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Wordsmith with a Slingshot: The Gerry Gil Book edited with an introduction by James S. Ong

Review Author: Danton R. Remoto

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As for the other articles, most of the accompanying non-textual material are (cute) pictures of endangered wildlife (the tarsier, the Philippine eagle, the tamaraw, the Palawan peacock pheasant, marine turtles, and so on). Perhaps a separate edition can be made of this successful (winner of the 1991 National Book Award) book—with colored pages to do justice to the animals and habitats pictured therein!

Still, written in a lively and engaging style (which has become the trademark of the PCIJ), this book is one of the best local reports I have read on the environment. It is must reading not only for environmentalists but students, teachers, lawmakers, public officials, and anyone who cares about our world.

Queena N. Lee-Chua
 Mathematics Department
 Ateneo de Manila University

Wordsmith with a Slingshot: The Gerry Gil Book. Edited with an Introduction by James S. Ong. With a Foreword by Cipriano S. Roxas. Quezon City: Phoenix Publishing House, Inc., 1997.

The sudden death of the journalist Gerry Gil in 1995 when he was but 53 stunned his colleagues and readers in the *Manila Standard*. Aside from being one of the country's finest columnists, he was, at one time or another, a seminarian, campus pamphleteer, doctoral fellow, population researcher, and psychology professor. He was the associate editor of his paper and its opinion editor at the time of his death. He was also the treasurer of the Philippine Press Institute and a teacher at the Ateneo de Manila University, the University of the Philippines, and the Asian Institute of Journalism.

But beyond all these, he was a columnist par excellence. We should thank Phoenix Publishing for coming up with *Wordsmith with a Slingshot: The Gerry Gil Book*. As Jimmy Ong, who edited and introduced the book, put it: "Gerry's opinion writing was superb [because] he was extremely literate. This is not always true of journalists . . . The editorials, more serious and weighty, were marvels of construction, clarity, and phrasing. The columns had all of the latter, plus a bit more whimsy and wordplay."

In an issue of the *Philippines Herald* dated Feb. 25, 1972, Gerry wrote on "The Tiger Lady's Fascinating Past." He went to town satirizing the life of "a smokey-eyed beauty [with] sweet singing voice who married a powerful man . . . She is known to have gone after the wife of another official who happened to have a necklace that offended this powerful lady."

Who is this woman?

"Yes, indeed, Chiang Ching, better known to the world as Madame Mao, is one of the most powerful—as well as intriguing—women of this century."

The chameleon quality of his writing is also found in the letters to the editors that he wrote. In the March 24, 1983 issue of *Panorama*, he called himself Karla V. Castillo of Bautista St., Makati, in a letter called "All About Jolly B."

Listen: "Speaking of the effect of consciousness on development, Deputy Minister Jolly C. Benitez is quoted as saying: 'Once you start thinking, poor, poor, poor, you start acting poor, poor, poor—devoid of the actual material needs. But if you start thinking God I'm rich, rich, rich, you start seeing yourself as rich, rich, rich.'

No wonder Mr. B's automatic response to every problem is spend, spend, spend."

As Carlos Alfaro of 1609 Copernicus St., in Makati, he wrote this withering letter: "Exiled Pres. Marcos's message to us from Hawaii was written on official Malacañang stationery, under the letterhead, 'Office of the President.'

"The paranoid in me bristled this way: 'What? Is he still claiming to be our President? Is he thinking of setting up a government-in-exile? Will he direct a 'contra' force from Honolulu?"

"But the Pollyanna in me responded, 'No, despite the wealth he brought and the wealth he has already stashed away, the waste of perfectly good stationery offends his frugal Ilocano soul.'"

Aside from having a mad sense of humor, Gerry was also a linguist with a twist. In a column called "The Kit Down There," he extrapolates on the book *Ask Isadora* by Isadora Alman, the sex-advice columnist of the *San Francisco Herald*. Isadora writes on the other names for the female organ.

Perhaps one part of the problem is that the territory is more complex than the same region in men. Men have a single tool; we have a whole kit. And perhaps we could call it that. Not only is a *kit* a toolkit, but also the frolicsome young of the fox. It makes sense for a foxy lady to have a kit. The *Oxford English Dictionary* says that a kit (workbox or basket) was originally a covered tankard. More to the point, a kit is also a light woman, and a small fiddle much used by dancing masters. As a bonus the *OED* gives us *kittle*, to tickle, the friction of the strings of a fiddle. Figuratively to *kittle* is to stir with feelings of emotion, to excite, to rouse. As an adjective it means ticklish, difficult to deal with, requiring great caution or skill."

And now, Gerry's *coup de grace*: "I am convinced. Henceforth I will use *kit* to refer to a woman's *down there*. Of course this means that I won't be able to keep a straight face when I address Senator Francisco S. Tatad by his nickname."

Here are a few more Gil-isms. On the revelation that the National Power Corporation was using nearly double its water allocation in 1992 to generate power: "The image of the Napocor officials is so irredeemably bad that even if they publicly prayed for forgiveness and for rain, the public will still regard them as the kind of sinners Psalm 51 describes as 'born in guilt, and

in sin their mothers conceive them'—and apply to them the more earthly Tagalog equivalent."

On Speaker Jose de Venecia's announcement of a P1.7 billion allocation to plant one billion trees: "Of course Speaker de Venecia is notorious for operating his mouth when his brain is not fully engaged."

On Senator Blas Ople's suggestion that the semiconductor and electronics industry would advance with Vice President Joseph Estrada as the head of the Dept. of Science and Technology: "To Mr. Estrada, a semiconductor is a person who has a part-time job on a bus."

I wonder what Gerry would have said about the quality of today's political leaders candidates? Margie Holmes was right when she said of Gerry: "Jesus, but I'll miss you."

Danton R. Remoto
English Department
Ateneo de Manila University