

THE (MIS)EDUCATION OF THE FILIPINO WRITER

The Tiempo Age and Institutionalized Creative Writing in the Philippines

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Abstract

According to Merlie Alunan, the writers Edilberto and Edith Tiempo, founders of the Silliman University National Writers Workshop, have so influenced Philippine literary production that the latter half of the twentieth century and “a few more decades hereafter” can be called “The Tiempo Age.” This essay examines the relationship of aesthetics and politics in institutionalized creative writing in the Philippines by unpacking the politics of the Silliman Workshop’s autonomous aesthetics. It situates the origins, pedagogy, and imagined community of the Silliman Workshop within the network of American colonial education in the Philippines, American cultural diplomacy, and institutionalized creative writing in the United States. It explores how New Criticism, as appropriated by the Iowa Writers’ Workshop-trained Tiempos, conflates the autonomy of the literary text with the autonomy of the literary space in which it is produced. The lack of institutional self-critique authorized by this conflation results in the propagation by the Silliman Workshop of colonialist and classist ideas about language and literary production, which are camouflaged, if not naturalized, as principles and mechanisms integral to the craft of writing. The essay calls on the successors of the Tiempos who currently run the Silliman Workshop to scrutinize the historical contingency of the aesthetic values they inherited and to revise their New Critical pedagogy, which continues to uphold the primacy of English as the language of creative writing education and literary production.

Keywords

creative writing pedagogy, writing workshops, politics of aesthetics, cultural diplomacy, Philippine writing in English

About the Author

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Creative writing as an academic discipline entered the Philippines by way of a Filipino officer who served in the resistance movement during World War II. Like his colleagues and students at Silliman University in Dumaguete, Edilberto K. Tiempo, together with his wife Edith, was forced to retreat to the hills of Negros Oriental at the onset of the war. He worked as the historical data officer of the Seventh Military District, gathering intelligence for the United States Armed Forces in the Far East (USAFFE). The data he collected, which tracked the movements and documented the atrocities of Japanese troops, was consolidated into a unit history and later proved to be relevant in the prosecution of Japanese war criminals (Casper, "Tiempo, Edilberto" 1554; Torrevillas, "Light on the Mountain" 224-225; Klein 12). After the war, Tiempo was given a scholarship to attend graduate school in the United States by the Presbyterian Board of Missions, which funded the American-run Silliman University. A teacher of literature and a writer, he was sent to the Iowa Writers' Workshop of the University of Iowa in 1946, the year the Philippines gained independence from the United States. The following year, Edith received the same scholarship and joined her husband at the Iowa Writers' Workshop (Alegre and Fernandez 409-10, 447). The Tiempos were the first Filipinos and among the first non-Americans to graduate from the oldest creative writing program in the United States.¹ They, in turn, inaugurated the institutionalization of creative writing in the Philippines and in Asia (Torrevillas, "From Hybrid Seed").

In 1951, the Tiempos established a creative writing program for undergraduate English majors at Silliman University (Pernia 47). In 1962, they launched the National Summer Writers' Workshop, which is still to this day extremely influential in disseminating the aesthetics and pedagogy that they learned in Iowa. The Silliman University National Writers Workshop, as it is now known, is an annual summer workshop that provides aspiring writers with the opportunity to study with a panel of acclaimed Filipino authors. Having built a reputation as "a rite of passage for the country's finest writers," it has given fellowships to over six hundred Filipinos since its inception over half a century ago, and counts among its alumni and teaching panel those who dictate "the shape, direction, and development of Philippine literature" ("About"). A coveted means of induction to the literary community, the Silliman Workshop is also known as a bastion of New Criticism, which dominates the tradition of Philippine literature in English. New Critical tenets were integral to the Tiempos' transplantation of the American creative writing workshop to the fledgling postcolony.² According to Merlie Alunan, the Tiempos have influenced Philippine literary production to such an extent that the latter half of the twentieth century and "a few more decades hereafter" can be called "the Tiempo Age" (373).³

For their work as teachers steeped in New Criticism, the fiction writer Edilberto and the poet Edith are credited with cultivating excellence in the writing craft among generations of Filipino writers and teachers of creative writing. They are, however,

also charged with propagating a purportedly politically impotent movement of literary criticism, in which the writer's primary domain of responsibility is the integrity of the literary text *in itself*, as an aesthetic object and an organic whole. To their critics, the Tiempo school, which embodies institutionalized creative writing in the American New Critical mode, privileges aesthetics over politics. In downplaying the role of literature in social transformation, which, in postcolonial Philippines, includes the work of decolonization and nation building, it authorizes the production of apolitical and de-historicized, if not assimilationist and antinationalist, literature.

The charge is not without basis, but it is not yet thoroughly elaborated on by Filipino literary critics and historians. 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 emphasis on social consciousness in the Tiempos' pedagogy. Both arguments rely on the deadlock that pits aesthetic against political investments and maintain that the Tiempos, for better or worse, privileged the former over the latter. To unsettle the routine adherence to this theoretical impasse and apprehend more fully the vexed relationship of aesthetics and politics in institutionalized creative writing in the Philippines, it is necessary to flesh out the politics of the Silliman Workshop's autonomous aesthetics. I turn to accounts by the Tiempos, their American mentor Paul Engle, and Filipino writers mentored by the Tiempos to situate the Silliman Workshop within the network of American colonial education in the Philippines, American cultural diplomacy, and institutionalized creative writing in the United States. These coordinates illuminate the colonial roots of the American creative writing workshop in the Philippines and implicate the Silliman Workshop in what Renato Constantino calls "the mis-education of the Filipino."

In his essay of the same title, first published in 1966, Constantino argues that long after the Philippines achieved state sovereignty, the Filipino continues to be "a good colonial," whose lingering subservience is ensured by an educational system instituted by the United States and rigged to propagate American supremacy. Constantino's call for "a truly nationalist education," which occurred during the early years of the Silliman Workshop, draws attention to the need for educational institutions, in the aftermath of colonization, not only to recognize their compromised provenance, but also to dismantle and repurpose the ways that they function as conduits of colonial ideas. As the case of the Silliman Workshop will show, however, New Criticism, while providing a systematized approach to art that validates its study in an institutional setting, is also an effective apparatus for disabling institutional self-critique. Accounts of the Silliman Workshop's history by

its founders and those whom they trained suggest that the belief in the autonomy of the literary text sanctions the treatment of the literary space in which its production occurs as similarly autonomous. Couched in the rhetoric of benevolence and good will among individuals, the formation of the Silliman Workshop appears to have happened apart from or in spite of its historical origins in empire. Without engaging structural relations in narrating its own provenance, and later, its prominence as an institution that defines Philippine literary production on a national scale, the Silliman Workshop aids and abets the miseducation that Constantino rages against. Its pedagogy perpetuates colonialist and classist ideas about language and literary production, which are camouflaged, if not naturalized, in the name of personal bonds and in the service of craft.

These literary practices sanctioned by the apolitical aestheticism of the Tiempo school give credence to the foregone conclusion that the Tiempos' New Critical pedagogy is beyond repurposing. Although Edith Tiempo's critical work includes attempts to reconfigure her New Critical allegiances for the postcolonial context, she was ultimately dogmatic in her devotion to the text in itself. Consequently, the task falls on her successors who currently oversee the Silliman Workshop to unpack and fill in the gaps in her thinking about the limits of autonomy when divorced from its sociality. Confronting the historical contingency of the Silliman Workshop's aesthetic values, beginning with Edith Tiempo's professed loyalty to monolingualism in English in creative writing, could activate the possibility of treating the literary text itself as a site of social engagement. The English-only policy to this day of the Silliman Workshop, however, indicates that its institutional self-critique, while long overdue, has not yet begun.

THE THIRD WORLD COMES TO IOWA

The institutionalization of creative writing, writes Mark McGurl in *The Program Era* (2009), is "as American as baseball, apple pie, and homicide. And yet there is evidence that after fifty years of standing more or less alone, this is beginning to change—evidence that writing programs are, like fast food and nuclear weapons and (perhaps more relevantly) mass higher education, beginning to proliferate abroad" (364). Among the countries he cites with graduate programs in creative writing are Australia, Canada, New Zealand, and the United Kingdom, proof that "the discipline is on the way to becoming a globally Anglophone phenomenon"; in addition, "recent programs in Israel, Mexico, South Korea, the Philippines, and elsewhere suggest an even broader reach" (364). This brief account of creative writing's global spread makes several inaccurate claims, which I believe are rooted in the continuing invisibility of a historical fact: the American colonization of

the Philippines. The fifty-year lag between the development of creative writing programs in the United States and elsewhere does not hold true when as early as 1951, a little over a decade after the founding of the Iowa Writers' Workshop, a creative writing program patterned after it was established in the Philippines. In its rundown of Anglophone and non-Anglophone countries with writing programs, the account lists the Philippines among the latter, disregarding the century-old existence of an Anglophone Philippine literary production. Philippine history not only disputes the claim that the creative writing program is a recent American export, but also demonstrates how the United States turned to the imperialist practice of deploying militarization and education as an integrated mechanism to control its colony.

During the American occupation of the Philippines, education was, first and foremost, a military strategy. Between 1899 and 1905, in the years of the Philippine-American War and its aftermath, the death toll of Filipinos reached 1.4 million (San Juan, "U.S. Genocide"). General Arthur MacArthur supported the imposition of the American school system in the new colony "as an adjunct to military operations calculated to pacify the people" (Constantino 22). In line with President McKinley's Benevolent Assimilation Proclamation, the first teachers in the Filipino classroom during the occupation were American soldiers (21). The battlefield was relocated to the classroom, where military pacification was disguised in the noble enterprise of education. In 1901, over a thousand American teachers arrived in the Philippines, around half of them on board the ship *Thomas* (Racelis and Ick 4). Filipinos, who remained largely uneducated under Spanish rule, were granted access to education, but only in English, the language of their new colonial master.

"The Mis-education of the Filipino" accounts for the ways the public school system concealed the economic and political motives of American colonization. According to Constantino, it framed the American invasion as a benevolent gesture to save the country from Spanish rule and to introduce it to the "boons of liberty and democracy." It presented free trade "as a generous gift of American altruism" and celebrated the American ability to manufacture goods that Filipinos could not produce yet could import duty-free and consume. It portrayed rural life as idyllic and quintessentially Filipino while deflecting attention from "the poverty, the disease, the cultural vacuum, the sheer boredom, the superstition and ignorance" in the countryside and the lack of genuine agrarian reform. It taught Filipinos to idolize American heroes and to view Filipino resistance leaders as "brigands and outlaws." It even made Filipinos strangers to themselves: English, the language of instruction, "became the wedge that separated the Filipinos from their past and later was to separate educated Filipinos from the masses of their countrymen" (24-26).

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 for 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.⁴ The American public school system in the Philippines had been around for decades when General MacArthur’s son Douglas became the commander of the United States forces in the Pacific during World War II. It was to his base in Australia that Tiempo dispatched the intelligence he gathered from southern Negros (Torrevillas, “Light on the Mountain” 225; Alegre and Fernandez 410). After the war, Tiempo would travel to Iowa to study alongside many American war veterans who had returned to school under the Servicemen’s Readjustment Act of 1944, also known as the G.I. Bill (Bennett, “Creative Writing” 378).

Rowena Tiempo Torrevillas, the Tiempos’ daughter and a writer who has chronicled the life of her family, amplifies the imbrication of American militarization and education in her father’s development as a writer when she describes his arrival in Iowa to study creative writing as akin to a soldier’s homecoming:

My father had come in 1946, immediately after World War II, and he’d crossed the Pacific in a freighter. He took the train to Iowa City, arriving early one morning with his belongings in an old army duffel bag. He went straight to the campus, crossing the Pentacrest down to the Nissen huts by the river to the office of Paul Engle. For some reason I never wanted to know, he hadn’t eaten for quite some time, nearly a day. Paul finished up his paperwork at the office, then took Dad home with him and gave him lunch. When he lifted the first spoonful of soup to his lips, Dad said, he was embarrassed because his hand shook, as much from hunger as from the realization that he had survived a war and come ten thousand miles to meet this man, to learn about writing from him. (“Blue Route” 91-92)

The Filipino who fought alongside the Americans during the war now stands on American soil, and he is welcomed like family by the American writing guru who takes on the role of his mentor. The context of military ties, which permits the paths of the two men to cross, recedes into the background. In its place, education binds the Filipino to the American, whose first act of charity, the giving of food, reveals the generosity that would also extend to the giving of knowledge.

Torrevillas recounts with mythical flair that upon learning of her father's desire to be a writer, the Presbyterian Board said: "Then there is only one place where you can go for what you need. Iowa. There is a man named Paul Engle, who can show you all you need to know about writing, at the University of Iowa" ("From Hybrid Seed"). Iowa is framed as the sole source of the knowledge Edilberto seeks, and the existence of Engle, the second director of the Iowa Writers' Workshop (1941-1966), is disclosed as if it were a divine revelation. Removed from the brute force of American colonization, an American education appears to be an exclusive privilege that Filipinos are fortunate to enjoy.

The value of their education was not lost on the Tiempos, who went on to establish the Silliman Workshop, modeled after the Iowa Writers' Workshop and inspired by the mentorship of Engle. A benevolent father figure and nothing short of legendary in Silliman Workshop lore, Engle looms large in relation to the Tiempos' education in Iowa, and by extension, in the history of institutionalized creative writing in the Philippines. Edith Tiempo, the recognized matriarch of the tradition of Philippine poetry in English that fuses Romanticism and New Criticism, has spoken of her own writing as "pre-Engle and post-Engle" (Alegre and Fernandez 457). Torrevillas writes that in her family, Engle "was always referred to as 'Paul Engle,' never one name without the other, the way one might refer to 'the Louvre' or 'Iowa City'" ("Blue Route" 85). Seen as an institution unto himself, Engle is a metonym for Iowa and its wealth of literary capital. He is in fact the acknowledged force behind the development of the Iowa Writers' Workshop's enduring reputation as the most prestigious writing program in the United States and in the world. His arrival in Dumaguete in the early 1960s to visit his former students and the Silliman Workshop was a veritable acknowledgment by the parent institution of its newly founded progeny.⁵

Decades later, Engle's influence continues to be felt and framed as paternal to young Filipino writers. In her account of the 2008 Silliman Workshop, the writer Susan S. Lara recalls that several Engle writing maxims were invoked in discussion, and refers to the Tiempos' mentor as "Dad Ed and Mom Edith's literary father, and therefore our literary granddad." Engle also appears in my own coming-of-age as a writer, in an artifact from 1995, when I attended the Silliman Workshop. In my copy of Edith Tiempo's *Beyond, Extensions*, which she inscribed at the end of the workshop, Edith wrote, "What an explosive talent in your tiny frame! My old mentor in writing used to say, 'You can't grow hair on a billiard ball'—true, but you're quite another matter, you're a peach, lovely, quite befurred, no baldy, you!" Years later, I came across Engle's penchant for analogies to explain the limits of creative writing instruction, one of which compares teaching the writer without talent to "trying to grow hair on a billiard ball" (Tiempo, *Six Poetry Formats* 90). Edith, I realized, had

invoked Engle's words to encourage me to write. I had belatedly discovered his part in one of my earliest experiences of literary validation.

Although Engle was a writer, his major accomplishments lie in his career in the bureaucracy, as an "artist turned administrator" and "administrator as artist," whose platform was institutionalized creative writing (McGurl 172). The "literary granddad" of the New Critical tradition of Philippine literature in English is, first and foremost, an American bureaucrat. Engle was "involved in Kennedy's Cold War Cultural Front" and listed the "only poet on The National Council on the Arts" as well as the "American specialist for the Department of State" among his credentials (Glass 265). He was in fact unabashed in his belief in institutionalized creative writing as a form of international diplomacy. In the 1961 essay "The Writer and the Place," he declares, in no uncertain terms, the value of internationalizing the Iowa Writers' Workshop for this purpose, through a display of nationalist fervor by way of regionalist pride:

The benefit to the whole United States of giving these articulate people from the far islands and continents of the earth a conviction that this country cherishes their talent (as their own countries often do not) is beyond measuring. For those seeking a true image of America, it is lucky that they come not to a seacoast city but to an interior town in the midst of the fat land that feeds the nation. Here they have a direct look at the daily life of the U.S.A. in its most typical manner. (7)

The American heartland, according to Engle, is the United States at its most authentic and ordinary, and the United States at its most ordinary embraces the free and creative expression of all people, wherever they are and whatever their nationality.

Art, says Engle, "may turn out to be the last refuge of the individual in our time"; as a "friend" and "patron" to the writer, the American university provides art with a place of residence. Invented in America, the writing program and its "curious extraordinary devices" are "part of the American way," and in exchange for the freedom to explore the imagination that it affords the writer, the creative beneficiaries of America's hospitality are urged to do what is "proper": "to express our thanks to a country which has given freedom of voice to its own young talent, and to that of many other nations. . . . How can writers praise a country more than by saying: Look! In this place we have been free" (9-10). The combination of a demonstrative pronoun ("this place") and the present perfect tense ("we have been free") evokes a collective speaker who is simultaneously placed in and displaced from the United States: the tense suggests that freedom was a condition in the past that remains true in the present but whose future is uncertain. The statement subtly assumes the voice of visitors *to*, not citizens *of*, America, whose

experience of its liberties is temporary. To grant the writers of the world entry into the Iowa Writers' Workshop is to situate them in a microcosm of the Free World and the domain of the individual, which would inevitably produce, through debts of gratitude and loyalty, a crew of international ambassadors for the United States. The logic is reminiscent of Benevolent Assimilation, and the supreme benefit to be reaped from a writing program with an internationalist perspective is America's global cultural ascendancy.

“For three decades, Engle aggressively promoted the writer at the university as a symbol of liberal, democratic, capitalist free expression at home and abroad,” writes Eric Bennett (“Creative Writing” 381). As his portrait of Engle shows, the man combined his rhetoric with action; Engle was calculating in his efforts, which ranged from fundraising to media coverage, to make the Iowa Writers' Workshop part of the massive campaign of the United States to package and disseminate American culture as a means to quell local Cold War anxieties and fortify the dominance of the United States in the global order.⁶ This legacy is openly embraced by the Iowa-based International Writing Program (IWP), founded by Engle and his wife Hualing Nieh Engle in 1967, which cites cultural diplomacy among its core missions. “Cultural Diplomacy: The Linchpin of Public Diplomacy,” a 2005 report by the US Department of State (a major source of support for the IWP) that is available on the IWP website, is unequivocal in its goal to instrumentalize art: “cultural diplomacy can enhance our national security in subtle, wide-ranging, and sustainable ways . . . America's cultural riches played no less a role than military action in shaping our international leadership, including the war on terror.” Among many positive effects, cultural diplomacy “helps create ‘a foundation of trust’ with other peoples, which policy makers can build on to reach political, economic, and military agreements” (1).

The Philippines is a logical yet invisible point of reference for unpacking the “positive effects” of American imperialism repackaged via cultural diplomacy in the arena of institutionalized creative writing. Its longstanding reputation as the staunchest ally of the United States in Asia is the outcome, initially, of outright invasion, and eventually, of cultural indoctrination that began during the American occupation. Its state affairs remain subject to US intervention; a cursory look at the history of military agreements between the Philippines and the United States reveals them to be consistently asymmetrical.⁷ These blatantly oppressive agreements operate alongside less sinister manifestations of US control, including the widespread consumption of American cultural commodities by Filipinos. In *Workshops of Empire* (2015), however, Bennett refers to the Philippines only in passing as one of the countries from which Engle recruited students; he turns instead to accounts of Engle's generosity toward students from Japan and Taiwan to illustrate the good will for the United States that an internationalized writing

program could foster (101-02). Both *The Program Era* and *Workshops of Empire* cite the 1950s as the decade in which Engle actively pursued the recruitment of writers from abroad (McGurl 150; Bennett 101); the presence of Filipinos on American-funded scholarships to Iowa in the 1940s, shortly after the Philippines gained independence from the United States, is unexamined, if not unacknowledged. The Tiempos, who were in Iowa from 1946 to 1950, were in class with Flannery O'Connor, whose fiction is one of the earliest examples of American literature produced within the context of institutionalized creative writing (McGurl 129; Nazareth). Engle's mentorship of the Tiempos is arguably an early instance in, if not a starting point of, his evolution as a figure in whom literary and state interests converge; thus, Philippine literary production under his influence, specifically the New Critical tradition overseen by the Tiempos, should figure more prominently in any history of institutionalized creative writing as a form of cultural diplomacy.

This is underscored by some ideas from the Tiempo school that validate Engle's faith in the capacity of an internationalized Iowa writing program to cast the United States in a good light, particularly among the intellectuals of other nations. For instance, "an accident of history" is how Edith, in a 1991 interview, describes the use of English in the Philippines: "I think it is a happy accident because English happens to be the lingua franca all over the world now, and so whatever we Filipinos write has the chance to be read and understood elsewhere" (Manlapaz and Evasco 20). Her account not only glosses over the deployment of English as an apparatus in the far-from-accidental project of American imperialism, but also puts a positive spin on the trauma of colonization. Informed, it seems, by her New Critical belief in organic unity, Tiempo de-historicizes cultural indoctrination by framing it as a natural phenomenon whose fulfillment lies in the remarkable adaptability of Filipinos. "[O]ne of the marks of intelligence in the organic world is the ability to adjust," she says, and "it is a matter of pride that we are able to handle something that is not naturally ours" (20). Anglophone Philippine writing appears to spring organically, regardless of, if not apart from, economic and political violence. It is proof only of cultural riches; thus, literary production with a built-in capability for global circulation can only be a source of pride.

Torrevillas also resorts to language that whitewashes the American occupation in a lecture she delivered as the first Director-in-Residence of the Silliman Workshop in 2010. Well into the twenty-first century, she revives, without irony, the antiquated notion of the benevolent conqueror by waxing lyrical about colonial teachers and missionaries: "tall bespectacled men and women who heeded the call of an idea, to bring the Word across the world to those who would listen." The Honors Program of Silliman University, founded by her mother and adapted by the State University of New York in the late 1970s, is "an idea that was born right here returned to the land of its linguistic and spiritual roots" ("From Hybrid Seed"); the

filial imagery, which naturalizes the relationship of the colonizer and colonized, extols the United States as both source and destination of the elder Tiempo's creation. What Constantino calls "[t]he myth of friendship and special relations" between the Philippines and the United States is recast in the relationship between the Silliman Workshop and the Iowa Writers' Workshop, where "the distinction between the giver and the receiver has become blurred, because the gift has changed hands so often" ("From Hybrid Seed"). The Cold War politics that forged the link between the two institutions and their unequal stature in the global literary arena is lost in the rhetoric of benevolence and mutual exchange. Toward the end of her speech, Torrevillas says, "Truly, the world comes to Iowa, even as Iowa goes out into the world," glorifying the global literary center by attributing its enduring prestige to the extent of its generosity. Iowa, the source of creative "seeds," remains the originator of culture, and the Silliman Workshop is a grateful beneficiary and reaper of a creative "golden harvest" ("From Hybrid Seed").

The language of the second-generation Tiempo is mythical and expansionist. Her chosen metaphor is in fact the same one used in "Cultural Diplomacy" to define its objective: "to plant seeds—ideas and ideals; aesthetic strategies and devices; philosophical and political arguments; spiritual perceptions; ways of looking at the world—which may flourish in foreign soils" (7). Expansion is portrayed as a natural occurrence, purged of history as well as economic and political interests. As a venue where colonialist ideas are still expressed in earnest, the Silliman Workshop lends credence to a remark made by Engle in 1959 about Filipino writers, which subtly links, through parataxis, creative writing and American cultural diplomacy. Noting the presence of students from abroad at the writing program of the University of Iowa, he describes Filipinos through a telling parenthetical: "many talented and such fine people, so very loyal to the United States" ("Who Paul Engle Was").

That the Silliman Workshop evades the acknowledgment (let alone critique) of power in Philippine-American relations, a staple of nationalist teleology, endures in its own central metaphor for its imagined community: family. According to the Facebook event page of "Cities of Literature: An Exhibit on the Iowa/Dumaguete Connection," held in conjunction with the Silliman Workshop in 2014, Filipino writers have referred to Iowa City as "their 'blond Dumaguete,'" a rather unfortunate mixed metaphor on the fantasy of whiteness fulfilled through biological reproduction. The Dumaguete-based author Ian Casocot describes Dumaguete as Iowa City's "literary twin." The reference to family ties is not simply metaphorical: Torrevillas was an IWP resident in 1984, and the following year, she began working with her parents' mentor as an administrator of the IWP ("Blue Route" 86, 91). She retained the post for almost two decades. *The World Comes to Iowa* (1987), which commemorates twenty years of the IWP, is co-edited by the Engle couple and Torrevillas, who still resides in Iowa City. The institutional is

filial, from the “literary twins” Iowa and Dumaguete, to “literary granddad” Engle, to “Dad Ed” and “Mom Edith,” which was how the *Tiempos* wished to be called and how generations of fellows and panelists continue to refer to them. The genealogy suggests that the Silliman Workshop is sprung only from the generosity and good will of individuals, impervious to geopolitics and, over time, to institutional politics. If the Silliman Workshop is conceived of as family, then it is held together by personal and not political bonds; it is by nature homogeneous and unified, and it is by culture steeped in affection and deference. 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” or on the workings of a community one has been invited to regard as family. It is no wonder that 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.

For the writer Alfred Yuson, a longtime panelist of the Silliman Workshop, the patronage politics of its literary community is even a source of pride. The practice of older writers bequeathing the trappings of literary prestige to favored heirs is celebrated as family tradition: “The torch is continuously passed on from one Filipino poet or writer to another, as references and recommendations are generously given for whoever may be next in line in the circle of fellowship.” Access to cultural capital through connections is lauded as the demonstration of care from an “all-too-welcoming band of sisters and brothers happy to pass on and share their global networking experiences.” The metaphor of family, which authorizes a superficial claim to autonomy by a literary space already preoccupied with art for art’s sake, illuminates how the myth of friendship and special relations operates well beyond its initial colonialist intentions. Today, it thrives in the “padrino system,” whose mechanisms are so entrenched that Yuson is unable to respond to institutional critique without taking it personally, vilifying critics as “the faux anti-establishment fringe that feeds on envy and antipathy.” For better or worse, the *Tiempo* Age is in part sustained by this refusal to demystify the bonds that keep the family together.

THE NEW CRITICAL EDUCATION OF THE FILIPINO POET

When the *Tiempos* returned home from Iowa, the relationship between aesthetics and politics had already emerged as a central dilemma for Filipino writers,

who debated the function of literature in the years that saw the Philippines attain Commonwealth status in 1935 and independence a decade later. The opposing camps that emerged were, unsurprisingly, those who believed in literature as an agent of social change, and those who adhered to art for art's sake. The latter found its leader in the expatriate poet José Garcia Villa, whose cultish adherence to form in his literary and critical production between the late 1920s and early 1950s garnered a following among Filipino writers.⁸ After the Second World War, the brutal occupation of the Japanese, and the birth of the Philippine Republic, aestheticism was defined primarily by writers like the Tiempos, who were steeped in New Criticism as students in the United States. They were among many Filipinos who attended American educational institutions through grants and scholarships provided by the United States as part of its efforts to maintain ties with the Philippines beyond the period of official colonization (Lumbera, "Versus Exclusion" 181). New Critical aestheticism thus dovetails with American interests by entering the Philippines through education deployed as an apparatus for cultural diplomacy.

Described as "the absurd culmination" of the art for art's sake movement in the Philippines, New Criticism became "the critical orthodoxy" of local academia in the postwar years (Lumbera, "Young Writing" 186). It systematized Villa's art for art's sake movement by providing a teachable mechanics for analyzing the autonomous artwork that was disentangled from the web of authorship, history, and material and sociopolitical realities. It spawned a method of creative writing whose ultimate aim was the construction of a linguistically complex literary text that merited expert formal exegesis ("Versus Exclusion" 182). Developed by the Southern Agrarians, whose central figures included John Crowe Ransom, Allen Tate, Robert Penn Warren, and Cleanth Brooks, New Criticism installed the literary text itself as the object of literary studies, a radical proposal at a time when reading conventions focused on "paraphrase of logical and narrative content," the "study of biographical and historical materials," and "inspirational and didactic interpretation" (Brooks and Warren iv). What has become common practice in the teaching of poetry traces its origins to New Critical pedagogy: "1. Emphasis should be kept on the poem as a poem. 2. The treatment should be concrete and inductive. 3. A poem should always be treated as an organic system of relationships, and the poetic quality should never be understood as inhering in one or more factors taken in isolation" (ix).

In Iowa, Edith Tiempo first encountered the American New Critical classroom through her exclusion from it. Initially disallowed by Engle from attending the poetry workshop because "he must have felt [her poems] were hopeless," she was told to read three books: Cleanth Brooks's *Modern Poetry and the Tradition*, his *The Well-Wrought Urn*, and his co-edited textbook anthology *Understanding Poetry* (Manlapaz and Evasco 23; Alegre and Fernandez 451). Her success as a student was

contingent on developing her mastery of the poem as a verbal icon, which placed the postcolonial poet on a path preoccupied with universalism and timelessness, and disinterested in, if not divorced from, politics and history. Though rejected from the poetry workshop, Tiempo demonstrated perseverance by continuing to attend it. She eventually became part of the official roster, “although I never said one word during the semester – I just listened and at the same time read what [Engle] told me [to read]” (Alegre and Fernandez 451). Her silence is symptomatic of the subservience that assimilation into the colonizing culture requires, but in the New Critical classroom, where aesthetic values are regarded as ahistorical and conflated with excellence in the writing craft, Tiempo’s suppressed speech demonstrates her discipline as a good student rather than her inferior position as a good colonial. Silence comes with being a novice to the best practices of the creative writing classroom.

A memory of the *Tiempos* involving Flannery O’Connor further illustrates how suppressed speech is de-politicized in the context of a New Critical education. O’Connor had a thick southern accent, Edith recalled, and no one could understand what she was saying when she read her work aloud in class. To solve this problem, the students “begged for Paul Engle to take away her manuscript and read it himself.” This incident, said Edilberto, gave him license to stop “apologizing” for his Filipino accent (Nazareth). It is reasonable to presume that Edilberto felt less insecure upon realizing that a marker of his foreignness could also beset a native speaker. This shared “affliction” equalized the (outsider) status of the Filipino and American writer in the classroom. At the same time, it seems counterintuitive that he felt empowered by an act meant to silence rather than welcome the use of English with an accent. His response suggests that in an educational setting preoccupied with art for art’s sake, the relations of power implicit in the perception of speaking English with an accent as a flaw tend to be obscured by the pursuit of technical facility according to aesthetic values received as universal standards. Tacitly held up as one such value, Engle’s presumably “accent-less” speech is requested by his students to *improve* O’Connor’s fiction by making it intelligible. The silencing of O’Connor’s southern accent is not prejudicial but pedagogical, deployed for the good of the literary text. Perhaps for this reason, the *Tiempos* still did not flag the discriminatory tenor of the incident when narrating it almost half a century later. To enforce the loss of an accent was not an affront to O’Connor’s identity as an American Southerner, or to the *Tiempos* as Filipinos. It was simply part of the training to become a better writer.

O’Connor’s fiction, a longtime staple in the American literary canon, is described as consistently told not by first person narrators, whose southern dialect would be incomprehensible to many readers, but in the effaced or limited third-person point of view by narrators who spoke standard English, “even when relaying the

interior lives of characters who talk and think in southern dialect” (Pollack 550-51). Apparently, the New Critical classroom was able to school her fiction toward fluency in an unaccented English.

Like O’Connor, Edith Tiempo was a good student. Key New Critics, in fact, validated her progress as a poet. Robert Penn Warren received her work positively during his visit to the Iowa Writers’ Workshop. Cleanth Brooks first published her work in the United States (Alegre and Fernandez 451-52).⁹ She had become, through her education, a New Critical poet, and in this she was not alone. In *Six Filipino Poets* (1954), three of whom, including Tiempo, studied with Paul Engle, the poets in the anthology are praised for their autonomous literary compositions, which “have no nationality; their allegiance is to literature, that is, to the advent of truth” (Casper xvii). The Filipino poets were, so to speak, “accent-less.”

As writers and academics, the Tiempos promoted the New Critical aesthetic efficiently.¹⁰ Edith’s formalist practice was consistently committed to “subtlety and irony, paradox and yoked opposites, condensed and extended images, lyric grace above, and hard cold logic underneath” (“Limits – Or Chaos” 204). Her first published essay, written in 1948, already advocated the idea that a poem “should stand on its own—proving itself, conveying its meaning by itself, relying on no pre-knowledge of background or other extraneous material to make itself fully understood” (“The Metaphor” 24). This extended to her criteria for evaluating applications to the Silliman Workshop: “wholeness of work’s creative conceptualization,” “integrity of artistic articulation of creative concept into form,” and “depth of work’s transformative insight” (qtd. in Pernia 73). Near the end of her life, Tiempo remained fiercely New Critical. In *Six Poetry Formats and the Transforming Image* (2007), she provides a veritable mathematical schema for what is labeled free-verse poetry and plots the ways various poets arrive at the well-wrought poem. Citing “metaphorical structuring” and “heightened language and heightened sensibility” as the two indispensable features of poetry, she demonstrates how texts activate a combination of “external limits” (“rhyme, meter, and other traditional features like regular stanza pattern, special imagery and diction”) and “internal limits” (“thematic tension, understatement, ambiguity, indirection, and tone control, among others”) to produce, at best, “poetry well crafted,” and at worst, “prose” (9-11).

New Criticism enjoyed the status of critical dogma for a time in the United States, but severe criticism eventually led to its fall from grace. Its fetishization of the aesthetic object was a “recipe for political inertia, and thus for submission to the political status quo,” which appealed “to skeptical liberal intellectuals disoriented by the clashing dogmas of the Cold War” (Eagleton 50). If New Criticism did not turn its back altogether on society by treating the poem as a

controlled environment where disunities are played out and resolved, in the least, it viewed historical pressures “as merely partial, no doubt harmoniously balanced somewhere else in the world by their complementary opposites” (50). Its theorizing of intentional and affective fallacies excessively regulated the interactions between reader and text, and its systematic elucidation of a seemingly universal aesthetic turned the production and consumption of literature into elitist activities, reserved for academics and those whom they train.

What led to the unpopularity of New Criticism in the United States, however, proved effective in sustaining American cultural ascendancy in the literary production of its former colony. The conflation of “American” and “universal” literary values promised not only “national” but “international” literary competence for the New Critical Filipino writer, which lent neutrality to cultural indoctrination by framing it as the pursuit of literary excellence (Lumbera, “Versus Exclusion” 182). Transplanted to the Philippines, the view of literature as autonomous concealed its colonial roots and valorized the “individual personality, the individual in conflict with society, the individual striving to create art, the individual’s ethical responsibilities not to class or party but to human freedom” (Barnhisel 741). The dominant liberal ideology of the US that endured in the Philippines was thus enabled in part by New Critical writers whose “self-satisfied fascination with art as a self-sufficient craft” obfuscated the “colonial parameters determining the subordinate status of their writing practice” (San Juan, *Working through the Contradictions* 245-46). The ahistorical treatment of their aesthetic allegiances authorized a de-contextualized writing practice at ease with the status quo.

A lecture of Edith Tiempo at the 1971 University of the Philippines (UP) National Writers Workshop shows how the ideology of her formalist practice becomes hospitable to apolitical writing through its imperviousness to the historical contingency of aesthetic values. UP, an institution established by the Americans, was a hotbed of nationalist revolt by the 1960s, and in the 1971 UP Workshop, which took place shortly after the violent demonstrations of the First Quarter Storm, almost all the submitted manuscripts were politically charged (Ordoñez 35-36). Luis Teodoro, Jr. recounted that Tiempo was unreceptive to committed writing, which she saw as haphazardly written. Writing poetry, she stressed, “should not be an experience similar to going to the bathroom. ‘There is relief, but only temporarily’” (9). Although others in the teaching panel suggested that uncertain times could perhaps necessitate “disposable” poetry attuned to more immediate concerns, Tiempo emphasized that poetry was “founded on ‘universal values,’” for it was human nature, “this hankering for immortality, for things that would survive the flesh” (Teodoro 9). Confronted by the uneasy fit of her New Critical aesthetic with literary texts written at a time of upheaval, Tiempo regarded committed writing as a failure according to the terms of her craft, rather than work crafted

according to different terms. Likening the hasty compositional process that she deduced from the manuscripts to crude bodily functions, she remained steadfast in her devotion to the transcendent, well-wrought text, which presupposed a writing process of meticulous refinement achieved through prolonged contemplation. This process thrives best in a venue that fosters discipline, like a classroom, or a place of privacy, like a room of one's own, removed from the streets aswarm with social unrest. In her dogmatic fervor for craft in the New Critical vein, Tiempo implicitly recommends retreating from the chaos of the streets, a setting not conducive to her favored compositional process.

Already prone to apoliticism, Tiempo's poetic practice turns antinationalist when monolingualism in English, the language of the ruling class and decidedly *not* the language of the streets in the Philippines, is framed as a necessity in the service of craft. Bienvenido Lumbera recalls that Filipinos with literary ambitions in the 1950s could not write in anything but English, the language used by most of the magazines that accepted literary work (Dalisay et al. 278). New Criticism fortified the prestige of writing in English, which became more specialized and confined within the university. Writers were, in effect, steered toward literary production in the language that sustained the divide between "the monopolists of power and the people" and "separate[d] educated Filipinos from the masses of their countrymen" (Constantino 31, 24). At home in the autonomy of art, Tiempo sidesteps (language) politics when she regards commitment to a single language (English, in her case) simply as another disciplinary measure congruent with the pursuit of excellence in writing poetry. Although she spoke several local languages, she was not one to recommend bilingualism as a writing practice, since it would compromise the progress of her writing in English: "I tell you art is a taskmaster, a strict taskmaster. You've got to devote yourself wholeheartedly to it. Whatever writing I do in the vernacular . . . might affect my writing in English. You cannot just compartmentalize the two . . . There might be others who can do that. But I just can't do that" (Manlapaz and Evasco 21). Like O'Connor's southern accent, the vernacular needed to be kept away from Tiempo's writing to ensure its development. Monolingualism, in this light, is a feature of the Anglophone postcolonial poet's devotion to art, for "[o]ne cannot improve in one's art unless there is continuity" (21). Tiempo's stance implies that the multilingual reality of Filipino writers is detrimental to their creative work, and a bilingual or multilingual practice is a handicap to artistry.

ENGLISH ONLY IN THE SILLIMAN WORKSHOP

In the Silliman Workshop, monolingualism in English, which Tiempo preferred in her own practice, was and continues to be implemented as pedagogical policy

beyond her lifetime. Despite over fifty years of existence, and unlike other national workshops it has spawned, which are at least bilingual, the Silliman Workshop continues to offer fellowships only to writers in English. Writers in Filipino, such as Romulo Baquiran, Jr. and Luna Sicat Cleto, gained admission to the Silliman Workshop by submitting translations into English of texts they had originally written in Filipino. The workshop discussions focused only on the translations, not the original texts.¹¹ The English-only practice of a prestigious venue for studying creative writing is reminiscent of the notion in colonial education that the absence or exclusion of other languages ensures the student's mastery of English. According to Vicente Rafael, the 1925 *Survey of the Educational System in the Philippines* identified the vernacular languages as the greatest impediment to fluency in American English of both Filipino teachers and students, who were perpetually engaged in translation. Fluency, and the new colonial subject it promised, could only be achieved if translation ceased, or was at least significantly reduced; consequently, it was necessary to exclude the mother tongue from the classroom and treat it as subservient to the foreign tongue to both conquer the vernacular and master the English language (47-48).

Fluency in English uninflected by its postcolonial and multilingual context is what Tiempo holds up as an ideal when she describes teaching at Western Michigan University in 1963 as "more rewarding," since "[the students] didn't have second language devices, patterns and so forth" (Alegre and Fernandez 415-16, 449). What Rafael calls "translation," which had no place in colonial education, Tiempo refers to as "compartmentalization," which works against the craft of the postcolonial poet. Neutralized as an aesthetic value, monolingualism in English, the key to linguistic fluency, enables mastery in creative writing. In turn, creative writing as a discipline is most fully realized by those trained in the academy, the home base of writing in English. This outlook underpins Edilberto Tiempo's remarks in an interview from the 1990s, when he deems Anglophone Filipino writing of the last fifty years far better than writing in the vernaculars: "to begin with, those writing in English . . . are graduates of universities in the Philippines as well as those who have studied in the US and elsewhere" (Nazareth). The prestige of English as the language of intellect and imagination is so entrenched that its superiority over the local languages is also received as inherent rather than constructed. Thus, in the same interview, Torrevillas regards reductive thinking as the outcome of writing in Filipino: "I have found, without being overly pejorative, that the concerns of many of the nationalistic writers tend to be simplistic or oversimplified once they're written in the native language" (Nazareth).

As a pedagogical tool prone to fostering prejudicial thinking, monolingualism in English is colonialist and outdated. In the multilingual field of creative writing in the Philippines, it is also simply inadequate. The Silliman Workshop, a "National

Writers Workshop” by official designation and an institution that boasts the national scale of its impact on trends in literary production, is thus remiss in its obligation to match the range of its pedagogical capacity with the extent of its influence. It tends only to literary production in the undisputed language of the elite, in a setting where writers in English interact only among themselves. Such exclusivity contributes to normalizing the prime position of English not only in the domain of education, but also creative writing. By requiring applicants to submit manuscripts accompanied by a recommendation letter from “a literature professor or an established writer,” the Silliman Workshop also perpetuates the notion that literary production in English is the domain of college-educated writers, who would most likely be in contact with recognized experts in the field of creative writing (“Call for Manuscripts”). This is confirmed by the annual announcement of successful workshop applicants, which lists not only the fellows’ names but also their university affiliations.

Critics like Isagani Cruz and Charlie Samuya Veric have attempted to dispute the conflation of New Criticism with apolitical formalist practice by assessing the calibrations of Edith Tiempo to make New Criticism pertinent to Philippine conditions of literary production.¹² Their efforts are in line with various reconsiderations of American New Criticism, which aim to counter its reception as an intellectual outpost of political apathy, conservatism, and modern American capitalism.¹³ The American New Critics themselves struggled against being read as exclusively literary in their investments. Allen Tate, for instance, argues that to read literature critically, as a form of knowledge in itself rather than a historical document or vessel of information, is to undo and potentially reconfigure the dominant intellectual expression that buttresses the vulgar utilitarian attitude of the middle class and the bourgeois, consumerist activities of modern capitalism (8-13). The sociality of aesthetic autonomy is also already embedded in Brooks and Warren’s imperative that one must approach a poem as a literary text “*before* it can offer any real illumination as a document” (italics mine, iv). To engage with a poem as a poem is thus not an end in itself. To approach literature in formal terms is to treat it as neither “a transparent expression of its historical context” nor “an entirely autonomous form,” but to access the form of knowledge it generates as a critical response to its political and cultural context (Jancovich101).

That Tiempo recognized the limits of autonomy sans sociality manifests in her attempts to confront a fundamental incongruity in the Anglophone Filipino poet’s art, typically posited as the use of a foreign language to write native content. She may have called English “a happy accident” in a 1991 interview, but in an essay published in 1965, Tiempo also refers to it as “an uneasy endowment” (“Philippine Poetry” 273). Owning up to a common charge against the tradition built largely under her supervision, she notes that Filipino poetry in English “seems to feel safer

dealing with the 'inner man' . . . when it does not require the definition of specific pain that is felt in the national marrow and seared into the national flesh" (269); hence, "the poet evades the responsibility of asserting for others, and speaks only of his own esoteric insights" (270). It is not the lack of a social conscience, however, that drives a poet to lyric privacy, which makes no claims about national identity or collectivity; rather, Tiempo surmises, it is the recognition that "if he adopts the language he must also try to assimilate the way of thinking that has begotten it" (269). Political reticence, in this light, becomes a sound, albeit unsatisfactory, recourse for the poet in English, whose tongue can neither completely undo nor convincingly deny its complicity in colonization: "the poetry has to pay dearly . . . it may probably become more ivory-tower than it should be" (272). Her observations tentatively acknowledge the precarious place of literature in English in the formation of a national literature. For being written in the language not only of the colonizer but also the ruling and middle classes, Anglophone literature by Filipinos is an outsider to the domain of national literature, which literatures in the local languages occupy without question.

In the 1954 essay, "The Use of English in Philippine Creative Writing," Tiempo recognizes the inherently translational character of Philippine writing in English, and, by extension, the Filipino author's burden to produce what might be called a "divided text," one written in English yet evocative of the "ideal version" that has "defied projection of its peculiar 'feel' or 'taste' in English," which Filipino readers nevertheless might glean (8). She then ascribes the success of Manuel Arguilla's fiction to a combination of transliteration, translation, and standard (American) English (5-6). By thinking of English as modifiable by its contact with other languages, she undermines the given-ness of standard English as the language of Anglophone literary production, and begins to shed light on the relations of power that make English the language of postcolonial authors. When made more visible, English as a nexus of colonial and class relations is a potent springboard from which to confront its operations as the language of privilege and to disrupt the detachment from politics that she observed in the work of Filipino writers in English. Tiempo, however, misses this opportunity when she says, "[t]he problem is not the more superficial one of translating a vernacular version into English; it is not a problem between one language and another, but between a language and a material foreign to each other" (7). On the verge of unpacking the vexed relationship of English with its postcolonial multilingual context, Tiempo reverts to the binary of form and content that regards English as a purely aesthetic tool and local content as everything but language.

The reliance on this dichotomy, which isolates English from the heteroglossia that engenders its modification, explains why Tiempo's implicit invitation for the Filipino poet in English to exhibit social consciousness in her work "*does not include*

an adjustment in the style or mode of writing” (Barretto-Chow 395). It reinforces the notion that English is already a fully formed language that the Filipino writer must learn rather than a work in progress she can co-author. Combined with Tiempo’s New Critical loyalties, it prompts her to suppose that “the only procedure under the present circumstances” available to the Filipino poet in English is to be “carefully universal and neutral” or not “too indigenous”; this leads to congruity of language and content, and by extension, to “good poetry,” in which human situations illuminate truths about the human condition (“Philippine Poetry” 270-72). Her rethinking of political reticence circles back to its affirmation as a necessity in producing a “true” work of art, “considered as such anywhere by commonly accepted artistic standards” (“The Use of English” 10). Translation submits to fluency to preserve the integrity of form. By favoring the universal, Tiempo forecloses the proliferation of divided texts, in which Anglophone Filipino writers formally contend with the colonialist and classist baggage of English-language use. Technical fluency in English, or English without an accent, is once again de-politicized and held up as an objective component of good writing. Although Tiempo wonders if the Filipino poet will ever transform English to “make it wholly and naturally flexible to his purpose,” she relinquishes the possibility to the far future; in the meantime, rather than tamper with existing methods of writing in English, in the attempt to forge a connection with the local audience, “[t]he serious poet’s resort is to look for an audience elsewhere that would understand and listen” (“Philippine Poetry” 272). The ruse of literary excellence, which normalizes the dominant standards of Anglo-American tradition, turns the alienation of local readers into a necessary sacrifice in the name of good poetry, the trade-off for potential access to an international audience.

Universalism, in this sense, imagines a distant rather than proximate addressee; the universal subsumes the local in theory, yet alienates it in practice. The potentially emancipatory function that J. Neil Garcia assigns to the “predominantly universalist character” of Philippine poetry in English, described as “couched in Standard-sounding English” that “cannot be so easily ethnographically ‘placed,’” seems legible primarily in relation to this distant addressee (xviii, xvi). Less “colonially suspect” than explicitly ethnopoetic work, which defers to the West’s conception of its postcolonies by fetishizing its Otherness, the universal is an arguably compelling alternative to the trite and mercenary path of local color (xix-xxi).¹⁴ Though oppositional, however, the camps of the “universalizers” and “ethnopoeticizers” are homogeneously populated by poets fluent in English, who either bask in or bastardize their fluency as spokespersons for the postcolony in the international arena. Their peripheral position in the global literary scene is largely derived from and dependent on their elite status in relation to the local literary scene. The prestige that enables Filipino writers in English to be “literarily” mobile

and representative of the Filipino outside the Philippines, also maintains their local residence in an ivory tower.

This dynamic is evident in the way the Tiempo school positions itself in the local literary landscape and selects its participants. Located in the Visayas, the Silliman Workshop contributes to decentralizing the hold of “imperial Manila” on Filipino artistic practice; its cosmopolitanism even bypasses Manila altogether via its direct link to the Iowa Writers’ Workshop.¹⁵ Its use of English resists the language of the capital, Tagalog-based Filipino, and its hegemony over local languages. Still, as a private enclave for Filipino writers in English, the Silliman Workshop is inaccessible even to writers in the Visayan languages in its immediate area. It has also in recent years included international fellows and invited international authors to be on its panel of writers, which suggests a greater interest in interaction with players in the international rather than the local literary scene.¹⁶ The universalism that Tiempo values, whether applied to the literary text or to the operations of the Silliman Workshop, is tacitly equated with a global literary community whose lingua franca is English. Filipinos, let alone Filipinos without fluency in English, are hardly part of this scene, whether as consumers or producers.

The universal becomes an exclusionary and imperialist apparatus when regarded as always already formed rather than perpetually in construction; the former requires deference to existing terms for inclusion, while the latter thrives on the proliferation of new terms to include. To reject the universal altogether at times results in “a too-protectionist approach to assertions of identity”; recuperating it, however, entails attentiveness to the universal “as a horizon rather than a foundation” (Anderson 266, 281). Judith Butler notes that this dynamic universality is realized through “the difficult labor of translation, one in which the terms made to stand for one another are transformed in the process.” Rethinking the universal in linguistic terms, she imagines it to be persistently multilingual. As the outcome of ceaseless translation across multiple languages, the universal becomes “that which is yet to be achieved” and “may never be fully or finally achievable” (130-31). This not only indexes the unquestionable place of (postcolonial) particularity in the pursuit of the universal, but also situates the transformation of the universal in the realm of language *in itself*. Lumbera recasts Butler’s logic in pedagogical terms when he urges creative writing academia to become an avenue for the proliferation of “divided texts” by moderating the weight of proficiency in Standard English as a value in the writing classroom. Recounting a short story that he found moving when it was discussed at the UP National Workshop, where he served on the panel of writers, he observes that the story would be considered “unacceptable,” whether in the creative writing classroom or the literary pages of magazines “because of its grammatical lapses and the looseness of its construction” (“Young Writing” 187). In the academy, he notes, “all too often, we have repressed a young writer’s

expressive freedom and authentic voice by insisting on the same kind of correct English that one finds in the writings of American and British writers. Our demand in the use of English has been nothing less than the English of writers born into the language” (188). The disciplinary power of the classroom creates, for the Filipino writer, a relationship with English defined exclusively by “universal” standards of proficiency, at the expense of other potentially meaningful kinds of relations and the creative possibilities that they can inspire.

To imagine language as a mutable site where the universal is perpetually translated provides a way to rethink the conundrum Edith Tiempo was unable to surpass when she regarded her aesthetic allegiances as divorced from the political reticence that pervades literary production in English by Filipinos. Specifically, the Tiempos’ successors in the Silliman Workshop can begin to update its pedagogy by reviewing its policy of monolingualism in English. To interrogate the preservation of this tradition is a generative point of entry for the Silliman Workshop to examine its colonialist provenance, contend with the contributions of its New Critical aestheticism to mis-education, and refashion both its institutional structure and creative writing pedagogy to dismantle this complicity. Self-reflexivity on the institutional level also invites reconsideration of what it means to be a Filipino writer in English, whose education has been the Silliman Workshop’s primary concern for over half a century. It prompts a more thoughtful negotiation of the local multilingual context of Filipino writing in English, which challenges practitioners to not only write in but also rewrite English, in ways that subvert its elite, imperial, and universal status. The Silliman Workshop is, without question, a literary gatekeeper many times over, as evident in the degree-granting programs, award-giving bodies, university and mainstream presses, and creative writing classrooms that privilege and replicate the aesthetics and politics it systematized. While it is within reason to expect the institution to transform itself to keep up with the times, it is also unsurprising that it would prefer to sustain rather than interrogate the ideas to which it owes its cultural capital. The risk of complacency, however, is irrelevance. If left unexamined and unrevised by the Tiempos’ successors, the Silliman Workshop, along with the Tiempo Age, might quietly recede into the past, as the imaginative possibilities for Filipino literary production flourish not within but outside the institutions of creative writing.

Notes

1. In "From Hybrid Seed," Torrevillas says the Tiempos were the first non-Americans to graduate from the Iowa Writers' Workshop. There is no record in the vertical files of the Iowa Writers' Workshop to confirm this, according to Denise Anderson, library assistant in the Special Collections Department of the University of Iowa Libraries. Among the MFA students who graduated ahead of Edilberto Tiempo, there is a graduate from June 1947, Karl Sjogren, whose home address is Wispa, Sweden. His nationality is unidentified, but he is possibly non-American. In an interview with Alegre and Fernandez, Edilberto Tiempo says he and his wife were the first Filipinos in the program (409).
2. Creative writing was officially institutionalized by the Iowa-trained Tiempos in the 1950s, but Tom Inglis Moore, an Oxford-educated professor of English, could have also brought Iowa-influenced creative writing instruction to the Philippines. Moore had spent time as an instructor at the University of Iowa, where creative writing courses were already being offered, prior to teaching young writers at the University of the Philippines from 1928-31. As a mentor to young Filipino writers and an outsider to colonizer-colonized relations (Moore was Australian), he exhibited prescience in asserting that the Filipino writer "has to learn not only to write *with* English but also to write *against* it... He can use the language correctly, and *should* use it correctly. But he has to write English without becoming an Englishman or American... a Filipino literature must remain Filipino if it intends to be literature" (qtd. in Hosillos 69). See "About the Workshop" on the Iowa Writers' Workshop website and Perkins.
3. Former students of the Tiempos teach creative writing in universities all over the country. Alunan mentions Marjorie Evasco and Jaime An-Lim in Manila; Erlinda Alburo, Leoncio Deriada, Elsa Victoria Coscolluela, Ian Rosales Casocot, and Myrna Peña-Reyes in the Visayas; and Anthony Tan, Christine Godinez-Ortega, and Antonino de Veyra in Mindanao (375).
4. A memory of Tiempo from World War II both divulges and dispels the direct link between colonial education and colonial subjugation. He recalls having once met Col. Jesus Villamor, a fellow Filipino who worked closely with MacArthur, on a beach south of Dumaguete. Venturing beyond the scope of official business, Tiempo asked Villamor to take a manuscript he had written, a World War II novel set in the Philippines, to the United States through Australia. Villamor obliged, and it pleased Tiempo to think that his manuscript was probably the only one to journey by submarine beyond Philippine shores during the war (Nazareth, Alegre and Fernandez 410-11). The anecdote, on the one hand, celebrates the individual agency derived from creative expression at a time of danger and vulnerability. The effort to smuggle the manuscript out of the country magnifies the empowerment the creative work affords its maker, as it crosses the borders that the author himself cannot cross. On the other hand, the manuscript is emblematic of the military hold of the United States on the Philippines, now seemingly sublimated

into autonomous literary expression but marked by the mediation of colonial education: it is a manuscript written in English by a Filipino. The fact that the author is also a Filipino officer serving the USAFFE reinscribes the military control that is the manuscript's condition of possibility: the education that facilitates Tiempo's creative expression is also a tool to enforce his loyalty to the American armed forces. The manuscript later became his MFA thesis at the Iowa Writers' Workshop and his first novel, published as *Watch in the Night* (1953) in the Philippines and *Cry Slaughter* (1957) in both England and America (Alegre and Fernandez 410-11, Klein 66).

5. The exact year of Engle's visit is unclear. Torrevillas (in "Light on the Mountain" and "From Hybrid Seed") says he visited in 1962; in "Blue Route" she specifies that while on tour in Asia, he spent a few weeks in Dumaguete to lecture at the Summer Writers' Workshop of the Tiempos (86). Bennett states that Engle, while on a Rockefeller-funded tour of Asia in 1963, spent two weeks in the Philippines (*Workshops of Empire* 105). Pernia also pegs the year of Engle's visit as 1963 (85). He is included in her list of writers who have served on the panel of the Silliman Workshop. In a letter dated 12 February 1963 from the writer Jolico Cuadra to the expatriate poet José Garcia Villa in New York, Cuadra mentions that Engle, or so he had heard, was going to visit the Silliman Workshop.
6. Bennett's account shows that Engle's crusade was not without partners: "Hemingway-bedazzled veterans" were in the Iowa Writers' Workshop in its early years, which purged the writing classroom of "the taint of pink or red affiliations"; small corporations and businessmen from the Midwest responded favorably to Engle's fundraising pitches, which framed writing programs as an alternative to bohemia, where artistic energies merged with Communist sympathies in the early decades of the twentieth century; publishers such as Gardner Cowles, Jr. (of *Look*) and Henry Luce (of *Time* and *Life*) provided the media mileage to bolster Iowa's image as home to the American way of life ("Creative Writing" 381-82). Through charitable foundations that also functioned as tax shelters, large corporations poured money into academic programs and provided the state with resources to recruit intellectuals outside the United States (379, 381). Bennett singles out the Rockefeller Foundation as a major funder of the Iowa Writers' Workshop during Engle's tenure as its director, as evident in its generous grant to the program in 1953, its sponsorship of writers from abroad in the 1950s to study in the US, "often under Engle's wing," and its financing in 1963 of Engle's months-long trip to Asia, "where he scouted talent among politically uncommitted individuals in the capitals of the East" (382). Similarly, the Fairfield Foundation, a CIA front that invested in cultural efforts abroad through the Congress for Cultural Freedom, was one of the initial funding sources of the International Writing Program (IWP), which Engle established in 1967 upon his resignation as director of the Iowa Writers' Workshop (Bennett, "How Iowa"; Bennett, "Letter: On the CIA"). Among Filipinos, the Tiempos were early recipients of Rockefeller Foundation grants, and those who attended the Iowa Writers' Workshop in the 1950s through its support include Bienvenido Santos, Ricaredo Demetillo, and Francisco Arcellana. For biographical notes of the Tiempos, Santos, Arcellana, and Demetillo, see Abad, Cruz, Hidalgo, Yuson, and Manlapaz; Alegre and Fernandez; Abad and Manlapaz.

7. Put into effect shortly after the declaration of Philippine independence, the 1947 Military Bases Agreement authorized the operations of 23 US bases in the Philippines for 99 years. Over forty amendments between 1947 and 1991 paved the way for the historic termination by the Philippine Senate of the Military Bases Agreement in 1992 (Yeo 37-38); however, a mere seven years later, the Visiting Forces Agreement (VFA) of 1999 once again allowed US military forces to operate in the Philippines. The Enhanced Defense Cooperation Agreement (EDCA) of 2014 authorized the increase in presence of US military forces, as well as the construction of US military bases and stations in areas belonging to the Philippine military (Bello, Sison).
8. Salvador P. Lopez, advocate of art committed to social change, came to represent the opposition. Jonathan Chua notes that the “Villa-Lopez controversy” was battled out from 1938 to 1941 in various publications, including the *Vanguard*, the *National Review*, the *Graphic*, the *Literary Apprentice*, the *Leader*, and the *Herald Mid-Week Magazine* (182).
9. Tiempo recalls that Warren presided over a discussion of student texts, which he was given copies of sans the names of the authors. (The Silliman Workshop adapted this practice of anonymous workshop pieces, emphasizing objectivity and the author’s impersonality.) The first poem he picked, “The Pane,” was Tiempo’s; she said Warren liked it for “the imagery which was very, very sharp, and then the paradox at the end. I was beginning to catch on by that time.” Cleanth Brooks published Tiempo’s “The Return” in the *Western Review* (Alegre and Fernandez 451-52).
10. The Tiempos taught with the English Department of Silliman University, ran the Silliman Workshop, and wrote instructional materials. Aside from co-authoring several college English textbooks with her husband, Edith is the author of the textbook *Introduction to Poetry: Poetry through Image and Statement* (1993), as well as the writing manuals *Six Uses of Fictional Symbols* (2001) and *Six Poetry Formats and the Transforming Image: A Monograph on Free Verse* (2007).
11. Both Baquiran and Cleto confirmed this via personal correspondence.
12. In his introduction to a selection of Tiempo’s critical essays, Cruz makes the hyperbolic claim that the Tiempos “situat[ed] themselves firmly within the dominant tradition of socially conscious and politically subversive Philippine literature established by Francisco Balagtas and Jose Rizal” (240). Veric, in articulating Tiempo’s “poetics of in-betweenness,” tempers Cruz’s pronouncement and suggests that Tiempo undermines traditional New Criticism by asserting that “successful form itself is the context” (62).
13. Notable resources that reassess the New Criticism include Miranda B. Hickman’s and John D. McIntyre’s *Rereading the New Criticism* (2012) and Mark Jancovich’s *The Cultural Politics of the New Criticism* (1993).
14. Tiempo similarly mistrusts local color. Recalling a visiting American writer who told the young writers of Silliman University to use local proper nouns to particularize their poetry, Tiempo disputes the prescription by saying, “there is no short-cut to redemption” (“Philippine Poetry” 271).

15. It may be argued that the Silliman Workshop is still Manila-centric. Based on the roster on its website, of the sixteen writers who served on the panel in 2014, ten are based in Manila, and three are based abroad. In 2015, of the twelve panelists, eight are based in Manila and two abroad.
16. According to the Silliman Workshop website, the first international writer invited to be part of the panel is Xu Xi of Hong Kong, who visited in 2010 ("About"). It is unclear why Engle, who visited in the 1960s, is not cited as an early (or the first) international writer of the Workshop. Pernia's list of writers who have served on the teaching panel of the Silliman Workshop since its inception includes several Americans aside from Engle, such as Hortense Calisher, Kelly Cherry, William Gaddis, and Kenneth Rexroth.

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