



## The Newspaper Widow

**Cecilia Manguerra Brainard**

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While at first glance *The Newspaper Widow* seems like a standard historical mystery, that couldn't be farther from the truth. Cecilia Manguerra Brainard's novel is full and complex, overflowing with textured, fully realized characters who drive the story on every page.

Ines Maceda, the "newspaper widow," aims to clear her son's name. He has been accused of murdering a priest. In addition, Ines grieves for her deceased husband and combats the lingering trauma of earlier miscarriages. Her development is one of the shining elements of the novel—she feels tangible, rooted in the story and the setting.

*The Newspaper Widow* offers a nuanced glance into Filipino society circa 1909. It is a world rich with history, myth, and ritual; descriptions pulse with life, providing crucial insights into aspects of Filipino culture and world colonial history, such as encounters with the "Island of the Living Dead," sectioned off to contain those inflicted with leprosy, and once the world's largest leper colony.

While on the surface the book is a crime story, the plot is actually layered and unique. One of the novel's greatest strengths is how it raises interesting, complicated questions about morality and justice while Ines searches for the priest's true killer: Is death ever an apt punishment for a crime? Is revenge moral, or even necessary? Refreshingly, nothing is black and white.

For all of *The Newspaper Widow*'s greatness, sometimes there are too many layers to the plot, and the ending falls a bit flat in comparison to the rest of the narrative. But flaws are minor; overall, this is a solid, satisfying work of literature.

Cecilia Manguerra Brainard displays masterful storytelling skill in *The Newspaper Widow*, a unique, memorable mystery.

MYA ALEXICE (January/February 2018)

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