at the Philippine Information Agency⁴ (ibid.).

Cristobal became increasingly renowned for his literary and journalistic work, becoming associated with the Ravens, the University of the Philippines (UP)-based literary group. When Magsaysay died prior to completing his only term as president, Cristobal once more worked with the NP as a member of the Garcia-for-President Movement. According to the “Political Biography,” Ople then drafted him to organize the National Progress Movement to support then President Carlos P. Garcia. Cristobal claimed that he wrote “nearly all of the text of the [Movement’s] Nationalist Manifesto,” thus becoming one of the rationalizers of the Filipino First policy.⁵ With his brother Rene, he also wrote *Filipino First: An Approach to the “Filipino First” Policy and Selected Readings* in time for the 1961 elections, in which Garcia failed to be reelected. With malfeasance characterizing the Garcia administration, Cristobal became disillusioned with politics.

1 Adrian Cristobal, “A Political Autobiography,” Roll 24, images 883-892, Digitized PCGG Files

2 “Political Autobiography,” Roll 24, image 884, Digitized PCGG Files.

3 Ibid.

4 Ibid.

5 “Political Autobiography,” Roll 24, image 887, Digitized PCGG Files.



He was a practicing journalist during the administration of Diosdado Macapagal, Garcia's successor. Cristobal claimed that he decided to write for then Senate President Ferdinand Marcos Sr. after he was fired from the *Evening News* by Macapagal's minions.⁶

Marcos Sr. rewarded him handsomely during his presidency; personal loyalty seemed to be Cristobal's basis for supporting the martial law declaration. But Cristobal asserted that besides his allegiance to Marcos Sr., he welcomed martial law because it is "preferable [sic] to Revolution," giving the country "one chance for reform, of suspending our civil rights in order to learn to exercise them more effectively."⁷

Under the Marcos Sr. presidency, Cristobal held numerous positions: a member of the Board of Censors and the Board of Liquidators, SSS Commissioner, Special Assistant for Press Relations, Secretary of the Department of Labor, the president's representative in the Philippine Center for Advanced Studies and head of the President's Center for Special Studies, a Regent of the University of the Philippines, among many others.

The public was probably not meant to peruse Cristobal's abbreviated autobiography as of September 1972. More likely than not, it was meant to be a declaration of allegiance privately transmitted to Marcos Sr., to show that Cristobal, the man who, about a year prior, actually wrote the dictator's political treatise, *Today's Revolution: Democracy*⁸ continued to be loyal to his principal, and was absolutely *not* an undesirable communist, all other evidence to the contrary. It may also be indicative of Cristobal's ambition within Marcos Sr.'s coterie: he saw martial law as a means to inflict his and Marcos Sr.'s purportedly shared beliefs on governance of the populace, turning them into propagator and theorizer respectively, of the Marcosian answer to communism.

No similar profession of loyalty is known to have been executed by another writer-newspaperman who was likely far closer to Marcos Sr. than Cristobal ever was: Juan C. Tuvera. As a presidential assistant in the 1970s, he had wide-ranging duties which included being "overall project director" and unacknowledged editor of the *Tadhana* volumes on Philippine history, ghostwritten for Marcos Sr. by a group of UP

6 "Political Autobiography," Roll 24, image 888, Digitized PCGG Files.

7 "Political Autobiography," Roll 24, images 890, 892, Digitized PCGG Files.

8 Miguel Paolo P. Reyes, 2018, "Producing Ferdinand E. Marcos, the Scholarly Author," *Philippine Studies: Historical and Ethnographic Viewpoints* 66(2): 173-218.



historians.⁹ Tuvera may have known, unlike Cristobal and Ople, precisely when Marcos Sr. was going to declare martial law in September 1972.¹⁰ During the dictatorship, Tuvera was among a handful of presidential assistants but distinguished himself by becoming Marcos Sr.'s final Presidential Executive Assistant (1979-1986), equivalent to today's executive secretary. Still, there is no evidence that Tuvera contributed significantly to the articulation of the fundamental concepts of Marcosian rule such as the "democratic revolution" or "constitutional authoritarianism"; what can be termed as a "profundity by paradox" style characterizing much of the Marcos Sr.'s political canon can be attributed to Cristobal, based on the latter's other outputs.

Tuvera was an editor of the *Sunday Times Magazine* in the 1950s, which Cristobal also wrote for.¹¹ Tuvera was married to Kerima Polotan, a renowned writer-editor herself, whose writings also appeared in the *Times*. Her prizewinning 1962 novel *The Hand of the Enemy* and a collection of masterful short stories continue to be mandatorily discussed in college classrooms. Unlike Cristobal, Polotan was already writing puff pieces on Marcos Sr. when he was still Senate Minority Floor Leader; she called him "young elder of the Senate"¹² well before he left the Liberal Party to become the NP's standard bearer in the 1965 elections. But her most well-known Marcos-related work is the first authorized biography of Imelda Romualdez Marcos, published in 1969, in time for the presidential elections that year.

Whatever the beliefs or intentions of these esteemed members of the literati, they, among others discussed here, were instrumental in making it appear that Ferdinand Marcos Sr. was a one-of-a-kind intellectual titan who deserved to be president for life, able to attract the best minds, a philosopher-king who can readily become a reluctant but unrivaled warrior when needed. That Marcos Sr. had think tanks and ghostwriters is hardly a secret, save perhaps to those who, due to lack of access to relevant resources, believe that Marcos Sr.—or any Philippine president for that matter—labored largely unaided by advisers and consultants. Besides hinting at the true extent of the Marcos Sr.-era propaganda

9 Rommel Curaming, 2006, *When Clio Meets the Titans: Rethinking State-Historian Relations in Indonesia and the Philippines*, PhD Thesis, Faculty of Asian Studies, Australian National University, 76.

10 see Conrado de Quiros, 1997, *Dead Aim: How Marcos Ambushed Philippine Democracy* (Pasig City: Foundation for Worldwide People's Power, Inc.), 338-339.

11 "Political Autobiography," Roll 24, image 886, Digitized PCCG Files

12 Kerima Polotan, June 12, 1960, "The Young Elder of the Senate," *Sunday Times Magazine*, 10-11.



network tasked specifically with making Marcos Sr. the Brain of the Nation (borrowing from Resil Mojares), what will be shown here are some of the expenditures to maintain and amplify that facade. State resources were utilized to make Marcos Sr. seem much more brilliant than he was even though the alleged fruits of his intellectual labor were riddled with plagiarism, self-plagiarism, source misrepresentation, and outright lies.¹³

More importantly, this paper asks what few have attempted to answer plainly before: who, besides Marcos Sr., benefitted from these productions, and in what way? This paper tries to go beyond detailing what one may reasonably think is obvious: writing for the Marcoses, renowned for their ill-gotten wealth, was remunerative. An attempt is made here to detail the various forms of capital, as explained by Pierre Bourdieu, that these writers were able to access and accumulate by their collaboration “material wealth” that “yields monetary returns, or profits” allowing “for further accumulation” to its owners; cultural, which is “‘embodied’ in individual dispositions and competencies that give privileged access to economic capital in its ‘objectified’ form of cultural artefacts”; and social, or access to networks that “give returns via ‘contacts,’ support and representation.”¹⁴ A key manifestation of such forms of capital described here are the very books produced by these writers or their corporate faces, thus their treatment in this paper as commodity, artefact, and network nexus.

Edel Garcellano¹⁵ previously touched upon these, explaining that attempts of Cristobal and his ilk to depoliticize Philippine writing or wax poetic about the universalism of the literary—or, if they were in a confessional mood, to explain away their collaboration as necessary or unavoidable—were attempts to obfuscate their actual contributions to fascistic rule. Such work, however, focusing more on the ideological undercurrents of literary production, deals little with the nakedly economic. More precisely, hardly anything has been written on what can be described as the owners of literary production at that time, excluding brief writings about writers who were also owners of government-

13 Reyes 2018; Curaming 2006; Ramon Guillermo, 2023, “Ghostly Traces: The Hidden Source of Baranganic Ideology in Marcos’ Tadhana,” https://www.researchgate.net/publication/367332527_Ghostly_Traces_The_Hidden_Source_of_Baranganic_Ideology_in_Marcos_Tadhana.

14 John H. Goldthorpe, 2007, “Cultural Capital:” Some Critical Observations,” *Sociologica* 2 (September-October), 1-23.

15 Edel Garcellano, 2001, “Philippine Hermeneutics and the Kingpins of the Hill: A Veritable Intro,” in *Knife’s Edge: Selected Essays* (Quezon City: University of the Philippines Press), 51-88.



sanctioned press outlets (e.g., the *Tuveras*) as can be seen in the work of Rosalinda Pineda-Ofreneo¹⁶ and Ricardo Manapat.¹⁷

To answer this paper's main query and to address the gaps described above, albeit in a preliminary and partial manner, I rely heavily on the digitized PCGG files, which are currently in the custody of that agency and the National Historical Commission of the Philippines. These files, which include documents obtained from the presidential palace after the Marcoses were deposed in 1986, still remain largely untapped, even years after eminent scholar Filomeno Aguilar Jr. highlighted their potential for historical scholarship.¹⁸ Thus, this paper also aims to encourage the academic utilization of the files, showing how they can be useful, say, in the construction of literary biographies and inquiries into the political economy of writing and publishing in the Philippines.

Other sources examined here are publications often dismissed because of their Marcosian ties: propaganda books and periodicals, including the hagiographic and the self-aggrandizing. Again, few have chosen to even write descriptively about the authors of these works, especially those that were a tier (or several) below Cristobal, Tuvera, and Polotan in terms of esteem and influence, such as poet-essayist Cesar T. Mella and Marcos Sr. biographer Victor Nituda.

One of the concluding reflections of this paper concerns the possibility that these writers created, or at least reinforced, the belief that a Philippine president should be able to take on duties, or at least intellectual labor, beyond what is expected of them. Crucial to that were attempts to keep writing and publishing in check by the Marcoses and their writer-publisher lieutenants, even after the "normalization" following the paper lifting of martial law—by no means tantamount to the conclusion of the dictatorship—in January 1981. I showcase public and private communications showing such attempts at control.

Adrian Cristobal and his Underlings

Let us focus once more on Adrian Cristobal. When Ople tasked him with assisting in Marcos Sr.'s 1965 campaign, he, along with other journalists/

16 Rosalinda Pineda-Ofreneo, 1984, *The Manipulated Press: A History of Philippine Journalism since 1945* (Mandaluyong City, Cacho Hermanos Inc.).

17 Ricardo Manapat, 2020, *Some are Smarter than Others*, Annotated Edition (Quezon City: Bughaw).

18 Filomeno Aguilar Jr., 2019, "Political Conjuncture and Scholarly Disjunctures: Reflections on Studies of the Philippine State under Marcos," *Philippine Studies: Historical and Ethnographic Viewpoints* 67(1): 3-30.



writers and artists (including Amado “Gat” Inciong, Juan Gatbonton, Mauro Malang Santos, and Emilio Aguilar Cruz) were provided by the Marcoses with over PHP 5,000.00 a month, based on two demand letters from Ople addressed to the senate president.¹⁹ PHP 3,450.00 of that was for their allowances; back then, according to Republic Act no. 4134, the senate president’s annual salary was PHP 40,000. Ople also supplied drafts to other members of the Marcos-for-President campaign such as fellow journalist and would-be tourism secretary Jose Aspiras.²⁰

One early designation of Cristobal during the first Marcos Sr. administration was Special Assistant for Press Relations; based on archival documents, he reported principally to Imelda Marcos, who was charged with disbursing funds for his activities. His title was, based on a communication from Cristobal to Imelda dated September 22, 1967, given to him by Executive Secretary Rafael Salas, another leader of the 1965 Marcos campaign.²¹

Cristobal nevertheless was a minor Marcos propagandist then, hardly communicating directly with the First Couple. Still, after the 1967 midterm elections, he had evidently started to make suggestions regarding political communication to the Marcoses. In a position paper for Imelda Marcos dated November 21, 1967, Cristobal outlined a strategy for winning the 1969 elections to make Ferdinand Sr. the first reelected president after the Second World War.²² Cristobal believed that momentum after a favorable result during the 1967 elections needed to be sustained; among his suggestions concerned the effective utilization of the National Media Production Center (NMPC), the Bureau of Printing, and the Television Section of Malacañang and the creation of a de facto Ministry of Information to head the whole campaign.²³ It is unclear whether the Marcoses listened to Cristobal on this matter, but starting in 1968, there was an increase in funding for the NMPC from Japanese War reparations, meant for post-War economic recovery,²⁴ and in 1975, Marcos

19 Blas Ople to the Senate President [Ferdinand Marcos Sr.], April 30, 1965, Roll 133, image 2028, Digitized PCCG Files.

20 Blas Ople to the Senate President [Ferdinand Marcos Sr.], March 31, 1965, Roll 133, image 2018, Digitized PCCG Files.

21 Adrian Cristobal to “Madame” [Imelda Marcos], September 22, 1967, Roll 152, images 0309-0310, Digitized PCCG Files.

22 Adrian E. Cristobal, Special Memorandum for the First Lady, Subject: Presidential Propaganda: 1968-1969, 21 November 1967, Roll 139, image 0140-0144, Digitized PCCG Files.

23 Special Memorandum, Roll 139, image 0143, Digitized PCCG Files.

24 See Miguel Paolo P. Reyes, “Where did Japanese War Reparations to the Philippines Go?” Presented at the Eighth Biennial International Conference of the Japanese Studies Association of Southeast Asia, 21-22 December 2023, Kantary Hills Hotel, Chiang Mai, Thailand.



Sr. created a Department of Public Information (DPI), later rechristened Ministry of Public Information (MPI) when the form of government ostensibly became semi-parliamentary. The agency was first headed by Marcos Sr.'s press secretary, Francisco Tatad.

As detailed elsewhere,²⁵ it was Tatad who recommended Cristobal to be Marcos Sr.'s ghostwriter or "collaborator" for his books; it was in that position that Cristobal's perceived influence on the president grew more than ever before. Tatad formally came into the Marcos fold later than Cristobal, brought in, like most of the other journalists in the Marcos Sr. cabinet, via invitations from Imelda: he was not someone Imelda considered "theirs" at the time, as opposed to the likes of Cristobal and Tuvera.²⁶

Jose T. Almonte claims that he was the organizer of a study group that eventually became what was called the Philippine Center for Advanced Studies in 1974, chaired by the president, but was represented therein by then executive secretary Alejandro Melchor Jr. (2015, 72-73). However, there are also communications among the PCGG files showing Cristobal as a member of an "academic group" or a "New Society Research and Development Group" distinct from Almonte's,²⁷ and suggesting, "if the President is so minded, and as a source of ideas for him, he might create under the Office of the President and directly responsible to him, the Office of Special Studies headed by a Presidential Assistant with cabinet rank."²⁸ Cristobal later became the president's representative in PCAS, replacing Melchor. Only after the abolition of PCAS in 1979 did Cristobal become head of PCAS's successor organization, the President's Center for Special Studies (PCSS).²⁹

Still, while affiliated with PCAS, Cristobal became deeply engaged in the formulation of what would become the Marcosian Filipino Ideology. According to a Terminal Report for PCAS authored by Almonte, a research project titled "Towards the Formulation of a Filipino Ideology" was headed by Cristobal and given a budget of PHP 100,000.00.³⁰ Cristobal also

25 Reyes 2018, 181-183.

26 De Quiros 1997, 324.

27 For the President [Ferdinand E. Marcos] from Adrian E. Cristobal, Membership of the New Society Research & Development Group (Working Designation), Roll 131, image 0098, Digitized PCGG Files.

28 For the President [Ferdinand E. Marcos] from Adrian E. Cristobal, Personal Recommendation of the Academic Group, 18 October 1972, Roll 131, image 0102, Digitized PCGG Files.

29 Almonte 2015, 83.

30 Jose T. Almonte, Philippines Center for Advanced Studies Terminal Report, 13 September 1977-8 July 1979 (provided by Patricio Abinales).



headed two other projects: “Towards a Responsive System of Governance for the Filipino People” (budget: PHP 100,000.00) and “Filipino Lifeways and Overview during the Pre-Spanish Period” (budget: 140,889.00).³¹ Eventually, after the publication of numerous Filipino Ideology books, Marcos Sr. issued Executive Order no. 879 on March 1, 1983, “Directing the Propagation of the Filipino Ideology and Creating a Committee to Evolve, Supervise and Monitor the Implementation of the Program for Its Dissemination.” Nominally, the Committee was headed by Imelda, but it was actually Cristobal, and staff from the PCSS, who did the heavy lifting.³² (Contrary to semi-popular belief, former dissident Nilo Tayag was not the formulator of Marcos Sr.’s Filipino Ideology, only its foremost prophet; by the time Tayag was released from prison in 1981, two Filipino Ideology books authored by Marcos Sr. had already been released.) As per the EO, the initial funding of the committee was PHP 1 million, released by the Minister of Budget to the PCSS “from the Special Activities Fund of the President.”³³ Note that this was the time of worsening financial crisis, exacerbated by, among others, the Aquino assassination in August 1983.

While Cristobal’s various remunerations were likely more than sufficient for his family’s needs, I have not encountered any hard evidence that he personally gained more than what he was authorized by law (that is, by Marcos Sr.). During the martial law years, Cristobal also became president and chairman of the board of the Philippine Education Company or PECO, once a major book distribution and publishing enterprise. During his tenure as head of PECO, the company published a periodical titled *The Review*³⁴ as well as a collection of the works of the Ravens (*The Ravens: A Selection of Philippine Writing*, published in 1980). Importantly, according to Memorandum Circular no. 1157, signed by Presidential Assistant Tuvera in August 1979, to help PECO recover from “its present state of distress and near deterioration,” all foreign publications purchased by all government agencies needed to be made through PECO. University of the Philippines president Emanuel V. Soriano sent letters to Tuvera to seek for an exemption to this order, because, among other reasons, “the prices of the books supplied by PECO are approximately 16

³¹ Ibid.

³² Samuel Tan, 1987/2012, *A History of the Philippines*, Reprint (Manila: National Historical Commission of the Philippines), 104-105.

³³ Executive Order no. 879, s. 1983, <https://www.officialgazette.gov.ph/1983/03/01/executive-order-no-879-s-1983/>.

³⁴ Raissa Robles, October 1, 2014, “The Marcoses Never Really Left Home,” *Philippine Daily Inquirer*, <https://opinion.inquirer.net/78931/the-marcoses-never-really-left-home>.

times the peso equivalent of their dollar prices,” which meant that it was cheaper to purchase books directly from publishers.³⁵ The memorandum circular was repealed in November 1983. It is unclear how much Cristobal made as head of PECO.

An accusation was made shortly after the EDSA Revolution that a USD 254,000.00 condominium unit located in San Francisco, used by his son while studying abroad, was purchased anomalously.³⁶ Cristobal stated that the unit was actually bought using money of a relative living in the U.S., and that he was paying for it in installments.³⁷ Several sources also state that he was awarded housing units built under the Marcos Sr. government’s Bagong Lipunan Improvement of Sites and Services (BLISS) program.³⁸

The same sources claim that the BLISS units were in fact meant for “homeless writers”³⁹ or at least for other intellectual laborers at the PCSS.⁴⁰ Indeed, Cristobal is remembered by many a writer for helping them through financial difficulty, i.e., keeping them employed.⁴¹ One may also have heard of how Cristobal was able to facilitate the release of detained writer Pete Lacaba so that Nick Joaquin would agree to be among of the first National Artists of the Philippines.⁴² At least one other “canonical” writer, Alfredo Yuson, described publications work for Cristobal’s PCSS as a “sinecure”;⁴³ Carmen Guerrero Nakpil gave the same appellation to the various positions held by Cristobal under Marcos Sr. (2002, 28).⁴⁴

With Nakpil, Cristobal established the Unyon ng mga Manunulat sa Pilipinas (Writer’s Union of the Philippines), or UMPIL (Pantoja-Hidalgo 2008, 17).⁴⁵ Today, UMPIL’s annual lecture series, initiated in 2013, is named after Cristobal, its founding chairman. His biographical note in

35 Letter from Emanuel V. Soriano to Juan C. Tuvera, January 26, 1981, in *University of the Philippines Gazette*, 12(2): 63.

36 Ricardo Manapat, 2020, 415, 473.

37 Ricardo Manapat, 2020, 379, 415.

38 Garcellano 2001, 55; Rowena B. Reyes, October 12, 2016, “Hypocrites Opposing Marcos Burial,” *Philippine Daily Inquirer*, <https://opinion.inquirer.net/98111/hypocrites-opposing-marcos-libingan-burial>.

39 Garcellano 2001, 55.

40 Reyes 2016.

41 Alfredo Yuson, December 31, 2007, “Farewell to Dear Adrian,” *Philippine Star*, <https://www.philstar.com/lifestyle/arts-and-culture/2007/12/31/35975/farewell-dear-adrian>.

42 Ninotchka Rosca, September 21, 2012, “Martial Law was Personal,” *The FilAm*, <https://thefilam.net/archives/8292>.

43 Yuson 2007.

44 Carmen Guerrero Nakpil, “Adrian Cristobal,” in *Whatever: A New Collection of Later Essays, 1987–2001* (Quezon City: Ateneo de Manila University Press), 27–28.

45 Cristina Pantoja-Hidalgo, 2008, “Fiction as Response to History,” in *Fabulists and Chroniclers* (Quezon City: University of the Philippines Press), 1–57.

the latest edition of the *CPP Encyclopedia of Philippine Art* also mentions that he was “instrumental in the creation of the UP Creative Writing Center.”⁴⁶ The UP Institute of Creative Writing was established in 1978, or after about five years of the New Society, to borrow from the title of one of the books Cristobal and his team ghostwrote for Marcos Sr.

Cristobal’s patronage may have taken other forms. PCSS “consultant” Cesar T. Mella Jr., who inexplicably kept setting up publishing entities between 1979 and the early 1980s, was author, publisher, editor, and/or consultant of a variety of pro-Marcos books. In the biographical note of a book he edited titled *Adrian Cristobal Speaks: And Other Literary Figures*, it is stated that he “explodes the myth that writers are failed businessmen,” stating that his first success was serving as president of Konsensus, Inc., which published presidential assistant Guillermo de Vega’s *Ferdinand Marcos: An Epic* in 1974, a “feat” that he “duplicated” by heading Foresight International, Inc., publisher of *The Young Marcos* (1979) by another presidential assistant, Victor Nituda, for whom he had also served as “special assistant.” According to Ramon Guillermo, it was after de Vega’s assassination in 1975 that Mella became associated with Cristobal. Moreover, Guillermo gives compelling evidence that de Vega’s book-length ode to Ferdinand Marcos Sr. was actually ghostwritten by Mella.⁴⁷

Mella also produced a *Directory of Filipino Writers: Past & Present* (1974), with blurbs from the likes of foreign affairs secretary Carlos P. Romulo and, of course, Cristobal. An attempt was made to make it appear that the directory was blind to ideology; it includes an entry for Jose Maria Sison, then the outlaw head of the Communist Party of the Philippines-New People’s Army. But it fulfilled functions expected of a Cristobal-affiliated Media Advisory Council (censor)-approved publication; it contained a short section on “Philippine Presidents as Writers,” which included an entry on Marcos Sr., describing him not only as a writer of books on “ideas and ideals,” but also the composer of lyrics for Imelda Marcos.⁴⁸

There is no evidence of government funds going directly toward the production of Mella’s books, though the Marcoses’ hand in them is evident; Nituda’s *The Young Marcos* has an introduction written by the president’s brother, Pacifico Marcos, a medical doctor appointed to head

46 Galang, Rosalinda, 2017, “Cristobal, Adrian E.” *CCP Encyclopedia of Art* vol. 12 (Literature 2), 414.

47 Ramon Guillermo, April 29, 2020, “On Court Poetry During the Marcos Dictatorship and A Note on Duterte’s Anti-Poetry,” *Focus on Renewal of Southeast Asia*, <https://forsea.co/on-court-poetry-during-the-marcos-dictatorship-and-a-note-on-dutertes-anti-poetry/>.

48 Cesar T. Mella, 1974, *Directory of Filipino Writers: Past & Present* (Manila: CTM Enterprises), 229.



the Philippine Medical Care Commission. The book also has a back-jacket blurb from the president himself, where he exclaims how “touched” he was “by the efforts which [Nituda] was made to put together some recollections of my early years gathered from extensive interviews.” In both editions of another book, *Marcos: The War Years*—which Mella co-authored with Gracianus R. Reyes, another PCAS/PCSS affiliate—a preface is provided by Cristobal, and an introduction given by the head of the Ministry of Defense, martial law administrator Juan Ponce Enrile. In his preface, Cristobal claimed that both authors, “without being told or prodded by duty, write about President Ferdinand E. Marcos’s life”; the back cover of the second edition shows a photograph of Marcos Sr. signing a copy of the first edition.

The Tuveras and their Concessions

As I previously stated, even with Cristobal’s hand in numerous pro-Marcos publications, I remain uncertain whether he actually accumulated much wealth from such ventures. I am unable to say the same regarding the Tuveras, at the very least because of one case wherein Juan Tuvera was described as having abused his position for pecuniary gain.

The case titled *Republic v. Tuvera* clearly states that Victor Tuvera, son of Juan and Kerima Polotan, also listed as president of Orient Media, Inc., used his father’s connections to the Marcoses to obtain a Timber License Agreement for their Twin Peaks Development Corporation.⁴⁹ According to Justice Dante Tinga, the decision’s ponente, “kleptocracy cannot pay”: “As those dark years fade into the backburner of the collective memory, and a new generation emerges without proximate knowledge of how bad it was then, it is useful that the Court serves a reminder here and now.”⁵⁰ Since the Republic somehow failed to show evidence that the actual damages owed by the Tuveras amounted to PHP 45 million, the Court only ordered the Tuveras to pay PHP 1 million in temperate damages and 1 million in exemplary damages. However, as of this writing, the (heirs of the) Tuveras have been able to get away with not paying anything because of the government’s “failure to prosecute.”⁵¹

Tuvera had been described, along with Ople, as a “technocrat” within

49 Republic of the Philippines v. Juan C. Tuvera, Victor P. Tuvera, and Twin Peaks Development Corporation, C.R. No. 148246, February 16, 2007.

50 Ibid.

51 Peter Tabingo, December 14, 2021, “PCGG Case Thrown Out for Failure to Prosecute,” *Malaya Business Insight*, https://malaya.com.ph/news_news/pcgg-case-thrown-out-for-failure-to-prosecute/.



the Marcos administration as early as 1969, though he was a technocrat who supposedly “prefers to remain in the background, content with the thought that what [he writes] comes out of the President’s mouth” (Macatuno 1969, 24).⁵² Primitivo Mijares was far less charitable, claiming that Marcos Sr. himself talked about “the rapacity of the husband-wife team of Juan Tuvera and Kerima who want[ed] to be bigger newspaper oligarchs than either Benedicto or Kokoy [Romualdez].”⁵³ Indeed, they were among the owners of the so-called crony press during the dictatorship, owning *Orient News* and *The Evening Post*, among others.⁵⁴

Polotan can be classified among the “hers” in conjugal dictatorship’s groups (that is, Imelda’s), along with persons attached to the Ministry of Human Settlements, headed by Imelda, such as Jose Conrado Benitez and Carmen Guerrero Nakpil, who was Director-General of the Technology Resource Center during the 1980s. Along with Ileana Maramag, often credited as an “editor” of “Imelda’s” books, they are all known to have written for Imelda. Benitez in particular was once described as having given “flesh to many ideas on human settlements” in a government propaganda publication.⁵⁵

A possible indication of the influence Polotan thought she wielded may be the contents of a letter she sent to Ferdinand Sr., dated January 17, 1973, regarding the presidency of Silliman University. In the letter, Polotan stated her views on the candidates for that institution’s leadership, and indirectly requested Marcos Sr. to intervene in the issue (“Confidential information, however, seems to indicate that one phone call from your office, Mr. President, to [a rival candidate] will so flatter [that person] that [their] resistance will disappear”; “It is imperative that Senator Lorenzo Teves and Trustee Leon O. Ty be told to exert all their efforts to get [a certain candidate] elected so that this recalcitrant institution be whipped into line.”).⁵⁶ Polotan’s choice was not elected.

Like Cristobal, the Tuveras were ensuring that writers had a source of income, or at least a publishing outlet. Cristina Pantoja-Hidalgo described their *Focus Philippines* outfit as “one of the main outlets for new

52 Ernesto M. Macatuno, “The Technocrats: The President’s Planners and Implementors,” *The Sunday Times Magazine*, March 9, 1969, 22-24.

53 Primitivo Mijares, 2017, *The Conjugal Dictatorship of Ferdinand and Imelda Marcos*, Revised Edition (Quezon City: Bughaw), 201.

54 Mijares 2017, 558.

55 “Jose Conrado B. Benitez,” *Philippine Public Affairs Magazine*, 3(3): 36, 72.

56 Kerima P. Tuvera to the President [Ferdinand Marcos Sr.], January 17, 1973, “Silliman University and DYSR,” Roll 21, images 0134-0137, Digitized PCCG Files.

writers,” but quoted assessments that the quality of work they published was poor.⁵⁷ This was, however, the same outlet where Pete Lacaba’s infamous “Prometheus Unbound,” with a hidden anti-Marcos acrostic, was first published in July 1973. According to an undated letter from Tuvera to “Ma’m” (Imelda) in the PCGG files, 15,000 copies of the *Focus Philippines* issue containing the poem were withheld from the Bureau of Public Schools.⁵⁸ Tuvera noted that the writer’s name—Lacaba used the pseudonym Ruben Cuevas—was “obviously fictitious,” but, keen to help identify poem’s author, he had handed over the typescript submitted to *Focus* to General Fabian Ver, head of the Presidential Security Command, and hoped that the author would “try and collect his contributor’s fee” so they could catch him.⁵⁹ Tuvera told the first lady that he knew the poem’s publication “has hurt the President and you, and [he] would do anything to make the injury less painful, if possible.”⁶⁰

One detail about *Focus* may have been neglected by previous assessments: at least one print run of the World Bank-funded textbooks (1976-1982), released in 1979 until the 1980s, lists “Focus Philippines” as its publisher; more likely than not, this is the same *Focus Philippines* owned by the Tuveras. Involving tens of millions of US dollars, the textbooks—millions were printed annually—addressed a deficit in learning materials while at the same time reinforcing state propaganda about the Marcoses and the New Society.⁶¹ A 1979 copy of *Binhi: Sining at Komunikasyon I*, contains illustrations suggesting popular support for the “Marcos youth corps,” the *Kabataang Barangay*, and a poem, “Imelda, ang Uliiran” (Imelda the Exemplar).

After the establishment of the Philippine Educational Publishers Association in 1958, textbooks made up “over fifty percent of the total number of books published per year” throughout the rest of the twentieth century.⁶² Thus, the textbooks with pro-Marcos content distributed to public schools were likely some of the only books accessible to many

57 Pantoja-Hidalgo 2008, 17.

58 Johnny Tuvera [Juan C. Tuvera] to “Ma’m” [Imelda Marcos], [1973], Roll 24, image 1337, Digitized PCGG Files.

59 Ibid.

60 Ibid.

61 see Joseph A. Reaves, November 21, 1986, “Latest Philippine Texts Omit Praises of Imelda Marcos,” *Detroit Free Press*, 73; Mark Maca, 2018, “Education in the ‘New Society’ and the Philippine Labour Export Policy (1972-1986),” *Journal of International and Comparative Education* 7(1), 1-16; Letizia Constantino, 1982, “World Bank Textbooks: Scenario for Deception,” (Quezon City: Foundation for Nationalist Studies).

62 Patricia May B. Jurilla, 2013, “Copy That: Textbook Publishing (and Photocopying) in the Philippines,” in *Story Book: Essays on the History of the Book in the Philippines* (Mandaluyong: Anvil), 89.

children during the Marcos dictatorship. Book historian Patricia May Jurilla also states that at that time, “the importation of books, both educational and trade, remained a significant feature of the Philippine book industry,” such that in the 1980s, “the ratio of imported books to locally published titles circulating in the market stood at around 100 to one.”⁶³

Several sources also note the issue of “legalized textbook piracy” brought about by Marcos Sr.’s Presidential Decree no. 285, which allowed “the reprinting of domestic or foreign books ‘whenever the prices thereof become so exorbitant as to be detrimental to the national interest.’”⁶⁴ Because of the decree, “The total number of titles [published locally] rose from 706 in 1971 to 2,247 in 1975, with the applied sciences category posting the most significant growth, from 71 to 804 titles.”⁶⁵

Apparently, this growth was not sustained. According to Polotan, as head of the Publisher’s Association of the Philippines (PAPI), in 1981, local book production was back to 1971 levels: 700 titles were released by Philippine book publishers, in contrast to the thousands put out by publishers in Indonesia and Thailand (1982, 353; Santos Maranan 1983, 44).⁶⁶ Of these titles were likely numerous Marcos-authored and pro-Marcos books, which did not have any difficulty in being distributed nationally or securing quality book paper. In the early 1980s, “locally produced paper was “of low quality but imported paper [was] too expensive, and quite difficult to obtain”⁶⁷ but numerous printings of “Marcos Sr.’s” books that I have personally handled are printed on thick, high-quality, probably imported paper.

On Other Key Propagandists

As I have discussed elsewhere,⁶⁸ another seemingly distinct group among the Marcos propaganda corps were those directly under Tatad, and later, Gregorio Cendaña, at the Department/Ministry of Public Information. Many connected with Ople during the 1965 campaign found themselves either appointed with him at the Labor department/ministry (e.g., Amado

63 Ibid.

64 Ibid.

65 Jurilla 2013, 90.

66 Kerima Polotan Tuvera, 1982-83 “The PAPI and Press Freedom,” *Fookien Times Philippines Yearbook*, 353; Aida Santos Maranan, “The Book Industry in Distress,” 1983, *Diliman Review*, November-December, 38-44.

67 Santos Maranan 1983, 38.

68 Reyes 2018.

“Gat” Inciong) or attached to the aforementioned state propaganda arm. The latter included Andres Cristobal Cruz (former director of the Bureau of Standards for Mass Media), Juan Gatbonton, and Mauro Malang Santos. Many publications projects involving the DPI/MPI (under which was the Bureau of National and Foreign Information), the Office of Media Affairs (under the Office of the President), and/or NMPC bore their names.

Many Marcos propaganda books were designed by Malang though he hardly worked exclusively for the Marcos Sr. administration. Some Marcosiana were even designed by his son, Steve. Malang organized West Design Studio with Gatbonton and Noli Galang; their firm designed numerous books for Raya Books (which was organized with Francisco Tatad by the same group), the NMPC, and other government offices.⁶⁹

Andres Cristobal Cruz deserves particular mention here, given that he served as translator (of *Today's Revolution: Democracy*), illustrator (e.g., the cover of *Ferdinand E. Marcos on Human Rights*, published by the University of the Philippines Law Center with the Philippine Council for Policy Science, another Adrian Cristobal-led organization), and elaborator (e.g., his book *Filipino Ideology and the Bureaucracy*, Office of Media Affairs, 1986) of “Marcos’s” books. Marcos Sr.’s ghostwritten books, including the *Tadhana* volumes, were forwarded to the NMPC for publication. Copyright for some of them supposedly was with the private Marcos Foundation or Ferdinand Marcos, but there is no evidence that the majority of these books were ever sold (they were typically given away here and abroad) nor that the Foundation/Marcos ever funded the NMPC printings.⁷⁰

Conclusion

The total expenditures for the production of Marcos Sr.’s ghostwritten books is unknown, but there is no doubt that public funds were tapped to write, edit, finalize, and publish them. Even the indexing was done by a team of librarians—government employees—in the National Library.⁷¹ There are at least two memoranda from the PCGG files by NMPC assistant director Magno G. Matela that suggest how many copies of each book were printed during the 1980s and the cost of producing them. In 1980, over 163,000 copies of “Marcos” books were printed, costing over PHP 2.5 million, with another PHP 10.1 million being allocated for 2.2 million

69 Reyes 2018, 191.

70 Reyes 2018, 204-205.

71 For the President [Ferdinand E. Marcos] from the Presidential Spokesman [Blas Ople], 14 October 1985, Roll 254, images 0644-0645, Digitized PCGG Files.

“pocketbook” editions of works “by” Marcos Sr.⁷² In 1985, another PHP 2.5 million was requested by Matela from the “Special Activities Fund” for printing 12,000 copies of “Marcos Sr.’s” books.⁷³ Given that at least one new Marcos book (including derivatives) were produced annually on average between 1971 and 1985 (including an “unfinished” but still publicly disseminated “book-in-progress,” *Gains of a Reformist Government*), as well as other sources besides those mentioned here, it seems safe to say that at least PHP 100 million pesos went to making Marcos Sr. seem like one of the country’s most prolific and well-regarded authors.

It is probably also safe to say that given the publishing landscape, aside from textbooks that regurgitated pro-Marcos propaganda, local editions of foreign publications, and religious texts, the only Philippine books that had print runs well over the average, which were translated into various local languages, and were widely distributed, nationally and abroad were “Marcos Sr.’s” books. While there may have been thriving underground press outlets and literary communities especially after the paper lifting of martial law in 1981, it is highly unlikely that they were, even collectively, close to matching the printing and distribution capabilities of the Marcos publishing machinery at its height.

It is easy to dismiss what Cristobal, the Tuveras, and others did for Ferdinand Marcos Sr. as merely appealing to the vanity of a deluded kleptocrat, or in conformity with the known characteristics of sultanistic leaders who desire to be ideologues (lack of competency notwithstanding).⁷⁴ But we continue to suffer from the deleterious effects of their work. Arguably, the literati benefitting from their standing with Marcos Sr., permitting their near-monopolization of publishing opportunities, also held back the development of our book industry. In the early 1980s, said Aida Santos Maranan, “[while] other industries can avail of loans with low interest rates, the book industry does not enjoy the same privilege”.⁷⁵ Republic Act no. 8047, or the Book Publishing Industry Development Act, which created the National Book Development Board, only became law in June 1995, almost a decade after the ouster of the Marcoses.

72 Memorandum for the President [Ferdinand E. Marcos] from Asst. Director Magno G. Matela, Subject: Report on President’s Books and Request for Financial Assistance, 4 November 1980, Roll 171, images 1447-1448, Digitized PCGG Files.

73 For the President [Ferdinand E. Marcos] from the Assistant Director, NMPC [Magno G. Matela], 16 September 1985, Roll 254, image 0634, Digitized PCGG Files.

74 See Mark R. Thompson, 1998, “The Marcos Regime in the Philippines,” in *Sultanistic Regimes*, ed. H.E. Chehabi and Juan J. Linz (London and Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press), 206-29.

75 Santos Maranan 1983, 40.



Not only did they waste public funds to manufacture the intellectual Marcos Sr., these creatives likely also hindered the development of a public appreciation of what a president should and should not be. He is not what Cristobal repeatedly referred to as a “prince” (perhaps partly in the Machiavellian sense), but a limited though powerful executive. Instead of primarily being a competent manager, Marcos Sr. made it seem that the ability to articulate a state ideology was a vital qualification for a president. One wonders how many voted for his son, Ferdinand “Bongbong” Marcos Jr., thinking that he would also be similarly worth building a value or belief system around, or if Bongbong actually believes that like his father, he can appear to be a performing president while concurrently being engaged in various time-consuming intellectual tasks and endeavors.

Cristobal and the Tuveras also provide models of literary servitude and patronage that make close collaboration with the likes of the Marcoses appear practically consequence free. They played significant roles in the Marcos Sr. government, but they are often reduced to mere speechwriters or propagandists in published obituaries and biographical notes, if their Marcosian ties are mentioned at all.⁷⁶ Before the fall of the Marcos dictatorship, they headed both major writing (production) and publishing (distribution) associations in the country; we remember them for their writings or for what they “kept alive” rather than what they helped limit or suppress.

Let me share one last anecdote on the influence wielded by Marcos Sr.’s “creative collaborators.” *The Fookien Times Yearbook* was, during the Marcos Sr. years, a sourcebook of government reports, industry analyses, and essays on art and culture. For a time, Franz Arcellana—head of the UP Creative Writing Center from 1979 until 1982—gave his take on Philippine literature in every volume. In the 1980s, his space in the *Fookien Times* was taken over by Cirilo Bautista and Alfredo Salanga, who gave rather tame takes on outpourings and events in Philippine literature. The reason for Arcellana’s replacement: Adrian Cristobal, wearing his Secretary-General of UMPIL hat, wrote to the publishers of the *Fookien Times*, complaining that “the past essays on literature rendered only cursory discussion

⁷⁶ See, for instance Ayee Macaraig, August 26, 2011, “The Intensity of Kerima Polotan-Tuvera,” *Rappler*, and “Adrian Cristobal, 75,” December 23, 2007, *Philippine Star* (online). This may, however, be an effect of temporal distance; Juan Tuvera’s short obituary in one national broadsheet, (“Tuvera, 72,” July 25, 1996, *Manila Standard*, 8) referred to him as solely as someone who “served as presidential executive assistant under former President Marcos.”





of literary events and developments”. “We [UMPIL] feel that a more substantial analysis is needed to set in the proper perspective the literary situation in the country for any given period.”⁷⁷ In his letter—published in the letters section of the 1980 volume of the *Fookien Times Yearbook*—he recommended Bautista and Salanga without disclosing that they were also his subordinates at the PCSS.⁷⁸

⁷⁷ Letter from Adrian E. Cristobal, 1980, *Fookien Times Yearbook*, 23.

⁷⁸ Yuson 2007.

