Towards a Tradition of Sillimanian Literature

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This article provides the motivation for a literary history of Silliman University, a specific example of regional literature that has remained a largely neglected part in the consideration of the Philippines' national literary history, unappreciated in favor of the literary production and industry in the capital. The paper establishes Dumaguete as an important place in the Filipino literary geography and posits that there indeed exists a "Sillimanian" tradition of writing.

Keywords: Silliman University, literary barkada, Sillimanian writing, Sillimanian writers, literary tradition, National Writers Workshop, Philippine literature, Edilberto Tiempo, Edith Tiempo, Rodrigo Feria, *Sands & Coral*

INTRODUCTION

The immense contribution of writers from Dumaguete City in Negros Oriental to the development of Philippine literature in English remains a largely neglected chapter in the country's literary history, unremembered or unappreciated fully in favor of the literary production and industry in the Philippine capital. This is an understandable slight, if unwarranted: the center is power, power fed by easy access, a condition absent of the marginal and which hobbles its prospect for dominance.

One thing has to be made clear at the outset of this particular historical

project in this article. For the most part, a study of Dumaguete and Oriental Negrense literature is informed by and large by the literature put out by writers from Silliman University, the academic institution situated at the heart of the provincial capital, founded by American missionaries in 1901. Dumaguete itself, a city at the tip of the boot-shaped province in the middle of the Visayan Islands, is a university town, host to many academic institutions, including two other universities—but the gravity of creative writing lies very much within Silliman, influencing even those produced by writers from other universities and schools in town, most of whom invariably have gotten their training, formally or informally, from Edith Tiempo or Edilberto Tiempo, Dumaguete's literary titans.

That influence—also distinctive for its almost exclusive use of English as the primary language of expression—has spread to the rest of the province, and while the literary brand can correctly be labeled as "Sillimanian," the better distinction, if one has to be true to terminology, has to be "Dumagueteño" or "Oriental Negrense," given that it is the place—the geographical specificity—that eventually gives the local literary tradition its distinctive flavor. Writers from the place, after all, write about Dumaguete, and not Silliman; the university may indeed be instrumental in giving formal instruction on the craft to local practitioners, but it is the spirit of the work, sprung from a Dumaguete sense of being, that ultimately gives shape to the writing tradition. To make the distinction less confusing, one must quote the campus writer Georgette Villa (1995) who once exasperatedly declared, "Dumaguete is Silliman, and Silliman is Dumaguete." While arguable—because it simply does not compute, and is rather reductive of the two—it bears the mark of an emotional truth. For the sake of simplicity, let us blur the boundaries between the two. That blurring also reminds us that these categories—e.g., Silliman writing, Dumaguete writing, Oriental Negrense writing—are porous.

Edith Tiempo, for example, was born and raised in Bayombong, Nueva Ecija, but she is the paragon of Dumaguete writing. She was awarded, in fact, for this distinction by the provincial government when Negros Oriental celebrated its centennial in 1989. Her story as a transplanted Dumagueteño writer is the story of many other writers whose literary identitiesare fused strongly with the Oriental Negrense city: poet and fictionist Cesar Ruiz Aquino, from Zamboanga, and poet Marjorie Evasco, from Bohol, are the best examples of these.Then there is poet, fictionist, and playwright Elsa Martinez Coscolluela, who is from Dumaguete and who has written significantly of Dumaguete in her body of literary works. She can also be rightly called a Bacolodnon writer, having found

a home in Bacolod on the other side of Negros Island.

And what, in fact, constitutes a "Sillimanian"? In Handulantaw, a historical appraisal of the tradition of art and culture in Silliman University since its founding in 1901 (Casocot, 2013), the term is defined as someone who has matriculated in the institution, but not necessarily graduated from it. This would then include such literary luminaries as Resil Mojares, Rosario Cruz Lucero, and Kerima Polotan, who have enrolled in Silliman University for varying stretches over a few semesters, but would eventually transfer to other institutions where they eventually graduated. The term "Sillimanian" is also given to those people who have worked in the institution either as members of the faculty and staff, but having not necessarily graduated from Silliman itself. This allows for the inclusion of many people—e.g., David Hibbard, Laura Hibbard, James Chapman, Charles Glunz, Robert Silliman, Metta Silliman, Abby Jacobs, William Pfeiffer, Harry Pak, Albert Faurot, Alfred Yuson, Susan S. Lara, Betty Abregana, and many others—who have graduated from other academic institutions but whose professional lives are closely intertwined, in varying degrees, with the development and shaping of the university's art and culture scene.

The distinction of "Silliman writer" is thus porous, but it is also one that is important to make, because it is a snapshot of a literary scene governed by a specificity of place and circumstance, one that has a continuous and considerably history (from 1901 to the present), and—because it is set in the regions—one that provides a necessary corrective to the idea that Philippine literature is one defined broadly by its developments in the National Capital Region.

Still, even with the convenient blurring of distinctions and an acceptance of their necessary porousness, excavating a history of local literary culture proves to be a daunting task.

Only very few literary scholars and academics, among them Mary Ann Evasco Pernia (2013) and Merlie Alunan (1997), have written (mostly unpublished) short histories and cultural studies of the Silliman University National Writers Workshop and the literary culture of Dumaguete's premiere university. Scholarship that attempts at a definitive history of the literature and/or literary culture found in Negros Oriental has been scarce, often relegated to obscure academic journals and disappearing literary folios, because unarchived.

There is also a host of other challenges, one of which has created a fascinating limitation to any anthologizing project of a historical nature. Foremost of this is the language issue for this specific regional literature. Oriental Negrense literature written in the predominant Cebuano languagehas largely disappeared

as a driving force in local literary culture—or at least invisible because it is vastly unstudied, uncollected. One reason for this absence, despite the fact that Cebuano is still the common language spoken in the province, may be the "English Only" policy that took root in major schools around the capital city of Dumaguete, in large part due to the influence of American missionary teachers, who did not only find Silliman but also the popular provincial public high school in the middle of the city. Their language policy worked only too well, providing firm foundation for the flourishing of an English language literary culture, to the detriment of the development of a Cebuano literature. (It must be said, however, that Cebuano was one of the major languages the American missionaries used in the early days of Silliman—and along with Spanish and English, this was the main language used in the earliest publications, such as The Silliman Truth. But this was partly because of proselytizing purposes. Within a decade, Cebuano largely disappeared from the official organs of Silliman. Spanish and Tagalog had a longer run, persisting well into the late 1950s.)

Surprisingly, save for the occasional efforts of the editors of the literary folio Sands & Coral, there really has been no major attempt at anthologizing the literary outputs of significant writers to come out of the province or Dumaguete. The closest has been MerlieAlunan's The Dumaguete I Know from 2012, which collected creative nonfiction of personal recollections by various writers from Dumaguete. By and large, there has never been any attempt at preserving local writerly contributions, or perhaps more alarmingly, of their memory, thus marking a conspicuous absence in an otherwise very literary city. The plays of Roberto J. Ponteñila Jr. or Ephraim Bejar, who wrote a number of powerful indictments of the Marcos dictatorship, have been forgotten, unfortunately unpublished in collected form, or unstaged. The award-winning short stories of Jose V. Montebon remain uncollected. The essays on Moslem life by Lugum Uka—arguably one of the earliest Moslem writers to attempt at a cultural examination of Moslem Mindanao—have been forgotten. And the same can be said even of more contemporary writers, like the exacting feminist poetry of Lina Sagaral Reyes and Grace Monte de Ramos—both of them female voices unique because grounded in the local. Their poetry has remained uncollected.

This article, the first in a series of historical studies towards establishing a tradition of Sillimanian literature, serves then as a much-needed filler of a gap in literary scholarship, a veritable memorial to the forgotten and the unremembered, an anthology of lost voices.

The major impact of this regional literary tradition can be rightly traced

to the annual Silliman University National Writers Workshop (then known at its inception as the Summer Writers Workshop, and briefly as the Dumaguete National Writers Workshop in the 1990s and early 2000s). The SUNWW is patterned after the Iowa Writers Workshop and is held in the Dumaguete campus every summer since its founding in 1961, which makes it the oldest creative writing workshop of its kind in Asia. Established by the Tiempos, the workshop has become the virtual rite of passage for countless poets, fictionists, playwrights, and essayists writing in English for more than five decades. A cursory look at its roster of alumni becomes a veritable parade of active practitioners of contemporary literature.

In turn, alumni of the workshop, coming from various regions of the Philippines, have injected much of what they have learned from the Dumaguete workshop into their own literary efforts, so much so that the poet and anthologist Gemino H. Abad (2012) has admitted, in Hoard of Thunder: Philippine Short Stories in English, 1990 to 2008, that Dumaguete can very well be considered, quoting the researcher, as "the hometown of Philippine literature."

That consideration is entirely not without merit. The place indeed occupies a central pre-occupation in the imagination of many contemporary writers, a ubiquitous presence in hundreds of short stories and novels, poems, and essays, which will be discussed in the next section.

Primarily, there is the significant fact of cultural contagion. Creative writing graduates from Silliman University, mostly trained by the Tiempos, have also gone on to found creative writing workshops and programs modeled after Silliman's everywhere else in the country—Erlinda Kintanar Alburo in Cebu; MerlieAlunan in Tacloban; Christine Godinez-Ortega, Jaime An Lim,and Anthony Tan in Iligan; Francis Macansantos in Baguio;Leoncio Deriada in Iloilo; Aida Rivera Ford, Antonino de Veyra,and Timothy Montes in Davao; Marjorie Evasco in Tagbilaran and Manila; and Elsa Victoria Martinez Coscolluela in Bacolod—making the Dumaguete/Silliman brand of literary writing an influential shaper of national letters. Within Dumaguete itself, the Tiempos' influence spread to neighboring universities, with fictionist and playwright Bobby Flores Villasis shaping much of the literary culture in Saint Paul College (now University) and poets Artemio and Gemma RacomaTadena in Foundation University.

Internationally, its impact can be felt in small ways in the founding of the International Writing Program (IWP) of the University of Iowa by the poet Paul Engle, the former teacher of the Tiempos in that university's famed

writers' workshop. Engle's visit to Dumaguete in 1963 helped pave the way to his creation, with the help of his wife, the Chinese writer Hualing Nieh of the IWP, which has hosted literary writers from all over the world to a generous fellowship since 1967.

There is also the matter of Dumaguete writers routinely giving, since the 1950s, their counterparts in Manila stiff competition with regular publications of short stories, literary essays, and poems in national magazines and anthologies, as well as in winning national awards. Edith Tiempo, notably, was one of the first winners of the Don Carlos Palanca Memorial Awards, which were first handed out in 1950, and was the first Filipino poet to be published in the prestigious Poetry magazine. She was also chosen by the American critic Leonard Casper as one of only half a dozen poets in the country churning out provocative work in the landmark anthology Six Filipino Poets, publishedin 1954.

But it would be wrong to say that creative writing in Dumaguete started only with the Tiempos. When it was still known as Silliman Institute, the university churned out the first provincial newspaper (masquerading as a campus organ) then known as Silliman Truth, first published in 1903 and edited by the American missionary and entomologist James Chapman, although the earliest available extant copy is from 1904. The paper contained the first instance of literary criticism in English in the country, with a short unsigned article published in 1 February 1905 arguing about the literary merits of Jose Rizal's novels. It was, however, a publication grounded in two central types of writing: reportage on the goings-on in the small college, and earnest proselytizing essays with a distinct Protestant missionary zeal. That said, fissures of the literary type could be occasionally seen. In 1907, the first short story—unsigned—was published in Spanish in the March 15 issue of the school organ titled "UnaPalabra a Tiempo," an involved tale about a country doctor who meets a drunkard on the way to a house call, and tells him that medicine cannot cure him of his affliction as a drunk—but that there was one other doctor who probably could, and his name was Jesus Christ. The piece is still in the proselytizing intentions that Silliman Truth was predicated upon, but it provides a good break in form—and also provides us a glimpse into the earliest literary ferment in Dumaguete at the turn of the 20th century.

The first three decades of Silliman University [then known as Silliman Institute] were years of foundation-building—many of them tumultuous—but the 1940s may be considered the decade that would mark a decisive turning point for Sillimanian writing. With the founding of its pathbreaking literary

folio, Sands & Coral, in 1948, the university made another mark on the national literature, introducing many writers from Southern Philippines to the attention of those in the national literary scene—and among the writers that were thrust into the literary limelight are the Tiempos as well as Rodrigo T. Feria, Cesar Amigo, Dolores Stpehens Feria, Aida Rivera Ford, Jose V. Montebon, James Matheson, and Ricaredo Demetillo, most of whom would later make names for themselves in Manila and Davao literary circles.

From them, and from the many that soon followed their ranks, sprang a ground-swelling of literary ferment that became tradition.

DUMAGUETE IN THE LITERARY IMAGINATION

But there is the matter of the literary imagination, and Dumaguete's hold on it. This is the bedrock with which to begin any claim for a regional tradition of writing.

There is a certain emotional gravity whenever one tries to situate Philippine literature in the context of home, that is, in the sense of Dumaguete—and even more specifically, Silliman University, the city's premiere university and main engine of culture since its founding by American missionaries in 1901.

One can make the argument that Dumaguete is the 'x' on the map of the Philippine literary imagination. In this place, "the acacia trees run, the surf dances, the air is heavy with sepia memories, life is recalcitrant to change" (Casocot, 2006). It is a friendly place for the pen: to be a writer in the Philippines is in a sense to be, at heart, a Dumagueteño.

Philippine literature has lain claim to a mythic Dumaguete—the same literary sense of geography that embraces Manuel Arguilla'sNagrebcan, Carlos Ojeda Aureus' Naga, Anthony Tan's Muddas, Nick Joaquin's Old Manila, and NVM Gonzalez's Romblon. Perhaps you can add to this list, F. Sionil Jose's Cabugawan. But while each of these places is mythologized in individual writers' dream of words, the "literary Dumaguete"has been borne from more than one pen, and has gone on to colonize more than one individual imagination.

Perhaps this is because the Tiempos, for so many years, inspired an annual pilgrimage by young writers to Dumaguete, and subsequently the quiet appeal of the small Oriental Negrense city has indeed made its way into the pages of countless books, journals, and literary magazines, and immortalized in equally countless stories, poems, and essays. The Filipino authors one often reads about have been through Dumaguete, have walked on its streets, and have written

sonnets to the sunrise off its famed Rizal Boulevard. Indeed, for many writers since the 1960s, Dumaguete—perhaps because this was where they had their first rush of maturing literary awakening—has become their default literary hometown.

In a chapter from his book *The Word on Paradise: Essays 1991-2000 on Writers and Writing* titled "The Adopted Hometown," the poet and novelist Alfred Yuson (2001) writes: "In May, at the height of summer, I come to Dumaguete for a week or so to renew fraternal ties. Recent years may have confined the brief idyll to clockwork regularity. But I take the opportunity nonetheless, perchance as a perpetual gift. Only by doing so may I remain privileged in fostering an undeniable affinity. Poor Manileño never had a hometown. Until Dumaguete. I remember it as clearly as yesterday, that first ride on a slow-moving *tartanilla,* May of 1968. How I marveled at the manner of entry, at the fresh air of *provincia,* rustic redolence, aged acacias lining an avenue I instantly knew would lead to a long-imagined, long-elusive fountainhead.... I would have friends here. I just knew it. We would share time and joy together here, until the place itself would turn into a memorious intimate. It has happened. Come to pass. And it's still, as they say, taking place. My Dumaguete friends and I continue to pass snatches of time together through decades of an evolving tapestry, absorbing layer upon fine layer of reminiscence. Those first three weeks in Dumaguete in the summer of 1968 had proven so thoroughly enjoyable that I swore to come back. *Na-dagit.* Hooked by her, the City of Gentle People."

Other prominent Filipino writers share similar sentiments. Poet Anthony Tan (2001) recalls the National Artist for Literature Rolando Tinio being in his element in Dumaguete of 1973, when he came to the summer workshop for that year: "He played the role of the devil's advocate to the hilt [during that summer's writers' workshop]. There was no story or poem that pleased him. I remember an incident one afternoon when a literature-teacher fellow showed his poem to Mr. Tinio. It was under the acacia tree in front of Larena Hall. A circle of benches surrounded the tree. It was where idle students should make *tambay*, where the laundry women on Saturday and Sunday afternoons would wait for the students to pick up the laundry. After a quick reading of the poem, Mr. Tinio dropped the piece of paper, bent down, and covered it with a pile of sand and remarked that the poem deserved a proper burial. The way he scooped the sand with both hands, wordlessly pouring the grains of sand on the paper, how he quickly stood up and delivered the punch line was a brilliant comic action. We were all entertained. We all laughed, including the mustachioed victim of this joke who,

we learned later, he invited to teach with him at the Ateneo de Manila..."

Indeed, to journey to Dumaguete as a writer has been, for many, to relive the haunts of literary heroes from the past. Dumaguete exists in a tumble of writers' memories, and it can be claimed, as one writer once said, that "they've *all* been here."

Consider a small list of literary names who have come to Dumaguete, either to mentor or to learn, aside from the Tiempos. There's Nick Joaquin, Gregorio Brillantes, Victor Sugbo, Wilfredo Nolledo, Petronillo Daroy, Jose Lansang Jr., Linda Ty-Casper, Erwin Castillo, Elena Reyes, Geronimo Sicam, Rogelio Sicat, Rolando Carbonell, NinotchkaRosca, Jose Carreon, Elsie Martinez Cosculluela, Federico Licsi Espino, Salvador Bernal, Marra PL Lanot, Edgar Libre Griño, Migen Osorio, Donel Paccis, Rene Estella Amper, VirgilioAlmario, Alfredo Salanga, Ricky Lee, Conrado de Quiros, Carlos Cortes, Francis Macansantos, VirgilioVitug, Leoncio Deriada, Estrella Alfon, Romero Centina, Cristina Pantoja-Hidalgo, Eric Gamalinda, Marjorie Evasco, JuaniyoArcellana, Simeon Dumdum Jr., Grace Monte de Ramos, Susan Lara, Fanny Llego, Myrna Peña-Reyes, Danton Remoto, Vicente Groyon III, Ruel S. De Vera, Ruben Canlas Jr., Nerisa del Carmen Guverra, Doreen Jose, Rene Ledesma Jr., Conchitina R. Cruz, Ralph Semino Galan, Carla Pacis, Lorenzo Paran III, Lourd Ernest de Veyra, Anne-Marie Jennifer Eligio, John Labella, Kris Lanot Lacaba, Andrea Pasion, Ronald Baytan, Lakambini Sitoy—a list of names that are a mere drop in Dumaguete's pail of literary waters.

Davao's Aida Rivera Ford (2001), author of the oft-anthologized story "The Chieftest Mourner," recalls traveling to 1940s Dumaguete: "To go to [Dumaguete] after the war, I rode on a rice truck from Bacolod escorted by Mama, not via the sunny route passing San Carlos but through the towns with airy names—Hinigaran, Binalbagan, Himamaylan, Kabankalan—and from thence through dark mountains where lurked guerilla-turned-bandits or just plain wayfarers. We spent a night at a barrio chieftain's hut, with our *buri* baskets containing our precious few clothing left out on the bamboo porch, Mama worrying visibly about them and a Chinese trader whose baskets contained bundles of money nonchalantly putting on an air of calm. Nothing did happen that night. Late in the afternoon, we made it to Dumaguete..."

Poet Antonino de Veyra (1988) remembers Dumaguete in 1985: "... I came over to complete some papers with my professor who is doing her doctoral thesis here. I liked the 'New England' ambience of the place. Old world charm, complete with fog rolling in at night to the bass notes of boat horns either

docking or casting off. Like Gothic, man. So I decided to drop by another time..." and remained for more than a decade as a professor in Silliman, and in his recollection he seemed amused and bewildered over the long years of stay.

"This place," Palanca Award-winning fictionist Timothy Montes (1988) writes in an essay for the *Sillimanian Magazine*, "a friend told me once, 'can make poets out of bums.' The poetry here, however, is the poetry of leaves. We are forever in the shadow of mild feelings, mild contemplation, mild laughter—never the wildness of city tenements and the seething rage of the sun... Every day has a dramatic atmosphere of sad farewells..."

Beyond the non-fictional musings, there are the stirrings of Dumaguete in the Philippine literary geography. To provide a few examples: In Jaime An Lim's Palanca-winning short story "The Axolotl Colony," one gets a jolt of amusement and surprise to realize that the main characters Tomas and Edith Agbayani, expatriates in Iowa, are exiles from Dumaguete. Poet J. Neil Garcia, in the first *Ladlad: An Anthology of Philippine Gay Writings*, waxes rhapsodic over traveling across Tañon Strait from Dumaguete to Siquijor. In "Un Bel Di," a chapter in Edith Tiempo's novel *His Native Coast*, the city in the story bears a strong resemblance to Dumaguete. Gemino H. Abad philosophizes on children and old age in his poem "Casaroro Falls," the famous cataract in Valencia town north of Dumaguete. Merlie Alunan, in her poem "The Bells Ring in Our Blood," paints an anguished exploration for a city grappling the loss of an activist priest in the dark days of Martial Law, as recalled in the tolling of Dumaguete's Redemptorist Church's bells. Alfredo Yuson situates his Palanca Award-winning novel *The Great Philippine Jungle Energy Café* in Bacong, the town bordering Dumaguete to the south. In his short story collection Boulevard *Bergamasque*, fictionist Bobby Villasis finally embraces Dumaguete in his tales chronicling the madness and drama of its upper middle class, and makes the city the crown jewel of his literary world. And in Lakambini Sitoy's novel *Sweet Haven*, Donostia, the scandal-rocked Southern Philippine city in question, is a pseudonymous Dumaguete, and Sweet Haven University in its pages is actually Silliman.

One may wonder about the so-called "captivating romance" claimed of this place, and which has been appropriated by many writers in the making of their own personal literature. The city, truth to tell, offers no instantaneous quickening of bigger metropolises, and no obvious literary impulses, save perhaps for the pervading calm and the shiftless changes of provincial days. Dumaguete is not sophisticated New York, nor decadent Manila, nor slumbering countryside as we find in Manuel Arguilla's literary landscape. "Nothing happens," Montes (1988)

writes in that same essay. "The [newspapers] can't find enough dogs bitten by men, everybody knows everybody, and one resorts to gossip in the face of the uneventfulness of leaves falling to the ground. Still, when one says goodbye, one never really leaves the place. The mild sadness grows within you and when you ask yourself what makes you hang around this place transfixed in time, you realize the irony of leaves falling to the ground. I love Silliman; that's why I hate it. Like leaves falling to the ground, we are suspended in mid-air and never quite reach the ground until we learn to despise it."

The clearest answer is the common pull of Silliman matriculation. One of the first in the country to offer a degree in creative writing (then called "imaginative" writing) (Tiempo, 1955), it has become the incidental reason for the ubiquity of Dumaguete in contemporary Philippine literature in English.

IN SEARCH OF A LOCAL LITERARY TRADITION

This article aims to establish an interested take on the state of literature and creative writing in Dumaguete City, Negros Oriental—with a considerable focus on Silliman University—given the lack of scholarship that detail what can be considered a local writing tradition. Only a small—but very significant—part of this tradition has ever been studied: that of the contributions of the Tiempos, Edilberto and Edith, to the national literature, including their influence in shaping the sense of craft of many contemporary writers such as Rowena Tiempo-Torrevillas, Susan Lara, Marjorie Evasco, Cesar Ruiz-Aquino, Bobby Flores-Villasis, Myrna Peña-Reyes, Leoncio Deriada, Anthony Tan, Merlie Alunan, Jaime An Lim, Christine Godinez-Ortega, Timothy Montes, and others.

But the greater part of that writing culture has remained unstudied.

What one proposes to do with this project is to establish a history of creative writing in Dumaguete City and Negros Oriental, and lay down a definitive idea of local tradition. Part of this goal is to provide a conclusive history and anthology showcasing the development of local writing, featuring significant Philippine writers from Dumaguete City and Silliman University, some of whom no longer enjoy even a bit of recognition among those circulating in Philippine literary circles.

Case in point: the eminent Sillimanian writer, the late Jose V. Montebon Jr. who, at the height of his literary ambitions in the 1950s and 1960s, won top prizes from some of the national contests for his short stories, including the prestigious *Philippines Free Press* Literary Awards which gave him second prize

for his short story "A Bottle Full of Smoke" in 1954. Today, his stories—because he chose to remain in Dumaguete, and in the margins of Manila's publishing centers, and because he chose to pursue a career in law—have remained uncollected and unremembered, depriving our national literature of one of its brightest voices. Another case in point: the poet Artemio Tadena, a Tiempo-trained writer and professor of English at Dumaguete's Foundation University, has been acknowledged by anthologist Gemino H. Abad as a Filipino poet of the first rank, and when he was alive, won a string of national prizes for his stirring poetry, soon collected in a number of books—now all out-of-print, and its author largely forgotten.

A comprehensive study on the subject of a Dumaguete or an Oriental Negrense literary tradition entails a challenge that takes into consideration the literary works and developments in the city and the province over the past one hundred years, and subsequently mapping and even problematizing the Sillimanian stamp to its development. At the outset, it is important to consider our explorations into a possibility of a local writing tradition with the following questions: Does the university setting of the local literature provide a good framework for a consideration of literary development? But what exactly is a literary tradition, and is such a thing to be found in our geographic focus? Where does one get evidence for this possible literary tradition?

In her essay, "The Literary *Barkada* in the Philippines," the fictionist/essayist Cristina Pantoja-Hidalgo (1988) pounces on a coinage—the literary *barkada*—made by Gemino H. Abad, and argues that the development of Philippine literary is largely the result of various communities of writers, mostly tied to a university, influencing or egging each other in their literary productions.

"Barkada," writes Hidalgo, "is a term for which there is no adequate translation into English. It is less formal than 'organization' but more formal than 'gang.' It consists of people who just like to hang together because they like each other."

She then proceeds to name many the literary *barkadas* in Philippine history, starting with the *barkada* of Jose Rizal, Juan Luna, and their ilk (each of them responsible for iconic pieces of protest literature that include novels, poetry, speeches and essays, and various forms of journalism) that first put out the revolutionary newspaper *La Solidaridad;* to the group of pensionados sent to the U.S.A., and published in Berkeley in 1905 *The Filipino Student Magazine,* which various scholars claim to be the first Filipino literary publication in English (*The Silliman Truth*—a publication in English, Cebuano, and Spanish—

actually antedates *The Filipino Student Magazine* by two years. It was first published in Dumaguete in 1903); to the founding of such famous literary groups as the Veronicans and the Ravens, to the various literary organizations that have sprung since the 1950s, including the Philippine Literary Arts Council or PLAC (which publishes the poetry journal *Caracoa*), the U.P. Writers Club (which publishes the *Literary Apprentice*), the Literary Guild, the Beer Club, the U.P. Women Writers' Club, The Quill, the University of Manila Literary Club (which published the *Seed*), among many others. The assertion she makes is that a shared academic background is in a sense a kind of "barkada." In her summation, Hidalgo contends that many of these groups are university-based. She writes:

> It is also noteworthy that regardless of which group they happen to be part of, most Filipino writers in English today feel a strong sense of community with other writers. The "writing community" has grown, and has spread beyond the traditional "center," Manila, to the other regions, helped on by an active literary scene. It provides strong peer support for its members and invaluable training for the young. And, as in the early days, since many among them are also editors, publishers, journalists, and academics, young writers find themselves remarkably well connected at every step of their career.

Hidalgo pays attention to a "group of southern writers"—consisting of Silliman writing alumna Leoncio Deriada, Erlinda Alburo, Elsie Martinez-Coscolluela, Merlie Alunan, Anthony Tan, Jaime An Lim, Rosario Cruz Lucero, Aida Rivera-Ford, Marjorie Evasco, and Timothy Montes—who dominate the leadership of such regional creative writing workshops such as the Cornelio Faigao Workshop in Cebu, the Iligan National Writers Workshop, the Iyas Workshop in Bacolod, and the U.P. National Writers Workshops in Tacloban, Davao, and Iloilo. Collectively, they are informally known in literary circles as the "Silliman mafia."

Hidalgo posits then that this community of writers may well be the engine in the growth of our literature. And if that is the case, then it pays to put some concentration on these clusters. There is, indeed a U.P. tradition of writing, as well as La Sallian, Atenean, and Thomasian traditions. The literary folios of these universities have been quick to trace such a tradition in their campuses. In *Tomás*, the late poet Ophelia Alcantara Dimalanta (2000) writes in her

article, "Thomasian Writing: Reality of Myth": "Some outsiders observe that they can smell Thomasian writing miles away. Pejorative or not, this comment is truly interesting. What this smell is perhaps they should tell us." She admits to struggling with a definition of Thomasian literature, but concedes that Thomasian writing "as authentic voice is worth capturing, the expression of a life illumined by this lived [Catholic] faith … and breathed into art, celebratory, affirmative, even in the saddest lines, in the sheerest grappling with every day's needs, from the quietest to the most crying."

Could the same be said about the writings of Sillimanian authors? Is there an authentic Sillimanian literary voice?

Strangely, in Silliman University (which is the ecclesiastical cousin to the Catholic University of Santo Tomas, being the first Protestant academic institution to be established in the Philippine Islands), save for the consideration one gives to the contributions of the National Writers Workshop to Philippine literature, no concrete attempt—as has been previously discussed—at describing a local literary tradition has ever been done, save for an attempt by the poet Merlie Alunan (1997) who once wrote: "Whether true or not, there is said to be a 'Silliman style' or a 'Silliman school' of writing. The so-called school is characterized by a certain 'finish,' an exactness of tone, diction, handling of verse, 'smoothness,' 'polish,' a sense of being 'crafted.'" She nonetheless goes on to point out that these qualities—no matter how they might sound to be paragons to be sought after in writing, are not always pointed out by critics of so-called 'Silliman style' as admirable: "[F]or the terms could all be stretched to mean being effete, lacking in spontaneity, too 'arty,' too self-conscious. Those with mass sympathies and grassroot identity accuse the Silliman school of elitism."

And yet it is also interesting to point out that many of the writers identified with the 'Silliman school,' often said to sound like their mentors, the Tiempos, are forerunners in scholarly exploration and literary crafting in regional languages—among them Marjorie Evasco, MerlieAlunan, and ErlindaAlburo in Cebuano, Leoncio Deriada in Hiligaynon and also in Cebuano, and Alunan again in Waray. Christine Godinez-Ortega and Elena Maquiso have given distinct contributions as well to the study of folk literature in Northern Mindanao. "Each has a distinct voice," Alunan wrote. "Taken together their voices are as diverse as their ages, heights, and sizes." She continues:

> Also, they would be the first to deny they sounded like their mentor, the inimitable Edith Tiempo. Any writer, however, might admit a

> brief period of intense influence of which one is quickly cured by maturity, one's evolving sensibilities, the broadening and deepening of one's imaginative capacity to deal with experience. To the Tiempos at least, it may affirm unmistakably the workings of tradition and individual talent from whose cutting edge, they believe, no serious artist of the word may escape.

The current lack of inquiry into the Sillimanian writing tradition is unfortunate, given the more than a hundred years of this tradition that has seeped into the national literature, which began the moment local Dumagueteños began reading and writing under the tutelage of American Presbyterian missionaries in a rented house in 1901.

But what exactly is a "literary tradition"?

Simply defined, it is an awareness of a specific (and influential) body of literary work that has come before what is contemporary in literature, and which writers try to continue (as well subvert) in their individual efforts to do creative writing—mindful of T.S. Eliot's charge of the "anxiety of influence," which is the battle between "tradition and the individual talent."

Timothy Montes (2001) has argued that such a tradition exists in the Philippines—but, for the most part, contemporary writers remain ignorant or skeptical of it, which may lead to a literature that does not grow, or that remains perpetually inchoate (which is Fr. Miguel Bernad's once-famous charge against Philippine literature as a whole), simply because they have remained uninformed of what has already gone on before. Montes writes:

> I [mention] the word "tradition" in a more positive light [and does not carry] dark connotations… I [associate] it with another word: *agon*—a writer's imaginary dialogue, a struggle, a conversation, a wrestling—with writers from the past. It was T.S. Eliot who wrote in his influential essay "Tradition and the Individual Talent" that tradition was the force to reckon with for any writer. He said that if a young writer worth his salt wants to continue writing beyond his twenty-fifth year, he has to develop a sense of history, of tradition. A young [Filipino] writer can begin writing in his teens from a host of motives—to win a Palanca, to get the attention of a pretty classmate in Introduction to Poetry, to preserve childhood memories, to be inspired by early Joyce: "to forge in the smithy of my soul the

> uncreated conscience of my race." But a young writer is apt to lose steam and fall along the wayside if he relies on romantic, adolescent obsessions alone. One simply outgrows them when the sordid realities of life overtake him: marriage, work, payment of insurance—what philistines call "reality." Eliot's prescription was for the writer to take the long view: in his case he carried on an *agon* with the past, with the Western Canon. Eliot was carrying on an artistic dialogue with his predecessors—Dante, Shakespeare, Donne, Wordsworth, etc. "No poet," according to him, "no artist of any art, has his complete meaning alone. His significance, his appreciation is the appreciation of his relation to the dead poets and artists."

He continues:

> In this case, since the yardstick has been established by the past, the contemporary young writer has to take the responsibility of critical judgment by the standards of the past. It is as if our predecessors were millionaires who have bequeathed such accumulated wealth to us and we can not afford to lose that inheritance in the money market of free enterprise. The past, therefore, can be an object of imitation, of inspiration, or of derision by contemporary young writers.

If the past thus defines what is "tradition" in writing, our entrance to a study of a "Dumaguete writing tradition" must then first be grounded in the historical, with the hope that it leads to a formation of an idea of a "Dumaguete literary evolution"—the gleaning of the years since 1901 (the year of the founding of Silliman University) resulting to a harvest of observation of what Dumaguete writers write about, how they write it, how they share this craft of expressing what they write (and whether there is indeed a commonality of styles and message), and how succeeding generations of local writers respond to this living history of literary output.

For sure, this tradition of writing began to exist as something formless and quite inchoate—and solidified only by a constant turning of outputs all shaped by a never constant and present community, and in this case provided by the structure called Silliman education. The writings that were being produced in the early years of Silliman, especially between 1903 and 1945, existed in a vacuum of identity that was loyal only to individual expression, and not necessarily part of a

body of writing produced by a community. But the obliterations of World War II and the newly-acquired independence of the Philippines from America in 1946 most effectively provided the impetus with which many of these campus writers began to gravitate towards an idea of a shared or communal body of writing. The surprising high critical reception of the Sands & Coral, the literary folio produced in 1948, which stirred even the literary circles in the national capital, certainly helped in giving shape to what was now being called "Silliman writing." And there is evidence that as far back as 1952, the notion of "Sillimanian" writing had been acknowledged as something that was, in fact, existing and thriving. For the column *Point of View*, written by two pseudonymous critics named Alphonse and Gaston (1952), an article titled "Silliman Writers: Here and There" was published in the Christmas issue of *The Sillimanian Magazine,* dated December 20, which took into consideration the seeming preeminence of writers from the Dumaguete university in various national publications:

> There are on the campus today budding and seasoned writers. There are those who have been published in American quality magazines and have been praised (many times) and "unpraised" (still many more times) by the ever self-appointed critics. There are the few writers who have established themselves in the national magazines, and have managed to keep their names there at present. Then there are the newly recognized ones—those who have eventually succeeded in getting through the editor's desk. Finally, there are the unpublished ones, those who from time to time submit their materials for publication, with the hope that eventually they will make the grade… In the field of the short story, the Silliman writers have done their share of the job. In fact, according to [Editor-in-Chief Graciano H. Arinday Jr.] and [Managing Editor Ricardo Drilon] of The Sillimanian (these two have made quite a survey of all Philippine magazines), we have the longer list of published short stories than that of any other school in the Philippines. We really did not believe it at first. We argued with them, protesting vehemently at their assertions—How about Vivente Rivera Jr., Manuel Viray, Morli Dharam, and Joan Elades of UP; or Clemente Roxas, AzucenaGrajo of FEU; or Kerima Polotan Tuvera of Arellano? Their names have appeared constantly in national magazines.
>
> But these two … quietly took a sheet of paper and handed it

> to us. At first it looked like a telephone directory page in our hands; but when we started reading, it turned out to be a list of short stories, articles, and poems by Silliman writers published in national magazines this year [1952]. The two had us there."

In that list were names that included James Matheson, Reuben Canoy, Edith Tiempo, Edilberto K. Tiempo, Kenneth Woods, Jose Montebon Jr., Graciano H. Arinday Jr., Ricardo Drilon, Leticia Dizon, David Quemada, and Ricaredo Demetillo, all being published by *Philippines Free Press, This Week* (the Sunday magazine of the *Manila Chronicle*), *Graphic Report, Saturday Magazine of the Philippines, Evening News Saturday Magazine*, Philippine Review, Sunday Times Magazine, and Weekly Women's Magazine, as well as Poetry Magazine in Chicago. They provided the initial burst of inertia that galvanized "Sillimanian writing," which was to eventually flower in influence in 1961, with the founding of the Summer Writer Workshop by the Tiempos. It was not always a rosy picture of constant literary excellence, as evidenced by Antonio Gabila's (1957) rant, titled "Campus Writers and Writing," in the very pages of the same magazine in 1957, where he charged local writing as "uninteresting," "need[ing] restraint," and incapable of sustaining a singular theme. "When one writes on the floodtide of emotion, one produces not interesting, vivid writing, but often mush," he wrote.

But that is, of course, a kind of an inevitability in any story of growth—and the truthfulness of this becomes even more apparent as literary culture in Silliman and Dumaguete expanded and receded, in an extremes of heaving that is nonetheless indicative of its continued life. The march of Sillimanian writing has only continued since Gabila wrote those warnings in 1957, gaining momentum in the 1960s and the 1970s, and consequently prospered beyond the imagination of those who first laid its foundation.

For the purposes of this article, the best sources for finding what must constitute the Sillimanian writing tradition are the many publications that have come out in the university's more than one hundred-year history, which have nurtured literary musings of various sorts—Sands & Coral (first published in 1948); *The Weekly Sillimanian* (first published as the *Silliman Truth* in 1903, then as *The Sillimanian* in 1920, and briefly as *The Daily Sillimanian* during the early months of the Second World War); *The Sillimanian Magazine* (first published as a supplement to the campus paper in 1939); the *Silliman Journal* (first published in 1953); *The Junior Sillimanian* (first published in 1949); Stones and Pebbles

(first published as *The Midget Sillimanian* in 1967); Portal (first published as The Annual in 1913, and renamed in 1918); and *Dark Blue Southern Seas* (first published in 2007)—putting in minor consideration the literary outputs that remain in notebooks and the unpublished typescripts from Sillimanians. Other Silliman publications not covered in this study are *The Weekly Calendar* (formerly *The Calendar*), a newsletter for the faculty and staff; *Silliman Law Journal; The Parish News* (formerly *The Parish Visitor* and *The Church Concerns*); *Ang Sinugo* (formerly *Silliman Christian Leader)*; *Silliman Ministry Magazine*; *The Nurse; SUCNA Newsletter; The Gomez Gazette;* and *The Reporter.* Most of these have ceased publication. The fact of publication—having a piece written, edited, and read widely—makes literary pieces an inscribed part of history-making, and have better chances of contributing to a living writing tradition.

From the pages of these publications, and from the various histories of Silliman University written by David S. Hibbard (in 1926), Tiburcio Tumbagahan (in 1941), Arthur Carson (in 1965), Crispin Maslog, Edilberto K. Tiempo, and T. Valentino Sitoy Jr. (in 1977), and Paul Lauby, Proceso Udarbe, and Jennifer Lauby (in 2006), one can glean a workable tradition of literary writing that can include the following periods, and their subsequent literary sensibilities:

1. **The Formative Period**, from 1901 to 1945. This period covers, firstly, the foundational challenges (1901-1905) faced by the pioneering Presbyterian missionaries—particularly David and Laura Hibbard and James Chapman—as they struggled to fulfill their mission for their Christian denomination, as well as fulfill the vision of industrial education by philanthropist Horace B. Silliman. The nascent literary culture then was marked by the creation of several literary societies (organizations devoted to debate and oratory), the establishment of English as one of the main modes of classroom expression, and the purchase of a printing press in 1903, and with that the subsequent first publication of the campus paper, Silliman Truth, that same year. Secondly, it covers the eventual turn-around in the fortunes of the fledgling institution (1906-1941), which saw its campus publication become more secular—and student controlled—in 1920, now renamed The Sillimanian; the publication of the yearbook in 1913 (which was described by Hibbard as something "permeated with poetry"); and then the publication of The Sillimanian's supplementary magazine, The Sillimanian Magazine, in 1939, which hastened the literary ferment in campus. Thirdly, it covers the years

under Japanese occupation and its immediate aftermath (1942-1946), which saw the wartime publication of The Daily Sillimanian, the eventual silencing of the budding literary voice as the campus became deserted, and, after the war, the 1947 publication of Edilberto K. Tiempo's novel Cry Slaughter! (local title: Watch in the Night) by Avon Books in the U.S., a harrowing account of the war in Negros, which also helped bring in a stronger mode of realism in the Philippine novel in English.

Sillimanian writing from this period would be characterized first by a proselytizing bent in three languages—Cebuano, Spanish, and English—expected for an institution founded by Protestant missionaries; second by a didactic sensibility, with essays passionately tackling issues of morality and nationalism; and third by an inchoate literary and secular sensibility pervaded by the Romantic mode typical of the literature of this period.

2. **The Period of Rapid Literary Advance**, from 1946 to 1961. This brief period may be considered the Golden Age of Sillimanian writing, and covers Edilberto K. Tiempo's departure to the U.S. for study in the Iowa Writers Workshop under the poet Paul Engle in 1946. (Edith Tiempo would follow suit in 1948.) The joining of the faculty by alumnus Ricaredo Demetillo and the arrival of Rodrigo Feria in Silliman campus in 1947, together with Metta Silliman's leadership of the Department of English and Literature, jumpstarted the literary culture in Silliman, which became an agency for students, faculty, and staff alike to bolster morale after the ravages of World War II. Feria would become adviser to The Sillimanian, where he would institute radical changes in campus publishing and journalism that, together with Demetillo, would see the creation of the literary folio, Sands & Coral, in 1948, with Aida Rivera [Ford] and Cesar J. Amigo as founding editors. The 1950s would also see the national publication of many campus writers, including the Tiempos, Demetillo, Reuben Canoy, Kenneth Woods, Jose Montebon Jr., Graciano H. Arinday Jr., and David Quemada, together with the unceasing annual publications of both the literary folio and the magazine. Silliman University became one of the first schools in Asia to offer a degree in creative writing, then known as "imaginative writing."

Sillimanian writing from this period would be characterized by a more mature form of Romanticism, slowly pervaded by a formalist sensibility that would eventually flower in the late 1950s.

3. **The Period of the National Writers Workshop**, from 1962 to 1990. This period would see the rise in the national literary stature of the Tiempos, who were both back in Dumaguete fresh from their post-graduate studies in the U.S. Their founding of the Silliman Summer Writers Workshop in 1962 would bring in the Iowa model of formalist writing and criticism to the Philippines. They also brought into the Dumaguete fold many generations of contemporary Filipino writers in English, effectively making the city and Silliman University part of the rite of passage for any young writer in English in the country. Ricaredo Demetillo and Rodrigo Feria, together with wife Dolores Stephens Feria, would eventually make the move to the University of the Philippines during this period, where they would eventually gain grander prominence in the literary circles of Manila. The 1980s were a turbulent time for Silliman writing; however—an offshoot of the general sense of paranoia and disarray fostered by the imposition of Martial Law on the country by Ferdinand Marcos—and, while it ushered in a fresh generation of campus writers who were marked by a sense of radical social awareness and activism (seen in the likes of Timothy Montes, Antonino de Veyra, V.E. Carmelo Nadera, Lakambini Sitoy, Lina Sagaral Reyes, and Fanny HB Llego), it also marked the beginning of the exodus of a previous generation of campus writers such as Leoncio Deriada, Marjorie Evasco, Jaime An Lim, Merlie Alunan, Christine Godinez Ortega, Carlos Ojeda Aureus, Anthony Tan, among others, who moved on to other cities and other academic institutions in the Philippines, following a protracted institutional turmoil in Silliman's Department of English and Literature. In 1990, Silliman University would cease support for the workshop, which was hereafter run by the Creative Writing Foundation and eventually by the College Assurance Plan and, through the Dumaguete Literary Arts Guild, by the National Commission for Culture and the Arts.

   Sillimanian writing from this period would be characterized by a deft handling of formalism, but one slowly pervaded by a socialist sensibility brought about by the burgeoning protest literature typical of the period.

4. **The Period of the Diaspora**, from 1991 to 2006.This period covers a time in Silliman writing described by Montes once as the "tail-end" of a great generation of writing, and is characterized by a sense of the

young writers then as being orphaned by the lack of writing mentors in campus (Eligio, 2001; Alojamiento, 2001), most of whom have decamped to other cities—and which paradoxically helped cement Silliman's reputation as a literary hub by transplanting its influence in other regions of the Philippines. The university's Creative Writing Program, administered by the Department of English and Literature, while still officially alive, became inactive for a number of years. In 1997, Edilberto K. Tiempo would pass away, and in 1999, Edith Tempo would be conferred the title of National Artist for Literature (a national recognition which would help seed literary reawakening in campus years later). This was also the last period where the Sands & Coral would have a regular annual run, capped in 2002 with its nomination for Best Anthology in the National Book Awards given by the Manila Critics Circle. The Sillimanian Magazine, meanwhile, would last be seen in print in 2002.

Sillimanian writing from this period, while marked by a gradual slowing down because of the diaspora, would be characterized by a post-modernist approach, akin to Gemino Abad's (1998) description of a kind of poetic "open clearing" or what Jose Y. Dalisay Jr. (1998) once observed as the hallmarks of a new kind of generational writing, one that "derive[d] its inspirations from a whole new set of writers and ways of writing—still predominantly Western, but no longer so stolidly canonical"; one that dealt "largely with the bewildering variety of our unfolding experience—OCWs and the Filipino diaspora, the war in the countryside, the alienation of the middle class, the Chinese and the Others among us, our connections to the supernatural and to the afterlife, the tangled web of our personal relationships, including our sexuality, and art-making itself as subject" one that was "eclectic" in terms of treatment and approach, combining a deft handling of the dominant strain of realism with the "forms and mindsets of magic realism, metafiction, minimalism, science fiction, parable, comic book, gothic horror, and postmodern parody"; and finally, one that was, in terms of language, characterized by an unapologeticuse of English and "the refusal to be burdened by colonial guilt." This mindset would pave the way to a soft resurgence of bilingual writing in campus, with many writers opting to write not just in English, but also in Tagalog or Cebuano.

5. **The Period of Literary Reawakening**, from 2007 to the present. In 2007, under the presidency of Dr. Ben S. Malayang III, Silliman University once again sought custodianship of the workshop founded by the Tiempos, which would then be known as the Silliman University National Writers Workshop. In 2009, the workshop would have a regular home in the Rose Lamb Sobrepeña Writers Village, in what was formerly called the Camp Lookout in Valencia, Negros Oriental. (The workshop would celebrate its 50th anniversary in 2011, the year Edith Tiempo would pass away.) In 2013, Sands & Coral would be published anew with the special anthology publication titled Celebration, which commemorated the golden anniversary of the National Writers Workshop, taking note of its contribution to the formation of contemporary Philippine literature. In 2012, the Edilberto and Edith Tiempo Creative Writing Center would be founded, with the researcher as the founding coordinator and writing associate, and with Cesar Ruiz Aquino, Myrna Peña-Reyes, and Bobby Flores-Villasis as fellow associates (Marjorie Evasco, Anthony Tan, and Elsa Martinez Coscolluela would become associates in 2015.)

A history of Silliman writing, while mirroring much of what is happening to the national literature, offers another view of its development springing from more regional circumstances, and free from the conceits that shaped the literature developed in the national capital. It has its own arcs of development, replete with its dramas and challenges.

It reminds us that the literature from margins can have impact. To quote Alphonse and Gaston's parting remarks in their 1952 article: "An editor of a national magazine predicted that the good and better short stories and poems will come from the South. We believe that this editor was an exception to the general rule—he was not exaggerating. And we are surely glad that these writers … will be coming from Silliman, we hope."

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