Irog-Irog: Making Space for Contributions and Critique of the Tiempos and the Silliman Workshop

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Edilberto and Edith L Tiempo have been under scrutiny recently in relation to their perceived participation in the cultural diplomacy arm of American Empire. An article from a few years back, by the poet and critic Conchitina Cruz, viewed this from the lens of a Filipino nationalist Renato Constantino, who was keen on elucidating a vision of the "miseducation of the Filipino," alongside the ideas of Eric Bennett on the life and work of former Iowa Writers Workshop Director Paul Engle in relation to the Cold War.

Cruz's scrutiny is problematic because of the arguably inappropriate use of the framework by Constantino. This essay presents typically unseen aspects of the life and work of the Tiempos, particularly that of Edilberto. The goal of the presentation is to complicate the understanding of the couple's work, which is more aligned to the way Constantino discussed the way Filipinos worked and made choices in the light of nationalist concerns.

Ultimately, an alternative is given to Cruz's highly structured and limiting frame, one connected with more local approaches that involve connection with the kalooban, as embodied in a composed song in the Cebuano-Visayan language. What is hoped for is a kind of critical approach that allows for a more reasonable scrutiny, in which useful and harmful aspects are weighed to serve the strengthening of national interests.

Keywords: Philippine literature in English, American imperialism, cultural diplomacy, postcolonial criticism

It has been a few years since the online publication of Conchitina Cruz's "The (Mis)education of the Filipino Writer: The Tiempo Age and Institutionalized Creative Writing" in the Kritika Kultura Journal of the Ateneo de Manila University's Department of English (Cruz). I used to teach in the said department; and while I was already teaching in another unit when the essay came out, I felt its undeniable sting. It had to do with being both an Ateneo de Manila teacher and an alum of the Silliman National Writers Workshop, which the essay's subjects, Edilberto and Edith Tiempo, cofounded in 1962.

The years offer some relief due to chronological distance, which also allowed for a critical assessment that, though still holding the writer and publisher accountable for what is I believe is an unbalanced portrayal of the Tiempos, I have been able to frame the critique in a different vision. The delineation where "The (Mis)Education of the Filipino Writer" fits is that of an anti-imperialist project, wherein it is the great structural forces that need to be focused on and rebalanced, even when the tone of the essay goes polemically overboard. Such a project has great value, especially at this crucial time when demagogues are trying to stay in power, our national sovereignty in the Philippines is under threat, and oppression based on class is rife.

The presentation that Cruz does is a multilayered one, and I hope to address these concerns, some of which hold water and will do well to be considered. The following four points, I believe, summarize the concerns that Cruz sought to address:

1. The Silliman Workshop was modeled after the Iowa Workshop, which is linked to American Cultural Diplomacy.
2. The Silliman Workshop's focus on New Criticism prevents writers from seeing the political aspect of writing.
3. The Silliman Workshop's focus on English prevents writers from seeing the political formation and dynamics of language.
4. The Silliman Workshop, having focused on works in English, also perpetuated a local elite in Philippine literature, which has enabled gatekeeping of those who might produce new literary works from within and outside the academe.

Although I am trying to take the most useful material from her presented concerns, I believe it important to present the problems that I have seen in her paper. The goal is not simply to put the Tiempos and the Silliman Workshop in a more appreciative light. It is to forward a possible fruitful approach to criticism in relation to national concerns, in which literature and creative writing play a part.

I would like to propose that "The (Mis)Education of the Filipino Writer" must be read with care because it is problematic in its assessment due to 1. the deployment of a framework that does not match its purposes, and 2. there are gaps in the presentation of the Tiempos, which can be alleviated by more research. I will develop this thesis by going through the following:

1. An elucidation of Renato Constantino's "The Miseducation of the Filipino," and an assessment of how it does not complement the project of Cruz;
2. An examination of ideas by Jose Maria Sison and Gelacio Guillermo that might provide a better framework for Cruz's anti- imperialist project; and
3. A filling-in, so to speak, of what I see as gaps in the research of Cruz, which should complicate the way we view the Tiempos, the Silliman Workshop, and the anti-imperialist project that Cruz sought to launch.

I have elected to take a track different from critics such as Charlie Samuya Veric, who makes a formidable claim that Edith Tiempo, by being critic and poet, is able to place the two aspects of her life into a dialectic that synthesizes into work that breaks through the form-focused New Criticism that she was reared in (258-259). Critics, such as Veric, have focused more on addressing the claims echoed by Cruz in her work. My paper is an act of listening to her project and sorting out what has not been articulated properly in the process.

This paper, I believe, calls for a different approach as compared to the typical academic paper, wherein one usually borrows an overarching frame from an established critic or theorist. Although I will refer to established theories and ideas, I choose to begin with a set of lyrics that Edith Tiempo had used as part of her essay entitled "When Music Sings in the Hearts of

the People[1]." In doing so, I hope to frame my project, which is to enable a potentially useful understanding between writers and critics.

Pahaloka Ko, Day

Boy: Pahloka ko, Day! (Let me kiss you, Miss!)
Girl: Halok lang sa uban! (Just kiss others!)
Boy: Ikaw may gusto ko! (But you're the one I want!)
Girl: Nganong ako nga anaa may uban? (Why me when there are others?)
Boy: Sigi na lagi, Day! (Come on now, Miss!)
Girl: Dili ako kay waa ako gusto! (I won't because I don't like to!) Irog-irog! (Please move)
Boy: Unsay irog? (What do you mean move?)
Both: Irog-irog ngarig diyutay! (Move a little closer!) Irog-irog ngarig diyutay! (Move a little farther!)
Boy: Kanindot unta sa gugma ta, (How wonderful our love could be!) Kun pahalok pa ikaw kanako! (If only you would let me kiss you!)

Girl: Iasa ko man kanang imong halok, (Why should I want your kiss,) Nga dili man ko mahimuot? (When I could not be pleased?)
Both: Ay! (Oh!) (Repeat first part)

The composed song, which has aspects of Filipino folk songs and what seems to be a broad appeal to the people from Visayas and Mindanao, is akin to the *balitaw* form[2]. The topic of the song is courtship, and it may be taken that what is happening in the lyrics is a moment of flirtation. However, it might also be said that it is also about the negotiation of boundaries and the sharing of space. After all, these matters are not irrelevant to the complications of courtship and romantic relationship.

One aspect of the lyrics has to do with a call for appropriate space. Edith

1 The song *"Pahaloka Ko, Day"* is more commonly available as *"Pasayawa Ko, Day"* on YouTube.

2 The folk song is composed by the community in a combination of conscious and unconscious ways. On the other hand, a composed song has a specific person who wrote it. *"Pahaloka Ko, Day,"* according to critic and professor Jose S Buenconsejo (284), was written by Cebuano composer Ben Zubiri. It has a dialogue structure plus what seems to be a section that connects back to the beginning, making one think that there is a composer who put the music together. Still, it has elements of the folk – the differing titles indicate the influence of various communities on the song. I thank Dr. Jose Buenconsejo and Ms. Sol Trinidad of the UP College of Music, and Mr. Paolo Pardo, for allowing me to consult on the distinctions of the folk song and composed song.

has two takes on this matter: one is that a violation of space might occur if one forces the self on the other (Tiempo, Bernad and Tiempo 270). The other one, in "When Music Sings in the Hearts of the People," is about the pretense that people who are in love hold on to while they avoid closeness and intimacy (Edith Tiempo 24). Ultimately, what is necessary is a negotiation between the two parties involved in a courtship situation. Talking things through in a thorough way with another will ensure that everyone can share a space and enjoy it.

Talking things through, according to the lyrics of the song, might enable us to understand each other better. The instruction and request *"irog-irog,"* clearly, is something that can only be understood if one truly felt deeply for the other. One other way to get to the core of the statement is to ask for clarification. The lyrics of the song, in my opinion, do not portray this level of communication between the boy and the girl. Thus, one might say that one grants space to someone by giving this person an open ear.

I believe that the lyrics of *Pahaloka Ko, Day* might be explained from the philosophical viewpoint by Albert Alejo, SJ, who had written about the concept of *loob*, a word that though with Tagalog origins is still shared conceptually by people from different regions. What he writes, however, already goes beyond the mere understanding between two persons. What is really important is the benefit that companionship bears—the ability to understand the self better when the other person sees through you and communicates this with you in openness:

> *Hindi ko kayang mamalayan ang lahat ng nagaganap maging sa aking sarili mismo. Hindi ko kayang madama ang lahat ng tuwa at lungkot ng aking kapwa. At sa aking sarili, kung minsan, ang akala ko'y napatawad ko na ay nakatanim pa pala sa kaloob-looban ng aking kawalang-malay kaya hindi ko pa rin hawak. At hindi lahat ng nakikita kong maganda at dapat ay abot ng aking kawalang-malay kaya hindi ko pa rin hawak. At hindi lahat ng nakikita kong maganda at dapat ay abot ng aking kakayahan. Totoo, ang aking kalayaan ay nakasalalay sa sariling galaw ng aking loob. Subalit posible lamang ito sa loob ng isang daigdig na mayroon akong kasama, sapagkat kung ako lang, hindi ko alam kung hanggang saan ang aking abot. Kailangan kong mamulat na hindi ako nag-iisa, na kahit anong mangyari, meron akong kapiling na kapanalig na kapwa ko na nagnanasang magpakatao at lumaya ring tulad ko. At sa gitna ng ugnayang ito, mayroon pa akong makakapitang lubos na kasama ko, narito sa pinakaloob ng loob ko at hindi ako iniiwan. Siya ang pinaka-nakikisangkot sa lahat ng galaw ng aking loob. (115)*

What is notable in Alejo is that the belief *pakikipagkalooban* can be a channel of healing. Forgiveness is something that might not be given by a person only because one does not see the resentment that still festers within. On the other hand, the beauty aspired for is still not attained because this beauty is not yet seen–and can only be pointed out by a companion who is willing to share another's inner space, the *kalooban*. It is important to note that what the *kalooban* affords is not just healing on the personal level:

> *Naroon ang loob sa isang namumulat at dahan-dahang nagpapalawak ng abot ng kamalayan. Naroon ang loob sa nakikiramay at unti-unting nagpapalalim ng pakikiisang-loob sa kapwa lalo na sa mga gipit na gipit at hindi makahinga nang maluwag. Naroon ang loob sa nagpapasiya at pasulong na nangangatawan sa kanyang paninindigan sa harap ng mga hangganan at kamaarian ng makataong kalagayan. Naroon ang loob sa isang taong tahimik na nananatiling tapat sa minamahal o sinumpaan. Naroon din ang loob sa pagliliwayway ng mga likhang-sining mula sa kaibuturan ng ating pagiging isang lahi. Kaya't kasama ng mga lathalaing akademiko, hayaang umambag sa literatura ng loob ang mga salaysay at kuwentong-buhay, ang mga dalit at daing ng sambayanan, ang mga tula na nagmumula sa mga piitan, at ang mga pansin at di- pansing "kadakilaan ng loob" na hindi naibabantayog sa ating kabihasnang kung bakit ba naman lagi nang natutukso sa "ningning ng mga panlabas." (Alejo 117)*

It is apparent that for Alejo, changes can be effected beyond the personal through getting in touch with the *kalooban*. What might be a problem on the structural level might even be changed through the efforts of people in touch with their inner power, who are able to relate with each other on this level. It is clear that work against any structural imbalance is always rooted in the human and moves towards what benefits individual persons–and this can be done through endeavors that are artistic and creative, all of which are in touch with the *kalooban*.

What I am doing through writing this paper is to address the anti-imperialist concerns of Cruz through making the attempt to understand her work better and fill in what it has not been able to do. This attempt, I believe, comes from the attempt at appreciation, and hopes to foster a *pakikipagkalooban* among Filipino critics at a time when structural forces dominate Philippine life. This kind of relating, I hope, will help derive what is best from the approaches of people, even those we may not agree with. This should contribute to a greater sense of community, and possibly more collaborative approaches to the work of liberation.

My Subject Position as Critic

Coming to terms with writing this essay was a challenge, given that I feel a certain closeness to Edith, whom I learned to call Mom Edith after she asked my batch of fellows to call her that during my workshop in 2003. Maybe, it was because I had newly graduated from college that I decided to take a risk and find a way to live in Dumaguete. I ended up staying in the city for two years, and had quite an adventure. I regularly met with two of the workshop's resident panelists at that time, Bobby Flores Villasis and the late Ernesto Superal Yee, while there were days that I would just drop by CAP Building to see Mom Edith as she worked on student modules for what was then CAP College.

It was a sense of closeness to both Mom Edith and Ernie Yee, whom I fondly called my Mamah in Dumaguete, that eased me into the work of helping out with the establishment of the Dumaguete Literary Arts Service Group, Incorporated, which was more commonly known as DüLA, Inc. I worked as secretary of the organization, which helped source funds that would augment the already present resources of the workshop[3] while being a Graduate Teaching Fellow at Silliman University–both a student of the MA Literary Studies program and a teacher of a few basic writing and reading classes.

I was able to get 32 units from my studies at Silliman, but I did not finish my degree. Generally, my mind was directed towards attempts to write poetry, other creative endeavors, and a way of enjoying life that I thought was part and parcel of my being a writer. As a matter of focus and in order to avoid hurting the feelings of the people whose stories are intertwined with my adventure, I will be selective in presenting certain details from the two special years that I stayed in Dumaguete. The ultimate point of telling a few stories, after all, is to support the objectives of this paper as well as to complicate my location to a sufficient degree.

Some of the material I will be using will be comprised of creative and critical texts selected from the work of the Tiempos and some of the students that they have had over the years. Selected interviews, done online because of

3 The Creative Writing Foundation (CWF) had been the group that helped the Silliman Workshop when the university had withdrawn its support in the mid-1990s. Yuson, who heads the CWF, sent me the following as part of a message on September 13, 2020: "Re CWF, among the donor-friends we managed to secure financial assistance from were: Tonyboy Cojuangco (in a big way), Sen. Edgardo Angara, Dr. Jaime Laya, Erlinda Panlilio, and several other private donors who addressed individual fellowships."

the current pandemic situation, will also be excerpted and used to clarify fine points. As mentioned earlier, I will be including my own personal anecdotes, tailored in such a way that they honor the other persons involved in the interview in an autoethnographical fashion. Hopefully, my subjectivity will be complemented or interrogated by citing ideas from other critical thinkers.

I hope that it is apparent that the cue for this kind of perspective, wherein I try not to simply debunk any side of an argument, comes from the image that is derived from a close look at the lyrics of *Pahaloka Ko, Day*. Indeed, one might say that what is encouraged is a healthy kind of relationality, which can contribute to people having the space that they need. In our contemporary times, I think that sound relationships between parties that do not agree are needed because, as mentioned earlier, the point of our debating is liberation – something quite urgent at this point in history.

Problematizing the Framework of "The (Mis)Education of the Filipino Writer"

The title of Cruz's paper is a clear reference to Renato Constantino's landmark essay "The Miseducation of the Filipino" from which the following excerpt comes:

> The first and perhaps the master stroke in the plan to use education as an instrument of colonial policy was the decision to use English as the medium of instruction. English became the wedge that separated the Filipinos from their past and later was to separate educated Filipinos from the masses of their countrymen. English introduced Filipinos to a strange, new world. With American textbooks, Filipinos started learning not only a new language but also a new way of life, alien to their traditions and yet a caricature of their model. This was the beginning of their education. At the same time, it was the beginning of their miseducation, for they learned no longer as Filipinos but as colonials. They had to be disoriented from their nationalist goals because they had to become good colonials. The ideal colonial was the carbon copy of his conqueror, the conformist follower of the new dispensation. He had to forget his past and unlearn the nationalist virtues in order to live peacefully, if not comfortably, under the colonial order. (6)

It is clear from the above portion that Constantino sees language as an important factor in forwarding nationalist goals, all of which serve the interests of the nation. The essay contains proposals that move towards the strengthening of one's national identity in order to be conscious enough to

subvert neocolonial forces and forward national interests. The relatively short essay has a wide range, spanning issues on language, education, history, and economics. It is no wonder that even though it was written in the 1960s, it continues to be influential.

What I think must be considered first in the appropriation of this Constantino essay by Cruz is that her approach to human agents is different. Indeed, Constantino places a big focus on the matter of language in "The Miseducation of the Filipino." However, there are other considerations and allowances that he makes which Cruz does not. This, to me, speaks of the need for a more qualified appropriation because Constantino seems to advocate for reflexivity and a closer examination of matters pertinent to the choices that Filipinos need to make for the nation. This kind of approach is not clear from the Cruz's essay, if not at all absent.

If I may say so, what is present in Constantino might be a kind of openness that borders on playfulness. He is able to put his foot down on matters that will exacerbate the Filipinos' subservience to neocolonial forces. However, his essay also makes allowances that enable a tolerance of things that can be useful for the nation. For example, the learning of English for Constantino, though limited, is something that is useful and advantageous:

> This does not mean, however, that nothing that was taught was of any value. We became literate in English to a certain extent. We were able to produce more men and women who could read and write. We became more conversant with the outside world, especially the American world. A more widespread education such as the Americans desired would have been a real blessing had their educational program not been the handmaiden of their colonial policy. (4)

Constantino was an advocate of critical thought, which would help us be objective about colonial forces that we interact with. For him, it is important that what has not been done in order for us to view our colonial masters with objectivity–"seeing their virtues as well as their faults"–should be rectified. As he said, "The function of education now is to correct this distortion" (19). Overall, one might see Constantino's advocacy had a view of the Filipino as capable of conscious choice-making and utilizing what has been received from the colonizers and using these to advantage.

This kind of approach, unfortunately, is not the approach that is reflected in Cruz's "The (Mis)Education of the Filipino Writer." The essay in general takes on a firmly polemic tone that seems to have fixed or limited

views on the Edilberto and Edith Tiempo, which seem not to extend the benefit of doubt as to their agency. Cruz's words (with quotations from Isabel Pefianco Martin) on Edilberto, the half of the couple less examined in the paper, prove the point clearly:

> English was the language of creative writing at the onset of its disciplinary codification, and it cemented the role of the educational institution as the primary habitat of Philippine literature in English. The first Filipino writers in English were campus writers trained under a curriculum that excluded literature in the local languages. This turned the Anglo-American Canon, tailored specifically for the colony through selections that explicitly valorized colonial rule and promoted colonial values, into the sole resource of models not only of "good English" but also "great literature." (Martin 92, 95) As a Filipino officer who served the United States during the war, a product of American colonial education in the Philippines, and an Iowa-trained pioneer in teaching creative writing to Filipinos, Edilberto Tiempo is a clear-cut embodiment of the colonial subject shaped by both militarization and education. (9)

The way that Edilberto is portrayed as the ideal colonial subject by way of education and militarization lacks nuance and contextualization. Hence, I am led to think that the portrayal goes against the invitation of Constantino towards remembering the past, using what has been received from the Americans to our advantage, and using a greater level of critical thinking and reflection.

One of the things that can be gleaned from the novels of Edilberto K Tiempo is the keen eye focused on thorny questions pertaining to human concerns. From this alone, one would begin to question the clear-cut assessment that was made by Cruz. The literary scholar, Robert D. Klein, partially quoting from an essay by Lim Thean Soo, has this to say about the novels of Edilberto:

> Edilberto K Tiempo's early novels are set in wartime Central Philippines and capture the spirit of the times from an insider's perspective. As head of the Historical Section of the 7th Military District, United States Armed Forces in the Far East (USAFFE), he compiled documentation of Japanese abuses and torture of civilians, They Called Us Outlaws.
>
> Portions of this book were used in the war crimes prosecution trial of Gen. Tomoyuki Yamashita and incorporated into his novel The Standard- Bearer. (1985)
>
> As the first Filipino student in the Iowa Writers Workshop in 1946, he submitted Watch in the Night as his M.F.A. Thesis, coming out in print in the Philippines in 1953. It was later published in England and America as Cry Slaughter (1957) and quickly translated into several languages.

> All of Tiempo's subsequent novels have a similar focus on the choices and dilemmas its main characters have with the forces of history. Lim has called Tiempo's heroes "basically contemplative, driven to judgmental evaluation of incidents and people around them all the time...His choice of protagonists–e.g., minister, lawyer, politician–fittingly demonstrates the questioning frame of mind that, given the centrality of moral questions to Tiempo, his novels ultimately require." (1993b, 119-120) (66)

The assessment brings a number of questions to mind. Would a novel that is written in English not serve the interests of Filipinos even if the subject matter is a first-hand account of the Filipino experience of suffering during World War II? When one looks at the ideas presented by Constantino, Edilberto's act of remembering the point of view of Filipino victims of the war might serve the nation despite being written in the English language. Looking at Cruz's view that Edilberto was exposed to an Anglo-American canon that "valorized colonial rule and promoted colonial values," and thus inclined to such values, his act of remembering is cast in a bad light, seen as serving the cause of American Imperialism.

A More Appropriate Framework in Sison and Guillermo

One way to view Cruz's perspective is that it makes less allowances for ambiguities–and there are other political views aside from Constantinos that might allow for such takes. In this regard, I propose that it will be useful to examine the structural model of national liberation as proposed by Jose Maria Sison, which is informed with more structured ideas about feudalism and imperialism and which sees education as one means of propagation.[4]

Although the model that Sison proposes does not fully correspond to

4 Writing as Amado Guerrero in *Philippine Society and Revolution* (85), Sison states that "feudalism still persists in the Philippines although US imperialism has introduced a certain degree of capitalist development. US monopoly capital has assimilated the seed of capitalism that is within the womb of domestic feudalism but at the same time it has prevented the full growth of this seed into a national capitalism. The persistence of feudalism and the growth of a limited degree of capitalism can be understood only by delving into history. Feudalism is a mode of production in which the principal forces of production are the peasants and the land which they till and the relations of production are basically characterized by landlord oppression and exploitation of the peasantry. The most immediate manifestation of feudalism is the possession of vast areas of cultivable land by a few landlords who themselves do not till the land and who compel a big number of tenants to do the tilling. Feudal relations between the parasitic landlord class and the productive peasantry essentially involve the extortion of exorbitant land rent in cash or kind from the latter by the former. Such basic relations leave the tenant-peasants impoverished as their share of the crop is just enough or even inadequate for their subsistence. They are further subjected to such feudal practices such as usury, compulsory menial service and various forms of tribute. The old landlord class which utilizes land rent essentially for its private pleasure and luxury is satisfied with the backward method of agriculture because it gets more than enough for its needs from the sheer exertion of physical labor with simple agricultural implements by a big mass of tenants. On the other hand, the tenant who has only his own assigned plot to till is further impoverished by the low level of technology."

the view of Cruz, it does provide a basic dichotomy which might undergird the latter's reading better. There are a few people who hold the resources material and otherwise, and they keep most of it for themselves so that those of the lower class will always stay within a relationship of dependency. What complicates this dependency is that it ties in with the emotive aspect. Feudalism, according to Sison, is fueled by familial relations.

In his case, it was through this set of relations that he almost got into such a way of life:

> A great deal of the inculcation of feudal values was done through stories about my great-grandfather who was supposed to have accumulated wealth because of hard work, intelligence, and the sacred right to private ownership of land and other assets. From childhood onward, I was encouraged to study law and become a lawyer so as to be able to defend the family property, become a political leader and revive the fading feudal glory of the family. The family was already assailed by fears of continuing land fragmentation from one generation to another and by the vigorous postwar political rise of professionals coming from the rural bourgeoisie as represented by President Elpidio Quirino. I was not very much impressed by the stories about my great grandfather's hard work and accumulation of land. That was because my classmates and playmates in the local public school were children of our tenants and the local middle class and they told me stories about the way their own grandparents and great-grandparents had been dispossessed of land of their land by my own great-grandfather. I enjoyed bringing home and using those stories to make fun of the self-serving stories at home. (3-4)

Sison states that it was through the home that he received stories about his great grandfather, and how these served as guides towards retaining the feudal system. It puts the focus on hardwork and earnestness as factors that lead to success and puts under wraps the factors that promote the subjugation of the lower class under the hand of a few. What is interesting is that Sison, through this exposure to his classmates, is able to see beyond the stories. The short anecdote gives us both a dire outlook as well as a potential solution, which begins in the immersion in the lives of others.

For Sison, the arrival of the American regime would reconfigure the feudal system to serve imperial concerns. The power would move towards government as well as rich investors who run corporations, and the application of the feudal relationship would happen through the business framework (Guerrero 90). The shift is something that is seen in a critical articulation of the framework by Gelacio Guillermo, who had written a

review of Edilberto Tiempo's novel, *To Be Free*. The title of Guillermo's take is very telling: "How Not to Be Free."

The novel, spanning three generations of characters, involves the Alcantara family of Nueva Vizcaya, and the travails of its members. The focus of the novel, in a way, is discursive. It problematizes, indeed, how to be free. The answer comes in narrative form, through the lives of characters from three generations: Lamberto Alcantara and his brother Hilarion, Lamberto's daughter, Teodora, and Teodora's daughter Louise, whose apperance is very much like Lamberto's wife, Luisa. Each generation has a specific answer to the question, unexpected and based on individual agency.

It seems that the project of Edilberto is to present how each character manages his or her own subjectivity. This is not what Gelacio Guillermo focuses on in his argument. For him, the focus is on what, in a way, lies at the back of the character action and introspection. He focuses on the social structures and apparently disparity and–perhaps to our advantage and disadvantage–creates a reading both compelling and problematic. He begins his assessment with a clear articulation that might sound positive:

> Ostensibly, the main argument of Edilberto K Tiempo's novel, *To Be Free*, is that individuals, bound by the ceremonious rigidities of traditional custom or swept away by the freewheeling whims of personal conduct, prove their worth and dignity through a long process of testing, whether this concerns the lives, loves and politics of the landowning class or the faithfulness of the ruled class, the *aripans*. The novel seems to be a search for the so-called bedrock decency that abides in the midst of changes that have transpired in Philippine history and ways of life for more than fifty years, starting from the late Spanish colonial administration up to the postwar period. For the principal character, Lamberto Alcantara, this search involves, first, a progress in the quality of discernment–that in matters of moral rectitude, the substance may remain where the form no longer avails–and second, an optimism in civilized man's capability to adapt himself in all circumstances at whatever time and place. (109)

However, the heart of the critique beats for a structural view that the literary work does not exactly abide with. For him, it is important to examine how bigger forces such as capital and imperialist power impinge on human relations, and it is a focus on this that matters more than looking at how each character can make a decision for himself or herself:

> Moral values, as well as political ideas have a life in the matrix of a specific historical period, whether such values and ideas serve to prolong such a period or undermine its ascendancy. To regard morality as a matter of private integrity alone,

> and politics as a process of unfolding an all- time, all-place concept of freedom whatever social forces are involved is to take issues in such a vacuum.This is clearly anomalous in a novel that presumes to situate the moral and political worth of its characters in well- defined strands of Philippine history. (Guillermo 110)

What is important, in the long run, for Guillermo is to uncover the matrix and eventually act on it so much that it falls apart so that the feudal lords may lose control and the dominated be given an opportunity for a better life. Only when system is broken can it be possible to install a new system in which people might act in more just ways.

A look at the framework on which Cruz built her argument makes me think of the greater alignment of her perspective not with Constantino's, but with the reading of Gelacio Guillermo. This reading also ties in with Eric Bennett's *Workshops of Empire*, which Cruz utilizes to forward her reading of the Tiempos. In this book, Bennett examines the formation of workshops by two major figures, Paul Engle–of the Iowa Writers Workshop–and Wallace Stegner, renowned fictionist who was instrumental in the workshop scene in Stanford University. Edilberto and Edith Tiempo are both alums of Iowa, were both close to Paul Engle, and had used the Iowa Workshop model for the one in Silliman.

What makes the Iowa Workshop problematic, says Bennett, is its complicity with the US Department of State, which is known for having conducted activities that enabled the propagation of imperialist ties with other countries. This propagation might be called Cultural Diplomacy, and it was in the analysis of Bennett that the State Department's funding of the International Writers Program of the Workshop (IWP) was presented (112-113). This kind of complicity complicates the invitation of international writers to the program, making it appear that it was a kind of neocolonial methodology.

The choice of Conchitina Cruz to frame her reading of the Silliman Workshop and the labors of the Tiempos within anti-imperialist ideations moves it towards a structural reading in broad strokes.

This kind of reading enables one to see the movement of power from those who hold it to those under their control. I would agree that in certain contexts–like the present day–this kind of reading is useful. Capital, in its various forms, moves people and institutions in certain ways, in which individuals have no say in the matter.

However, such a reading is not entirely compatible with an appropriation of Constantino's "The Miseducation of the Filipino." To say, from this view,

that the Tiempos and the Silliman workshop had miseducated students of creative writing by providing an education focused on English and a New Critical approach that led towards an apolitical literary production, is therefore very problematic. Such a claim can lead to a misappreciation that can prevent future readers of Philippine literature to see the usefulness of the Tiempos' writing to the concern of the nation–a claim that is justifiable via Constantino.

Filling in the Gaps: A View of the Tiempos and the Silliman Workshop

What might account for the heavy criticism imposed by Cruz on the Tiempos can be found in an assessment that aligns her project more with the views of Sison and Guillermo. I propose that a review might clarify the view of the Tiempos, who had foundational ideas that are in tension with the more structural approach of Sison and Guillermo:

1. The Tiempos have indicated in their critical work that they are deeply rooted in their Christian faith. This might have informed their liberal humanist approach to education and politics.
2. The Tiempos utilized their Filipino heritage in their creative work, as seen in the exploration of other modes of expression such as music.
3. The Tiempos built on the local focus on family, affecting their critical positioning and their approach to education and to the Silliman Workshop.

The Christian and Liberal Humanist Politics of the Tiempos

If there are persons who might have the most stories about Edilberto and Edith's exercise of human agency in light of nationalist motives, it probably will be their children who must have been witness to much decision-making day in, day out. The following is an account from Rowena Tiempo Torrevillas, the elder of the two Tiempo children, about what happened to the family's plan to move to Tehran, Iran in 1972, the year martial law was declared. Edith spoke to the late Leticia Ramos-Shahani, then Secretary of the Department of Foreign Affairs:

> Mrs. Shahani put her arm across Mom's shoulders and quietly led her outside the office to stroll in the corridor, where they could speak more privately. She whispered, *"Alam mo, Edith, ang inyong familya…writers kayo.* And writers, Marcos does not trust."
>
> We should have known. Dad's entire career was founded on the principle of resistance. In 1972, he should have won the National Heritage Award…but the title of his latest book was *To Be Free.* And that was the year martial law was declared.
>
> Dad was also known for his outspoken, uncompromising voice. Throughout his long teaching career, his colleagues would look to him to speak up, whenever a thorny issue arose at the Deans' Conference or other faculty meetings. In 1971, when the writ of habeas corpus was taken away from the populace, and student activist unrest was sweeping the nation, General Fidel Ramos (Letty Shahani's brother) was sent to Silliman, where he spoke at a university convocation there. Dad got up, and in his forthright way spoke directly to the general: "You're aware, aren't you, that your president is about to turn our country into a dictatorship?"
>
> Alarmed, the faculty sitting next to Dad reached out to tug at him to sit down, whispering, "Ed! Ed, be quiet!"
>
> Of course, Dad could would not, and could not, remain silent. (Torrevillas)

The family was set to move to Iran two days after martial law was declared, the plans ironed out. Apparently, it was the stance of Edilberto, ready to speak out against oppressive forces both via speech and creative writing that might have been the reason for the Marcos administration to prevent their departure at that point in time.

And not only was Edilberto willing to put himself on the line in front of government people, apparently. He was willing to present the problems of the nation even on the international stage:

> On returning from an ambassadorial mission such as her Iran trip, one important Malacañang Order of the Day was for all school children in Metro Manila to line up along the ten-kilometer route from the international airport to her palace on the Pasig, each child waving a flag or strewing flowers as she passed. The world has not known that the Queen of Thailand demanded that kind of homage. (Edilberto Tiempo, "That Oxymoron, Freedom" 63)

Edilberto received the SEAWrite Award from Thailand's Queen Sirikit around a decade after their family was not allowed to travel–and he would use the opportunity to deliver critical remarks about the ostentation of the First Lady in the face of the nation's more than economic woes. Not

long after this, he would publish what I think is a clear jab at the Marcos administration, a portion that nonetheless fit well with the narrative that Edilberto was writing:

> "I remember now," said the driver, unfazed. He turned right at the first corner, obviously to backtrack. He pointed to a high wall to their left. "Inside, Mister, is the house of the first wife of the president."
> "What president?" Delfin was still smarting at the deception of the man, who, it was quite evident now, really knew the streets of Greenhills.
>
> "You know, the Old Lipunan."
>
> "What Lipunan?" In spite of himself he felt like laughing. "You know, the New Society and the Old Society."
> "The president of what society?"
>
> "Everybody around here knows it. I will not tell you. You have to find out yourself. If you are interested." He was thoughtful for a moment. "You know, Mister, if I were president I could afford three wives. I would build a house for Loretta Gutierrez." (Cracked Mirror 62)

The above excerpt is taken from the novel *Cracked Mirror,* which is about the journey of a young man named Delfin Olivar through different levels of self-awareness. The taxi ride scene takes place when he goes in search of a girl who looks exactly like a sister that he lost through unusual circumstances.

Edilberto makes good of the trip and makes it a short illustration of how deception happens in daily life, as exemplified by a driver who tries to lengthen the trip for higher fare. Edilberto takes a swipe at the Marcoses' *Bagong Lipunan,* which is juxtaposed with mansions created for wives and mistresses. The mention of Loretta Gutierrez in the excerpt makes reference to a bold star that Delfin and the driver were speaking of earlier–I would like to think that this alludes to the Dovie Beams scandal that the former president faced before the declaration of martial law.

From the above quotations, and from other materials too, one will see that Edilberto had been an active agent in fighting against the Marcos regime. If we look at this administration as allied with the US during the time of the Cold War, providing spaces for bases that were strategic in case a war took place with the USSR and China, then would Edilberto not also show aspects of agency that defines with greater detail the possibility that he was not simply the colonial subject Cruz calls him?

A good way to begin reassessing the life work of the Tiempos is to revisit their graves in Dumaguete City. Visiting Edilberto's grave was something that I used to do when I lived in Dumaguete City. Thus, I am familiar with the words inscribed on the piece of marble on his grave, a quote from the Epistle of Paul to the Romans: "We are more than conquerors through Him that loved us." It was years later when I would see Edith's epitaph, during a visit to Dumaguete in 2019. It was from the Book of Micah: "He will bring me forth into the light, I will behold his deliverance."

Beginning a revisit through their respective epitaphs should help one branch out into the different connected aspects of their lives. Firstly, the Tiempos were church elders in Silliman Church, a Christian church which is Presbyterian in orientation. They were involved in the affairs of the church, and thus it might be safely assumed that they were concerned with its Christian teaching and way of life. From this alone, one might see the divergence of their position to Sison and Guillermo: the work of church, without eschewing the structural, always has a sense of the personal and relational[5].

It is, I think, complementary to this personal and relational aspect of Christian life, which I will call "relationality," that the Tiempos espoused a liberal and humanist framework. This framework is what might be said to have been the beacon of the Silliman Workshop, and the relationships that the Tiempos had with their students, which is widely known for its family aspect. I believe that it is reasonable to connect this orientation to the family to the Tiempo's commitment to Filipino life and culture, which was something that, despite the criticism, had bearing on the Silliman Workshop.

5 Although well beyond the flow of argumentation of this paper, I am putting down ideas of the philosopher Slavoj Zizek in this footnote, as he had articulated a value that Christianity has in a reexamination of a Marxist viewpoint. Touching on Zizek here shows that there have been recent ideational developments that bridge Christian ideas, leftist frameworks, and ideas of liberation–the last one approached by the Tiempos differently through their Christian background.

Zizek borrows from a psychoanalytic position when he writes that "In Lacanian terms, the difference here is the one between *idealization* and *sublimation*: false idealizing idealizes, it blinds itself to the other's weaknesses – or, rather, it blinds itself to the other as such, using the beloved as a blank screen on to which it projects its own phantasmagorical constructions; while true love accepts the beloved the way she or he is, merely putting her/him into the place of the Thing, the unconditional Object. As every true Christian knows, love is the *work* of love – the hard and arduous work of repeated 'uncoupling' in which, again and again, we have to disengage ourselves from the inertia that constrains us to identify with the particular order we were born into. Through the Christian work of compassionate love, we discern in what was hitherto a disturbing foreign body, tolerated and even modestly supported by us so that we were not too bothered by it, a subject, with its crushed dreams and desires – it is *this* Christian heritage of uncoupling that is threatened by today's 'fundamentalisms,' especially when they proclaim themselves Christian." (128-129) This quotation intersects with my proposed view of the Tiempos upholding the personal because this is not a denial of other overarching forces that influence lives. Though there is a focus on the personal, it is marked by the detachment, the *uncoupling* that Sizek writes about, that allows for a dynamic movement from the broad to the intimate – the structural to the personal.

A reconsideration of the epitaphs of the Tiempos will show that there is a relational and communal focus that can be found in the words. In the case of Edilberto's, the verses that lead up to the exclamation that is the epitaph has to do with the commitment of a shepherd to his sheep. The idea is that the sheep will not be left to perish alone and that the shepherd will be given extraordinary strength to face the dangers that might beset the sheep[6].

On the other hand, the epitaph on Edith's tombstone is one that comes from a text that speaks of how the savior will come and redeem those who have been treated unjustly[7]. In fact, this is the precise scene that is depicted in the epitaph of Edith–there is a trust that the one speaking will meet the one who will take her from the difficulties of her situation. In a way, both epitaphs speak of a community in a less than ideal situation, as well as a trust placed in someone who will come for them.

What is interesting is that this person who will be there for others is what differs in the two epitaphs. In the quotation for Edilberto, the regular person is enabled to be "more than conquerors" by grace, while in the quotation for Edith, the person awaits the coming of the one who will bring the transformation. I personally would like to interpret the quotations as both significations of faith and commitment: the human being is an agent, but also one that is dependent on grace, and one that is gifted such by the presence in community and relationship.

What enables one to fully engage in community and relationship, I think, is the capacity to be conscious. A person must have a certain hold on subjectivity and agency in order to interact with others in a way that is liberating for the community. It is in this regard that I surmise that this might be the reason why the Tiempos encouraged a liberal and humanist take on education–because of the possibility that one might see one's independence and agency, and having these, enable people to relate well and justly with others.

6 Romans 8: 35-39, King James Version: (35) "Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? *shall* tribulation or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or the sword? / (36) As it is written, for thy sake we are killed all the day long; we are accounted as sheep for the slaughter. / (37) Nay, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him that loved us. / (38) For I am persuaded, that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, / (39) Nor height / nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord." The epitaph of Edilberto is to be found in verse 37.

7 Micah 7: 9, King James Version: "I will bear the indignation of the Lord, because I have sinned against him, until he plead my cause, and execute judgment for me: *he will bring me forth to the light, and I shall behold his righteousness.*" Only the italicized section appears on Edith's tombstone.

This is what Edilberto tells us of what a liberal education should be:

> The first business of the university is the promotion of the expansion of the mind, for there is no true culture without acquisitions; in other words, the first business of a college student is the striving for enlargement, for illumination. This means acquiring a great deal of knowledge on a good number subjects, and translated into the program for a bachelor of arts degree it means about 147 units, or the equivalent of more than forty different courses. All this means a great deal of reading, a wide range of information. Matthew Arnold says that the function of criticism is the search and propagation of the best that is known and thought in the world in order to create a current of true and fresh ideas. Such a function is indeed the primary function of a university. This necessitates, for the student, the possession of a curious, exploring mind; a mind that can be both shocked into recognition of a folly or error, and startled into a new discovery; and finally a mind that dares to be challenged. A student with such a mind and with a willingness to buckle down to work has his university career more than half accomplished. ("On Liberal Education" 183-184)

Without saying it, the orientation of a student of liberal education would be relationality and its prerequisite openness. One receives and one responds in the most appropriate way possible. It is only through this that the Arnoldian invitation might be met: to be able to offer criticism, and be part of the "current of true and fresh ideas."

Edith, sharing Edilberto's ideas on liberal education, would manifest these in her writing about the creation of poetry, which must have what "a bright coherence":

> Thus, when Robert Frost speaks up he does not say, "Love thy neighbor." Rather, he says in whimsical indirection and understatement, "Something there is that doesn't love a wall."
>
> Something there is that doesn't love a wall and would want to tear it down. Like the Great Wall of Ancient China, the Bamboo Curtain of the China of today, the Iron Curtain of Russia. Our cryptic modern poet says, Speak, but not a pretty affirmation, not a formula like "Love thy neighbor." But more different than arresting, more cognizant of inhering complexity, our modern poet would speak and say, "Something there is that doesn't love a wall."
>
> The ways of yesteryears, even the ways of writing and of saying things, are not for us today. We must make our own metaphors for thinking and living in our own age. Even the Bible has to have new translations to bring it closer to our modern experience and make it more meaningful to us.
>
> Finally, in such a shaky atmosphere as ours today, the best poetry becomes a kind of crusading poetry that would preserve for man his finest and best self. Thus it is that all enduring poetry becomes tinged with the religious. We

> scrutinize the significant poems of all times and find them inevitably religious. Even our own tough-minded modern poetry is religious and spiritual, often in its peculiar terms. For spiritual communion is the unity that holds together the most heterogenous elements,whether in the diversified macrocosm of society or in the no less diversified microcosm of the inner person. (Edith Tiempo, "A Bright Coherence" 107)

From the lengthy quotation, we find Edith's own application of liberal education in the discipline of poetry–the search for new poetic expressions and being aware of what had come before, the continuous need to make things contemporary and relatable. The call towards the religious can also be found here–hence the reference to Christianity and the psalms. One will also find here a discreet calling out of what Edith might have viewed as something that might go against the liberal vision of individual agency–references to the Iron Curtain and the Bamboo Curtain.

The metaphorical references to the Soviet Union and China in middle of the 20th century, I think, imply Edith's possible preference for a politics other than the positioning of these countries, which would be Maoist and Leninist, involving the proletariat and the peasantry in the a cultural revolution that is supposed to eliminate determined feudal forces, all to promote a more communal way of life.

In this regard, I think it will be fair to reexamine whether the kind of writing advocated for by the Tiempo couple was truly apolitical or not. The fact that Edith speaks of contemporary realities in relation to writing, as well as Edilberto's adherence to an idea of Matthew Arnold, who was certainly not an "art for art's sake" figure[8], will lead us once again to reexamine the adherence of the couple to the New Criticism.

Writing about the charge that the Tiempos were "propagating a purportedly politically impotent movement of literary criticism," Cruz presents the sides of the accusation:

> On the one hand, the New Critical belief in the autonomy of literature tends to function as a convenient shorthand to justify the easy dismissal of the Tiempo school as indifferent to socio-historical realities in general, and the nationalist project in particular. On the other hand, the primacy of craft as the content of a creative writing education serves as a catchall explanation for the lack of

8 National Artist for Literature Bienvenido Lumbera makes a distinction of the criticism of Arnold and the notion of "art for art's sake:" Modernist standards, set by Western artists reacting against commercialism and the worship of technology in the industrialized economies of their society, were appropriated as norms for young Filipino writers seeking to keep abreast of the times. For instance, when the UP Writers Club was founded in the late 1920s, it borrowed its artistic credo, "Art for Art's Sake," from turn-of-the-century Western artists who wanted to break away from the hold of Matthew Arnold's concept of literature as a "criticism of life." (186)

> emphasis on social consciousness in the Tiempo's pedagogy. Both arguments rely on the deadlock that pits aesthetic against political investments and maintain that the Tiempos, for better or for worse, privileged the former over the latter. (6)

It has already been asserted by other critics that the Tiempos had made New Criticism their own. However, I think that a return to the words of Edilberto himself shows us how he really viewed writing:

> The creative artist is not a chronicler; he synthesizes what has been recorded. He plows through the confused details and chooses only those that are relevant; he organizes them to achieve order and coherence and point up their meaning and significance as dramatized in terms of credible interrelationships among the personae, and to compel belief through the work's integrity. The author of a novel which deals with a Filipino family through three generations, from the Philippine Revolution and the Philippine-American War to the two world wars, received a high compliment when Ansuri Nawawi, an Indonesian visiting professor at Silliman University who holds a Ph.D in Political Science from Princeton, said, "I have learned more about the Philippines and its people from that novel than from any Philippine history book I have read." ("People Power and the Creative Writer" 28)

From the above, it is clear that the writer takes material from the substance of real life. In the case of writing *To Be Free*, it probably would not have been possible to divorce oneself from tackling political issues, on which the anti-imperialist concerns of Cruz would be inextricably related.

For Tiempo, one writes because it is intended to serve a function in society.[9] How can this be apolitical? He writes in the same speech from which the above was lifted, "to understand the role of the artistic writer as a contributor to People Power, we should be able to see first his contribution as the writer's responsibility in humanizing people's perceptions, not only of other people, but also of events and, ultimately, history." (29)

It certainly looks plausible that the Tiempos had a purpose for their writing, and it was to make one sensitive to the needs of others, with the intent of making good of that sensitivity in society. This is clearly not

9 In an email dated September 3, 2020, writer, administrator and critic Jaime An Lim shares a memory that proves the above point. He writes, The Tiempos were not always formalist. For instance, at one time Dr. Ed Tiempo criticized a well-written but "sexually racy" piece of work as a waste of the writer's creative talent. He saw literature as a vehicle for a more useful end. This was clearly not formalist anymore but already verging on the ethical and moral considerations. Moreover, he knew a wide range of critical theories. I took his graduate course in Literary Criticism which covered some of the important critics and critical concepts from Plato and Aristotle and Longinus to Shelley and Sydney and Arnold and Marx and Eliot and Brooks, etc." The range of Edilberto's readings in criticism and theory from this email must be considered as well.

apolitical–and hence I must say clearly that to focus on this assertion is a regrettable error on the part of Cruz. The politics might have been focused on the relational, but certainly the Tiempos were not apolitical writers, nor was their teaching of writing apolitical.

If ever there was a focus on form, it was for the sake of the delivery of ideas that are humanized and relatable to readers. This alone, according to Edilberto, might have a profound and transformational effect on readers:

> The ideas preserved in the best literature that the 3,000 years have produced do not conflict with the Christian ethics; on the contrary, the best literature and Christian ethics complement each other; and on points where they converge, they produce the transformation that comes with an encounter with greatness; they may produce a conversion through the illumination of the spirit. If the best literature may not "save a soul" in the theological sense, still it is enough that the best literature awakens a keener awareness of life and the world and of the sense of goodness and truth and beauty. Jesus was angry with those who had eyes but saw them not, with those who had ears but heard not. I think it is demanded of us, as students in a Christian university, to develop ears that hear, eyes that see, minds and quicken, hearts that can laugh and weep. And one excellent ground for this nurture is great literature. ("The Christian Faith and Literature" 242)

It should come as no surprise that Edilberto connects the Christian faith and literature as he sees that the function of literature is to make the heart sensitive and, hopefully, lead one to human transformation that will be of good to society.

The Tiempos, it may be said, had taken what they need from New Criticism–the ability to create an effective means of communication–as well as the strengths of a liberal education in order to be able to write humanizing pieces that are transformational. This, I would like to assert, is the liberal humanist theory behind the Silliman Workshop, and this is what Cruz, with her insistence on her particular lens, might not see.

The Combination of Modes of Expression

It is fair to ask–if such is a Tiempo theory of literature and creative writing, then what would be its praxis? It will be safe to say that it was the Silliman Workshop and their own creative practice. And a closer look at the workshop will not be close enough if one does not see that the notion of family is something associated with it. Before proceeding to this topic, it will be good to take a look at an aspect of the liberal humanist education that the Tiempos

espoused, which put it in a suspicious feudal and imperialist mold–the role of English in the workshop.

English was known to be the language of the Silliman Workshop. Until recently, only works in this language were accepted for discussion. According to an email by Jaime An Lim, writer and former Silliman Workshop Director, it was in the year 2018 when the workshop accepted *balak*, poetry in Cebuano, for workshop applications. I believe that this shift is an important one; however, it needs to be considered in light of the reasons behind the use of English.

The primary reason behind Cruz's focus on English as the language of the Silliman Workshop, as already stated in her assessment of Edilberto Tiempo, has anti-imperialist motives as impetus. Based on Cruz's assessment, the formation of the Anglo-American Canon that was accessible to Filipinos early in the twentieth century was formative, and the formation had both language and values in view. Though her assessment of Edilberto might not be fair, it is valid that she problematizes the choice of language: because of the closeness of the formation of language use and the actuations of the person learning English, one might as well say that the use of language is reflective of character.

What Cruz would have wanted to happen was that the Tiempos unpack this relationship between language and life as an anti-imperialist stance–hence, subject English to variation from the Standard English that the couple was teaching at the workshop. However, for Cruz, there is no openness to variation in the language, which does not conform with the notion of heteroglossia, reflective of a cacophony of voices within a particular social context. (23)

I propose that, though this idea is a good one to explore, perhaps Cruz was expecting the Tiempos to act the way her structural vision compels her to. This is because Cruz seems to be focused on the linguistic mode of expression in her vision of the theoretical concept of heteroglossia, whereas Edith was encouraging–as early as the 1960s–a combination of disciplines as a means of creating something new. One key to the Tiempos, I think, is to consider that they were more than focused on literary matters. Understanding their literary work involves being familiar with their other commitments and interests.

The dichotomy of divided writing that Cruz does well to point out in Edith's essay "The Use of English in Philippine Creative Writing" can be supplemented well by a set of remarks given during a folk music conference once given at Silliman University:

> One great danger from our times is the tendency to separate the form from the spirit in our thinking. As seen in the procedures of art, this deplorable tendency is displayed by some of our artists today in the dichotomy of form from substance, or technique from feeling. This dichotomy or separation is evident today in the strong emphasis upon form, often without the corresponding life and spirit in the artistic work. And ironically enough, it is this very life and spirit which can quicken the art and make it communicate itself and move people to respond.
>
> Folk music does not have this trouble at all, of course. No one can accuse a folk song of being pure form and having little or no spirit. Quite the contrary. Folk music is almost absolutely unguarded expression of a people's spirit in every type of mood: The folk music in countries of the world over show this spontaneous outpouring....
>
> Let us turn away from the great danger of our times, the danger of separation from feeling, of looking on unmoved at the crucial issues of our day; the danger of looking on at cruelty and imminent disaster, and at man's inhumanity to man, as if these were mere ideas, mere items of knowledge that have no power to touch us, to move us to tears or to rage or to indignation. This is our danger. This is the terrible dichotomy whose warnings are echoed today in the divided performance of many an artist and many a scientist, both. And the study and appreciation of our folk music is surely a step toward this return to sensibility. (Edith Tiempo, "When Music Sings in the Hearts of the People 21)

This lengthy but key portion in "When Music Sings in the Hearts of the People" speaks of a notion of spirit that animates a community, and which leads to the formation of a particular song, which is not the same as the one written according to the traditions we have received through Europe and the United States. By extension, Edith's suggestion for the writer is to be immersed in this music from the folk and let it inform what must be the content *and form*.

If the language taken from what is known as the West is taken and broken into through an immersion not only in folk stories and images, but also folk melodies and rhythms, then would that not be a combination of modes of expression that will result in something hybrid? The colonized one, therefore, can use such hybrid material as performance against the colonizer, all in light of the linguistic turn which can considers the materials of music as comprising a kind of language.

Though there will be scholars who will insist on the music-ness of folk music (perhaps in a range of what can be called by musicologists as musics), it can be argued that it has a function of signification in the way language signifies. This will make it possible for me and others to read Edith's poetic

work as heteroglossic because it employs elements from a multimodal range which expresses various voices from her community.

I wish to illustrate this by expanding her own discussion of the poem "The Pestle," (Edith Tiempo, "The Pestle") which I personally claim to be a poem that can be read to contain nationalist and anti-imperial significations. I quote this important poem in full; it is relatively short, and there are no stanza breaks:

> THE PESTLE
>
> ...in the beginning the sky hung low over the earth...and the woman took off her beads and her crescent comb and hung them up on the sky, the more freely to work. As her pestle struck the blur arch again and again, it began to rise, rise...
> – The Origin of the Moon and the Stars, A Philippine Myth
>
> …the bamboo split and out stepped Malakas [Strong] and Maganda [Beautiful], the first man and woman.
> – The Story of the Creation, A Philippine Myth
>
> On the bank the wash-stick is beating out time,
> Time and wise words and riddles in a wooden rime;
> Why should he listen, just to cross its dark message! If he,
> A good smith beating his tempered muscles into plows,
> And she (in prayers), folding her mildewed safety between bleached vows,
> Once wrought for Beauty and Strength, if they be
> Splinters from the cracked bamboo,
> They shouldn't listen to that crude tattoo!
> To grapevine its heresies through some crumbling bole –
> Why should they?–they, the divine stems? Yet strange, he stokes the fires,
> Burns himself in a thousand spots. He is not done.
> And she?–he sees her rinsed-out fears a whole
> White line slacked, flopping through the mire.
> Old woman, best leave the wash-stick in the sun;
> (The pestle pushed the thigh-bone comb
> And the beads of clay high, too high)
> Our tough hands shake and our sweaty lips smirk and lie,
> We had stored our treasures in a maggoty home.

Edith, without saying it, offers her own reading of this work in the key essay "Myth in Philippine Literature," which tells us that the way to cross the divide created by language and culture is through accessing the universal images that connect us, presumably via the collective unconscious:

> One common Philippine myth, the myth of creation, can give body to the idea of the impact of industrialism on the local sensibility, which is generally

> characterized as gentle and unsophisticated. Instead of an outright dramatization of this idea in a story or a poem (a procedure which would leave the outward terms of the situation strange and unreconciled to alien eyes, unless indeed made more detailed than artistic propriety would advise), the myth of Malakas and Maganda coming out of a split bamboo can be most happily used as a basis. Then one can rely on the universality of human behavior thus exposed in primitive terms; also one can take full advantage of the ironical connotations attached to the "bamboo underpinnings" evident in so many of our enterprises today, as contrasted with the steel rods and trappings of industrial efficiency. (265)

While Edith focuses on the content of the poem within the excerpt above, I would like to call attention to the internal rhythm that supports the whole poem. The rhythm is built only on strong-sounding consonants like d and b, but also soft-sounding ones such as m, as well as repeated vowel sounds.

Indeed, this might be the tattoo that Edith refers to in the middle of the poem.

I believe that her use of repetition, which is ambiguous in its signification of both cold industrial machines and repeated beating of the wash-stick by the river, is indicative of her efforts at multimodality, combining materials from music and language (Edith Tiempo, "When Music Sings in the Hearts of the People" 23-24). In any case, the structures of Standard English might be considered broken because of the repetitions of words and poetic torquing that happens because Edith was following a distinct internal rhythm.

The quoted excerpt from "Myth in Philippine Literature" indicates that the reading of the poem might be framed in terms of the issues brought about by industrialization and class struggle in a primarily agricultural nation such as ours. However, I would consider it leaning towards a nationalist and anti-imperialist statement by virtue of the thigh-bone comb that is pushed away when the clouds go higher because of the up and down motion of the pestle used to separate chaff from the rice. The tines of the comb subtly indicate stripes, whereas the baked beads that hang with the comb–could those be stars?

The multimodal reading that I offered above will not suffice for an anti-imperialist reading premised on the pushing away of "stars and stripes," so I choose to be frank and say that, in my conversations with Edith, she has told me of her determination to retain her Filipino culture–even in the way people address each other–not only when she was studying in the US, but also when she was studying with the American teachers at Silliman University.

Going beyond this and moving into her life context, husband Edilberto was also someone to problematize what it is to be Filipino. It is not well known these days that he had clearly presented his stakes about the national language in 1983, when he published the essay, "Tagalog: the Fourth Colonization," in Panorama Magazine.

It is clear from the title that Edilberto refused to be dominated, indicating that the imposition of Tagalog as the basis, for the national language goes against the idea of freedom. He writes that "the allegation by the Tagalistas that English is the language of the elite is mindless and myopic; they seem to forget that propagating a Tagalog-based national language is creating their own brand of elitism" ("Tagalog: The Fourth Colonization" 214). It might be safe to say that the sting of colonization was still felt by the Tiempo couple, after all.[10]

It was Edith's choice to retain manners Filipino and the concern for quashing the colonial and its extensions that Edilberto must have shared with her, that I take as handle for an anti-imperialist reading. Without a doubt, this also makes sense in light of that bigger act of moving back to the Philippines with Edilberto and her children even if options for her family to stay in the US had opened up.

Overall, the above details will place the use of English by the Tiempo couple and the Silliman Workshop under a different light–and it might add a dimension to Cruz's take that it was an imperialist tool that the Tiempos were not able to address.

Reading the Family in the Silliman Workshop Context

Returning to the concern for a different political approach to the search for greater freedom, I am proposing that the Tiempos did not focus on creating a structure that would go against feudal and imperialist forces. However,

10 What might be considered problematic in Edilberto's notable argumentation is the idea that education is available to all of people elect to go to school. These days, poverty and other structural imbalances continue to make this difficult. However, what we must put our attention to is the likely intensity of the debate, so much so that it merited a non-mention from a well-known teacher from the University of the Philippines, SV Epistola, who proposed another way of going about the national language problem. "Instead of making a nation out of us, this only disunited us even further. Instead of breaking down the barriers that divide us, it has in effect made them even more implacable. Predictably someone in Dumaguete declared he would never submit to another colonialism, which sadly was how he perceived the propagation of a Tagalog-based national language." (122) For Epistola, the solution was to have one national language and promote the reading of regional literature. Personally, I find the proposal problematic given that it does not address the signification of Tagalog being the basis of the national language. In any case, I present the stinging quote above in order to open up spaces to discuss the commitments of Edilberto on language as well the nation.

the relationality that could be read from their Christian orientation, as well as their commitment to the return to local materials and interactions, must have led to what might be a logical return to the fundamental family structure, the basic unit of Philippine society.

The Silliman Workshop has long been known to be built on the family image. Edilberto was called Dad, and Edith Mom. I called them by these appellations even if I did not meet Edilberto in the flesh, not all workshop fellows did. I think that the family structure is easily relatable to the fact that Edith had miscarriages during the war, a fact of her life that would be reborn into poems such as "Lament for the Littlest Fellow." However, to say this would be to immediately stop looking at other aspects of the Tiempos' life that might enrich our understanding why the workshop was viewed as family.

Not all workshop fellows felt that they were part of a family structure, to be sure. To look at the Silliman Workshop and immediately associate it with the family might then be inappropriate although it would be on point to speak of it as a nurturing environment[11]. There are many stories that attest to the sense of nourishment one got from the Silliman Workshop. It was not just being fed in terms of knowledge, nor was it just about food. It was such a well-rounded experience that one might as well call family. The writer Merlie Alunan, in an email dated September 4, 2020, elaborates on how it was to be at the Tiempos' old family home in Amigo Subdivision, Dumaguete:

> Ed and Edith drew people into their circle, like moth to candle flame. It was probably out of mutual need. People attracted to literature rarely find good company anywhere they go in the world. In the environs of the Tiempo home, especially in the old Amigo house, literature breathed down upon one's head from the santol and the mango trees that Ed had tended with so much love, the old furniture, the paintings, Mom Edith's special way with her table, the little touches of refinement on china and sparkling fresh fruit drinks they loved to serve. One's soul is fed, as well as the body. Conversation under the trees, under the moon,

11 Jaime An Lim, who would become one of the foundational persons behind the Iligan National Writers Workshop, presented me with possible explanations aside from making it clear that not all the fellows felt that the workshop had a family structure. The following comes from an email from An Lim dated September 1, 2020: "During my time as an MA student, I never called the Tiempos Dad and Mom. I saw them first and foremost as my professors not as my parents. There were those who worked closely with them, helping out with the running of the workshop, etc.) and they perhaps felt entitled to call them Dad and Mom. I don't know. I was never encouraged to call them that. But they were always kind to me and helpful in any way they could (getting me a scholarship, writing a recommendation letter, etc.) Because Silliman U was a relatively small university, they did not have so many students (there were only less than 15 MA students during my time) and could afford to give personal attention to every student. In a much bigger university (UP, Ateneo, La Salle) this might not be possible. But the workshop itself was more collegial rather than familial. When they discussed anyone's work, that person was treated as a writer rather than as a son or a daughter. Rowena, the daughter of the Tiempos, was also a student at Silliman. The Tiempos were of course Dad and Mom to Rowena, so the other students probably got the cue from her and started calling them also as Dad and Mom.

> with the noontime serenade of the cicadas in the background scintillated. They lingered in the memory. Until now these memories are still with me. Where but in Amigo can you savor the refined air of poetry, not just in a book but as it is lived?

It was not only at the table that fellows feel like family. The dynamics of the relationship, if I might say so, had an inward and outward motion. It was as if one gave and one received both. Anthony Tan writes via Facebook Messenger, "Dad would go to the airport/wharf to welcome the arriving fellow. Cesar Aquino[12] was so impressed by this gesture of generosity and hospitality that he wrote a glowing tribute to Dad and called him 'a man whose heart was as large as Africa.' No other workshops/heads of workshops that I know of, would do this. They usually send their staff/subalterns to pick up the writing fellows."

There are many more former fellows of the workshop who can say more about the nurturing quality of the relationship with the Tiempos. However, perhaps the one who might be able to represent best what was the workshop family is the late Ernesto Superal Yee, who had written a short story illustrating the relationship. It is unabashedly titled "Valencia Drive: A Tribute to Dad." A good part of the story illustrates similar memories as some details of the story, but Yee was able to direct the reader towards what the purpose of such nourishing was –the hopes of forming a more well-rounded writer and person:

> Now it was time to write fiction. His first attempt (which was actually a mutant of that genre), was mildly criticized by Dad as lazy writing. After the session, Dad told him, Myles, if you can write a poem, then you shouldn't find it hard to write fiction. Give the writing of stories the same amount of drive, energy and love as you do for your poems. If you can do that, show me your work. And while doing it, keep in mind the artisans at work. He who holds a blowtorch endures heat and glare while melding two edges of steel to form a design; and he who has conquered his fear of heights may measure space's precise length and width from which his structure shall rise. Dad was right. The work he submitted was haphazardly done. After supper, Myles, bearing seriously Dad's words, tackled the dizzying and crafty art of fiction. The revised work entitled "Anniversary," altough there was a minor obscurity that Dad wanted cleared (nothing Freudian about it!), got Dad's warmest smile and hug of congratulation. (Yee 52)

It might be said that the "amount of drive, energy and love" that Edilberto calls from Yee, who gave himself the name Myles (in reference to

12 Cesar Ruiz Aquino, one of the earliest fellows of the Silliman Workshop, was also said to have looked for potential students from his home of Zamboanga upon being instructed by the Tiempos. It is through this action that the late poet Francis "Butch" Macansantos had an opportunity to study under the Tiempos. This is how Macansantos's daughter Monica, herself a writer, recalls her father's story, which shared via Facebook Messenger on August 30, 2020.

the Frost poem "Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening," maybe?) is the same thing called for when Mom and Dad Tiempo ask him to drive up the mountain of Valencia town in Negros Oriental. The story, which happens internally, is really just about a car drive up challenging terrain. Yee's character surmounts the challenge–and the writing challenges too– because of nurturing presence of the Silliman Workshop parents[13].

The closeness that is developed through nurturing makes the following words of Cruz particularly hurtful:

> The filial logic that camouflages the colonialist enterprise embedded in the institutional history of the Silliman Workshop is replicated in the logic that deflects criticism of its institutional power over the literature produced, circulated, awarded, and studied in the Philippines. It is awkward, at the very least, to cast a critical eye on the legacy of a literary figure one has been taught to call "Mom" on the workings of a community one has been invited to regard as family. It is no wonder that the writings on the Tiempos by those they mentored tend toward hagiography. To regard the Silliman Workshop as family, while inspiring affection and harmony, also naturalizes a culture of deference and loyalty in an institutional setting. (15)

However, the call of criticality tells me that there is more. Firstly, it was not simply a camouflage, but a lived nurturing reality, which grew for some into a family relationship. To speak of a family relationship and say that what comes out of it in terms of writing is hagiographical is an unbalanced conjecture. The reason for this is that though affection might be seen, it does not mean that it always a condition towards deference. In fact, can the fullness of a family relationship not end up with individuals who exercise their own agency, utilize their independent judgment?

Anthony Tan, when asked about the expectations of the Tiempo couple on their writer students, gives the following response on the side of agency in his Facebook Message dated September 4, 2020:

> Absolute autonomy. Write what you know best, in the language you are most capable of using. Choose your own genre which befits your abilities.....That's what students learn in workshops. You can't learn that
> from books. They didn't stop me from writing my "Sulu" stories. I don't think they really "love" the subject, especially Mom Edith, but they didn't tell me: "Hey,

13 It needs mentioning that Susan Lara, during a piano recital and tribute to Ernie Yee that I delivered in Silliman University on May 9, 2019, gave a tribute to him, which included these words: "He was generous with everything he had—time, energy, talent, yes, even money—in everything he did, as writer, as pianist, as panelist in the National Writers Workshop (and for several years, as Workshop coordinator), as lawyer, as RTC clerk of court, as friend. During those years when the Workshop had to operate on a shoestring budget, Ernie helped out by sponsoring a number of workshop fellows and hosting them in his home in Dumaguete."

> leave that subject alone." They respected my choice.
> Besides, I am sure they saw that that is the only subject close to me since I am from that place. They respected my choice.....When "The Cargo," my story about Sulu massacre at sea was going to be anthologized, Dad Ed was asked by the editors Jaime An Lim and Christine Ortega to write the intro. Dad Ed thought–in that intro–that I had written a very good story in "The Cargo." The subject is a violent, gory one which could only be found in Sulu. So write what you know best, was a kind of unwritten law to them, and in a language that you know best, and in a genre which befits your talent.

This autonomy extended well beyond the writing life. As there is no separation between both, the students also had the freedom to exercise their own choices when it came to the visions that are the foundation of their endeavors.

It is notable that the Silliman Workshop, according to An Lim, gave birth to many workshops, stating that "it has spawned numerous local, regional, or national counterparts at UP Diliman, UP Mindanao, UP Tacloban, UP Iloilo, La Salle Manila, La Salle Bacolod, UST, Ateneo de Manila University, University of San Carlos, Far Eastern University, MSU-IIT, not to mention the various workshops sponsored by such literary groups as LIRA or Linangan sa Imahen, Retorika, at Anyo. As a whole, these writers workshop have had arguably some impact on the development and direction of creative writing in the country." (An Lim, "Keynote Address")

What must not be consigned to forgetfulness is that the above workshops specialize in the encouragement of writing in the regional languages. This surely resonates with Tan's assertion above that the Tiempo couple was not particular about the writing student's language of choice, but one can immediately see that the couple did not exert control outwardly and otherwise. How can we therefore assume that the family relationship necessarily brings about deference[14]?

According to Edilberto as narrated by Yee, what enables the creation of a work of art is love. What is passed on through the nurturing and the family relationship within the Silliman Workshop community, in its different

14 The ideas of Judith Butler, though mostly based on theorizing that is distant from our lived reality, provides a useful parallel to the family relationship that was borne out of the Silliman workshop. For Butler, a subject begets a subject; and in the discussion above, a parent who is a subject will produce a child who will come to one's own power and be a subject. According to Butler, "a critical analysis of subjection involves: (1) an account of the way regulatory power maintains subjects in subordination by producing and exploiting the demand for continuity, visibility, and place; (2) recognition that the subject produced as continuous, visible, and located is nevertheless haunted by an inassimilable remainder, a melancholia that marks the limits of subjectivation; (3) an account of the iterability of the subject that shows how agency may well consist in opposing and transforming the social terms by which it spawned." (29)

degrees and appellations, is love. It is this that allows for the students and writing children to be their own human agents, and it is this dynamic agency that has arguably enabled the rise of many workshops that put into question the idea that the Silliman Workshop propagates a feudal system and the American imperialist agenda.

Could the love fostered in the Silliman Workshop, being a parent-workshop, have contributed to decolonizing motions in the country via the nurturing of literature in the regional languages? This kind of idea is not an implausible one, if only through the lens of other people proposing similar theories. In fact, love as a decolonizing factor is a key concept in Chela Sandoval's *Methodology of the Oppressed*, which views the wounds that love creates in a colonized context as Barthesian puncti from which decolonial *movidas* come about[15] (139-140).

What about the idea that the workshop has "gatekeepers?" I personally would think that any endeavor bound by various resources will always have limits, and the *padrino* system might always take place because of the vulnerability of human actors. Still, one needs to listen more. For example, my own recommendation to the workshop came from the writer Alfred "Krip" Yuson, whom Cruz criticized for his elaboration of the idea of the workshop family. I did not feel that *padrino* system she speaks of protect me when Ernie Yee, a member of the selection committee, told me that I was not top-ranked by the selection committee in 2003[16].

Yuson, in a Facebook Messenger chat dated September 13, 2020, wrote me the following: "The matter of recommending? That came naturally. Former fellows and panelists would of course be an important source of dissemination about the workshop, and thus encourage friends and acquaintances to try getting in. Those who seemed impressive were recommended or required to come up with the note of support from workshop alumni or distinguished academics / lit profs / writers. *Siempre* it

15 Chela Sandoval, considering the idea of punctum, makes this clear and moving statement: "It is love that can access and guide our theoretical and political *"movidas"*–revolutionary maneuvers towards decolonized being. Indeed, Barthes thinks that access to the spectrum from which consciousness-in-resistance emanates might best materialize in a moment of "hypnosis," like that which occurs when one is first overwhelmed or engulfed by love." The moment when one is "first overwhelmed or engulfed by love"–one can find the *punctum* there.

16 I remember sitting in with Ernie Yee, Bobby Flores Villasis, and Cesar Ruiz Aquino during one screening committee deliberation – likely for the Silliman Workshop in 2004. I also remember seeing committee members sift through the recommendations, and even disagree with some of them. What I remember most was a conversation with Ernie Yee. He told me that the panel gave writers whose works were exemplar higher ranks, while selecting others whose works showed indications of benefitting from the workshop.

would turn into what was eventually condemned as 'gatekeeping.' But how else could info about the workshop spread out? But the evaluation for final fellowship selection was mainly based on manuscript quality. A factor was regional distribution."

It was clear from the online chat that Yuson views "gatekeeping" and the *padrino* system was connected to the Silliman Workshop's way of dissemination. To me, these are aligned with the idea that the Tiempos had prioritized relationality as part of a Christian-Liberal Humanist-Filipino approach– wherein love and the fascination for the literary work would have a place. As mentioned earlier, human actors are vulnerable. The fact that the Silliman Workshop had a safeguard in the screening committee must, however, be considered as a positive point.

I see the risk of the feudal possibilities that Cruz decries. This is also something that is clearly reflected in the thoughts of Sison, mentioned earlier, about how family becomes the means through which feudal relations are replicated. I think it prudent to return to the Tiempos' philosophical perspective and give appropriate focus on individual agency when passing critical judgment on the matter while facing head-on the theorizing of structural power and dominance.

The individual actions taken by Edilberto in his own quest for freedom, I find it worth noting, could have come to fruit in the promotion of regional languages which he and Edith did not write with because of certain turns in their lived reality–including their having come from different provinces. It is entirely possible that coming to fruit happened through the family relationship that Cruz simply judged as "camouflage," which might be the operationalization of the optic through which the Tiempos lived and taught, and which had its own vulnerabilities because of the focus on human actors.

Ending by Way of Story

There are three things that I wish to do as I conclude this critical analysis.

The first of these is to make clear ideas that arose while trying to listen carefully to "The (Mis)Education of the Filipino Writer":

1. Firstly, it is not fair to frame the Silliman Workshop under the aegis of American Cultural Diplomacy without an attempt to

formulate the approach of the Tiempos to creative writing. This, I theorize to be based on Christian, liberal humanist, and Filipino elements that still need to be accounted for better in the future.

2. The second point is that for the Tiempos, writing is always integrated with one's life experience, and politics is part of life. This idea, which resonates with Constantino, should be a clear indication that the Tiempos, though they utilized New Criticism, were not New Critics and not apolitical.
3. Interpreting the choice for English in the Silliman Workshop should factor in the high-level debate about the choice for the national language, and a perceived inclination of the Tiempos towards interdisciplinarity. Upon looking closely at their work, it might be seen that they might have worked, consciously or not, towards a multimodal heteroglossia, which enables anti-imperialist gestures beyond language.
4. The last point I wish to make is that the family quality of the Silliman Workshop, though not something shared by all workshop fellows, is something that needs a closer examination. From my viewpoint, because of the element of love, there is something that makes the Silliman Workshop both transformative and vulnerable on many levels. It so happens that there has been a transformation of the Philippine writing scene, thanks to students of the Tiempos institutionalizing workshops that nurture the regional languages. Though the possibility of the padrino system is a vulnerability rooted in the focus on relationality, there might be something anti-imperialist in the Silliman Workshop after all.

The second major point I wish to make is that there might be a view that it is impossible to find middle ground between the Christian-Liberal Humanist-Filipino approach that the Tiempos used, and strictly structural approaches to feudalism and imperialism. I would think that Cruz, for all the possible good that anti-imperialist criticism can bring, might have been caught in the dichotomy because she had clearly taken one side.

My only wish is that it creates a dwelling–a new space–within the difficulty. What best represents this for me is the framework I had chosen for this paper. We must always make space for one another, even in our criticism

and theory, and focus on *pakikipagloob*. It may seem to have a harmonizing function, but that is not the end goal. What is important is to make space for one another in a world where people wrest power and resources from others. Perhaps the expression *irog-irog* might work as a gentle reminder. Perhaps criticism can be geared towards listening and making space in discourse, not just the assault and wresting of power that seems associated with it.

The final point I wish to make is that that the answers we look for might be elsewhere. In the case of the Tiempos – how would it have been possible for me to see that their interdisciplinarity could have resulted in a multimodality, which might just be another way towards an anti-imperialist project?

Let me end with a story. Mom Edith Tiempo and Ernie Yee were once invited to judge a literary contest in Tagbilaran, Bohol. Ernie took me along perhaps so that he could have a companion when Mom Edith spent time with Ma'am Marj Evasco, who is a Bol-anon, and other friends in the city. After the judging was done, and while Mom Edith and Ernie were asleep in their respective rooms–or so I thought–I went down to the empty ballroom of our hotel to try the grand piano.

I was overeager back then to take lessons again, though Ernie, himself a pianist, wondered at how I could make time to practice. I had my MA studies and my involvement with workshop-related matters to attend to. I played Mozart's Sonata K 545, movement 1. I remember how uneven the tempo was, how I infused the playing with a passion that I would most likely temper now. Lo and behold, Mom Edith entered the ballroom and approached me, watching closely until I finished the movement.

What I remember most are her words: "You play like a college student!" My familiarity with her approach told me that she was both encouraging me and challenging me. After this, we would have conversations about music back in Dumaguete, which culminated with the advice that I should not let go of my music.

She taught me poetry at the workshop, Mom Edith, but her most direct piece of advice was to keep my music going. If I did not heed her advice, I would not be in a graduate program in musicology now. Without concepts from musicology, how could I even begin to have a fuller appreciation of the Tiempos' lifework as an iteration of the dynamic connection between creative writing and nationalism?

If we don't step away from perspectives that we are inclined to, how might we find new ways of understanding?

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