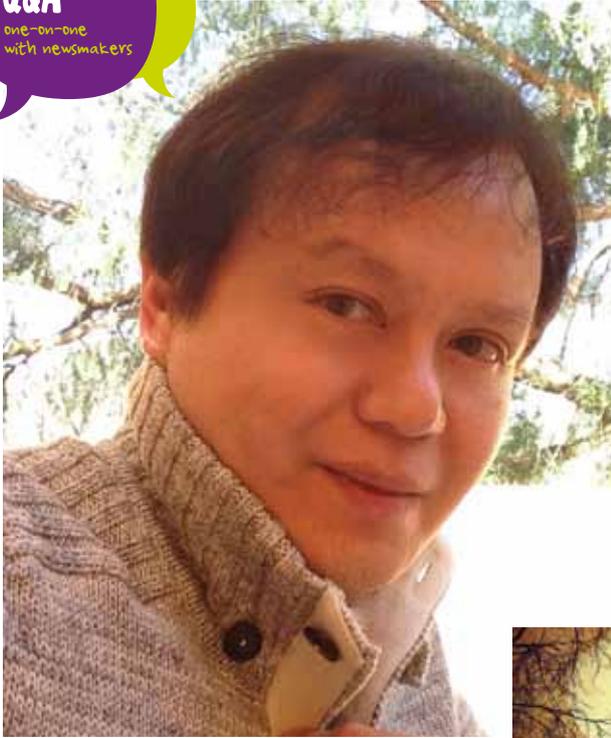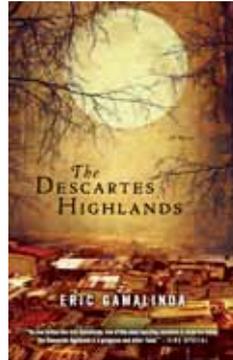# The write way

WE CAUGHT UP WITH FILIPINO AUTHOR ERIC GAMALINDA AS HE PREPARES TO GO ON THE ROAD TO PROMOTE HIS LATEST BOOK

His latest novel, *The Descartes Highlands,* has been called "mesmerizing" by Publishers Weekly and "spellbinding" by Booklist. Even author Amy Tan was captivated by this story of two half-Filipino brothers who are sold for adoption and, as adults, attempt to trace their family roots.

As a result, Eric Gamalinda, the award-winning Filipino writer, poet, playwright, filmmaker and teacher who's based in New York, found himself coping with a packed schedule before and after the book's November release.

"I'm working on an author video for *The Descartes Highlands,* which will feature three actors reading lines from the book. The book launch takes place at the Asia Society on December 1 and will feature actors doing a staged reading. The evening will also have Jessica Hagedorn doing a Q&A with me," he says. "On January 9, I'll be doing a Google Hangout online conversation with Desiree Zamorano, Latino author of *The Amado Women.* It will be at 2pm EST. I know that's right after midnight in the Philippines but I hope some people can tune in." It's a good thing we managed to corner him for a quick chat.

Where will we find you this holiday season?
I'm usually home in New York during the holidays, trying to stay away from the tourist crowds! Hopefully things will be quiet for me. I'll be reading my students' papers and starting on my new novel.

Do you often take your work along with you?
I take my work in progress with me all the time, either on a USB drive or on my iPhone. I type out notes for my book either on the Notes or Word app because ideas come to me all the time.

What do you usually read on vacation or when you have time to relax? What are you reading at the moment?
I read a lot of non-fiction. I'm currently reading Thomas Piketty's *Capital in the Twenty-First Century* side by side with *The Utopian Vision* by Charles Fourier. Not exactly relaxing but totally engrossing and enlightening. I just got the new translations of Proust and am reading them, too. I got a copy of Resil Mojares' *Brains of the Nation* and am thoroughly enjoying it. I'm also reading a number of Filipino novels for a translation project that I'm thinking of doing.

Is there anything new and exciting you learned about the Philippines in the course of writing the book?
During my last visit to Manila for the Philippine Literary Festival, I learned a lot from conversations with writers and journalists. I'm amazed at the sheer energy of their writing and at all the young writers doing so much new and inventive work. I also learned from Karina Bolasco at Anvil that there's a growing market for books translated into Tagalog. She's offered to translate and publish my novel *Empire of Memory.* That's something I dreamed about many years ago — to have my works translated into Tagalog and finally reach a Tagalog-reading audience. I hope *The Descartes Highlands* gets translated, too.

Which part of the story and writing process resonated the most with you?
The brothers' search for human relationships and their effort to keep them alive are some of the things that I feel deeply connected to. It's an unfortunate phenomenon of our age — when digital media and globalization are supposed to keep us all connected — yet I sense that people are even more isolated in their loneliness these days. There are no real human connections. There are only fleeting "interfaces" or interactions.

You've won many international awards and much praise. Which bit of feedback or comment you've received so far has meant the most to you?
I think Amy Tan's recent Tweet about my novel was absolutely amazing. [She wrote: "Obsessively reading early copy of *The Descartes Highlands* by Eric Gamalinda. Darkly complex, exquisitely written. Wow!"] It was better than winning any award!

ℹ **THE DESCARTES HIGHLANDS** IS AVAILABLE AT NATIONAL BOOKSTORE AND FOR KINDLE AT *WWW.AMAZON.COM*