

# NEW CRITICISM AND THE WRITING OF CONTEMPORARY WARAY POETRY

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OVER 1,400 WRITERS from 130 countries from all over the world have held residence at the University of Iowa's International Writing Program (UI-IWP), "a unique conduit for the world's literatures," its website reads, "connecting well-established writers from around the globe, bringing international literature into classrooms, introducing American writers to other cultures through reading tours, and serving as clearinghouse for literary news and wealth of archival and pedagogical materials" (University of Iowa International Writing Program). The program has its home in Iowa City, declared by the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) as a City of Literature for its impressive history of literary accomplishments. The profile of writers who have graced the program is rich with variety. Writers would come all the way from Djibouti to Turkey, from Iceland to Kosovo, from France to Honduras. The International Writing Program has indeed gone global.

The founders no less represent the diversity expected of a writing program of such scope. Paul Engle, American poet, novelist, and literary critic, and Hualing Nieh, Chinese fictionist and his wife, founded the writing program in 1967. The works though began earlier than that. From 1941 to 1966, Paul Engle ran the Writer's Workshop attended by students from the United States and around the world. The first two international fellows to attend the workshop were Edilberto K. Tiempo in 1946 and Edith L. Tiempo the year after (Abad 169). Edith stayed for three years and Edilberto, four, the longest a fellow has stayed in the workshop (Alegre and Fernandez 447-449).

In 1951, the *Tiempos* returned to Silliman University in Dumaguete where they instituted creative writing as a specialization for English majors. This prepared the path for the workshop, patterned after the one they attended in Iowa. By 1962, the Silliman National Writers Workshop, then at some point, the Dumaguete National Summer Writers Workshop, was set in place. The first and longest running workshop in Southeast Asia, it produced most of the practicing writers in the Philippines today. As Cirilo Bautista puts it: "It is an understatement to say that [the Silliman Workshop] has a significant influence on the growth of our literature. The number of applicants increases each year, and the works of writers who have passed through it continue to enrich our arts and letters. The amount of learning these writers got from this workshop is incalculable, approximated only in the way they have contributed to the qualitative and quantitative growth of our literature. Being a pioneer, the Silliman Writers Workshop occupies a premier position in the history of creative writing in the Philippines" (33). Not just the history of creative writing in the country, one may quickly add, but also the beginning of New Criticism in the Philippines.

## **NEW CRITICISM IN THE PHILIPPINES**

The introduction of New Criticism in the Philippines did not come unopposed. Its "analytical approach" was met with resistance within Silliman itself. Edilberto Tiempo writes: "The literary magazine of the University took up the cudgels for us. In the early years outside Silliman, we were branded as freaks, faddists, propagators of a fantastic cult.... In the Philippines, it took about fifteen years before the New Criticism gained a foothold. In the meantime, a dozen or so other writers and scholars had gone to American universities and returned to the country and added impetus to the propagation of the New Criticism. The National Writers Workshop at Silliman, patterned after that of the University of Iowa in textual and analytical methodology, through its fellowships... has helped shape the thinking of a whole generation of writers in the country" (83-84).

American New Criticism is a formalist literary theory that looks at the literary work as a self-contained world independent of the author's

intention and reader's impression. It uses close reading as a method of textual interpretation. Its main proponents are I.A. Richards, John Crowe Ransom, W.K. Wimsatt and Monroe Beardsley down to Cleanth Brooks, Robert Penn Warren, and Paul Engle, the founder of the Iowa Writers Workshop and teacher of the *Tiempos*.

Engle's influence on the *Tiempos* cannot be overstated. Edith, in one interview, classified her works as pre-Engle and post-Engle, the latter of which she considers the best of the lot (Alegre and Fernandez, 457). Edilberto would mention that it was in Engle's workshop where he, despite being widely published in the Philippines at that time, realized he did not have any idea about the structure of the story (Alegre and Fernandez 407). The Iowa Writers Workshop was a turning point for the *Tiempos* in their lives as writers and literature teachers. Similarly, the Silliman Writers Workshop and creative writing program which they established became a turning point for many Filipino writers. By extension, the workshop in Silliman became a turning point in the history of Philippine Literature. This is affirmed by Gemino Abad who called this period in literary history as "The Formalist Strain" where "this new critical mode with its stress on organic unity, emotional restraint, and metaphor, irony, and ambiguity, shaped the poetic sensibility from the '50s well into the '80s and '90s...." He further remarked that if a comparison be made between "our poets in the '50s and the '60s with the earlier Romantics, we would immediately notice a greater number who have each his own individual mode of expression and his own distinctive subject" (8).

In a movement of decentering, the Philippine literary map has been redrawn further down South and away from the center, first by the *Tiempos* who brought critical discourse outside of Manila, the country's artistic and intellectual center, then by their students who went all throughout the Visayas and Mindanao to put up their own creative writing workshops: Resil Mojares and the Sillimanian Erlinda Alburo in Cebu City in Central Visayas; Elsa Martinez Coscolluela in Bacolod City, Western Visayas; and Anthony Tan, Jaime An Lim, and Christine Godinez-Ortega in Iligan City in Mindanao. "I would think of the SU National Summer Writers Workshop then as the generative cell from which all these other workshops in the Visayas and Mindanao area

evolved,” Alunan observes. “These workshops, soon to be labelled ‘regional’ in Manila-centric parlance, cover the Philippine south and make little centers of writing wherever they are found. It bears mentioning that the needs of the writers in these little centers are entirely different from those one would find in the primate city of Metro Manila” (3). The characteristic of these workshops which make them distinct from its origins in the English-steeped environment of the Silliman workshop is that they teach and encourage writing in the mother language. Thus, the University of San Carlos Cebuano Studies Center’s Cornelio Faigao Creative Writing Workshop promotes writing in Cebuano. The De La Salle University-Bienvenido N. Santos Creative Writing Center’s and University of St. La Salle’s Iyas Creative Writing Workshop in Bacolod uphold writing in Cebuano, Hiligaynon, and other West Visayan languages. The Mindanao State University-Iligan Institute of Technology’s Iligan National Writers Workshop has become the venue where works in Visayan and Mindanao languages are discussed.

In Tacloban City, center of trade and commerce in Eastern Visayas, Merlie M. Alunan, Victor N. Sugbo, and David Genotiva led in the revival of writing in Waray declared moribund then by critic, literary historian, and National Artist for Literature, Bienvenido Lumbera. Products of the Silliman University Workshop and its graduate course in literature, all three held teaching posts at the University of the Philippines in the Visayas-Tacloban College (UPVTC). Alunan, a much awarded poet and Professor Emeritus of Literature at the UPVTC, joined the workshop in 1982 and Victor N. Sugbo, critic, Waray literature scholar, and poet, in 1985. Genotiva received his graduate degree in English and Literature from Silliman. Through the leadership of Merlie M. Alunan, the Visayas Writers Workshop (VisWrite), later called the UPV Creative Writing Program, was established at the UPVTC. Sugbo and Genotiva served as the workshop’s resident critics. It did not take long for VisWrite to become the training ground of writers in Eastern Visayas. In the years that followed, a vibrant crop of writers in Waray, the language of Leyte’s eastern half and Samar, began to emerge.

The aesthetic genealogy of contemporary Waray poetry can therefore be traced from the New Critics, Paul Engle, and the Iowa Writer’s Workshop to Edilberto and Edith Tiempo and the Silliman National

Writers Workshop in Dumaguete, Negros Oriental to Merlie M. Alunan and the Visayas Writers Workshop in Tacloban City. Contemporary Waray poetry is fed by two streams of literary tradition: the New Critical, with its emphasis on consciousness of craft, and the indigenous, with its impulse for intuitive humor, irony, and imagery. Observing this from a Marxist perspective, Bagulaya designates this phenomenon as split modernity, “a combination of elements in western modernism, romanticism, and realism.” This leads him to believe that “Modernism in the Philippines resulted from the importation of New Criticism—a product of monopoly capital; romanticism through the persistence of some feudal structures and relations; and realism through the formation of a small national bourgeoisie” (106). While it holds true that such movements influenced the production of modern Waray poetry, this reading fails to account the revisions a foreign literary theory like New Criticism underwent from one critic to the next. Moreover, such reading reduces modern Waray poetry into a “colony” of Western cultural hegemony, incapable of thinking and speaking for itself, of hybridizing a global trend with local sensibilities through acts of subversion, and of asserting agency and space within the literary institution.

### REVISING NEW CRITICISM

The New Criticism of Edilberto and Edith Tiempo is a modified form different from that of the New Criticism taught in Iowa. In an interview, Edith disclosed, “At that time, coming from abroad bringing the New Criticism, we were dubbed ‘portfolio critics,’ coming in with our new theories. We saw very clearly the origin of these principles from an old standard. The only thing that remained was for us to sharpen our own insights, particularly for the presentation of this new approach, to underline the connectedness of the New Criticism to the Old Criticism—a New Criticism in the sense that the literary world has made something new out of the old, something that is relevant in the expression of our own geographical and psychological insights” (Reyes 15). By “sharpen(ing) our own insights,” Tiempo meant using New Critical principles to express native sensibilities, which “inevitably creep into many of our works and make for the charm of the expression as read in

English-speaking countries.” She concludes: “We can say that we enrich the English language sensibilities by whatever they find in our own idioms” (Reyes 16).

Writing on Philippine poetry in English, Tiempo recognizes the Filipino writers’ “mixed environment of culture” in which the artist writes the work. Here, the artist seeks a “compromise” between “an older, native imagery on the one hand and the new tool for expressing that imagery on the other” so that the artist becomes “never too Westernized... or perhaps, in a hundred years or so, he will have evolved a use of English which would make it wholly and naturally flexible to his purpose” (268-272). This suggests that the critic, schooled in Western thought and commenting on Philippine literary texts, must reconsider and re-view his use of foreign paradigms in the local setting. For literary scholars like Isagani Cruz, Charlie Veric, and Oscar Campomanes, the *Tiempos*, especially Edith, bent American New Criticism to make it serve Philippine Literature.

Cruz maintains that “Tiempo adapted the New Criticism they learned in American universities to the peculiar circumstances of the Filipino writer” (239). He further argued: “Situating themselves firmly within the dominant tradition of socially conscious and politically subversive Philippine literature established by Francisco Balagtas and Jose Rizal, the *Tiempos* formulated a distinct literary theory blending both the reading strengths of the American New Critics and the thematic preoccupations of Filipino writers” (240). He added that Tiempo proposed that Filipino writers contextualize their use of English in the native literary tradition specifically with the use of myths to enrich Philippine writing. Our myths, she said, may be strange to other culture’s eyes, but its symbols come from “universal tap-roots” (Tiempo 264). Tiempo likewise deplores the manner in which most Filipino writers in English evade social issues and retreat to their “inner man,” to their private lives as materials for their poetry. She was quick to say that for a literature to be great, it has to deal with man as a whole being. For Cruz, this puts Tiempo at odds with the New Critical paradigm she purportedly represents. Her critical work clearly contends that Philippine writers in English locate their writing in their milieu.

Veric frames it as “... the product that results from the fusion between a native imagination and a foreign language is, in the end, a text whose

life depends on the infinite plenitude of in-between shades of meaning—*a work that always locates itself*, its chains of signification and significance, in the valley of its thinking and saying (272, emphasis mine).” In the same essay, he examines Tiempo’s theorizing on the marriage of form and content where she differs from the New Criticism of her teachers, summing it up in the clause: “the formal is political.” “Tiempo,” Veric contends, “illustrates to us the political potential of the question of form. By attempting to ferry across to form the possibilities of content, and to content the possibilities of form, Tiempo reveals the promise of their absolute unity. This absolute unity is the logical horizon of all struggles” (280). As interlocutor between form and substance, between intellection and intuition, between the intrinsic and extrinsic that constitutes the operations of a poem, Tiempo symbolically interrogates the connection between literature and society, enabling her to see the coherence of poetry and poetics, writing and criticism, thus making her “more critical than New Critical.”

Veric’s critical New Critical is Campomanes’ New-Critical Heretic. In one lecture, Campomanes articulates the same problem Cruz and Veric saw when Tiempo as literary critic is read in the country today. He said: “A quick reprise of the species of formalism for which our National Artist for Literature is seen to have widely propagated, American New Criticism, and some authoritative accounts of her critical relationship to it in practice, will show how, in fact, for the longest time, her aesthetic theory and literary-pedagogical precepts have been unfairly stereotyped, not least by detractors and admirers alike” (2). Quoting the poet and student of the Tiempos, D.M. Reyes, Campomanes shows how Tiempo’s New Criticism subverts the dictums of the theory “affirming them while and through critiquing them, as a consequence of the particular demands and challenges of the Philippine educational environment” (3-4). Tiempo, for instance, was not in complete agreement with Wimsatt and Beardsley’s intentional fallacy. For her, it was inevitable, D.M. Reyes recounts, considering the way they were taught the creative process and which she herself had demonstrated in her work and in every workshop. Reyes phrases his Tiempo’s critical stance this way: “Form dictate[s] greater things (than itself, that is).”

## FROM TIEMPO TO ALUNAN

To this, I would like to add that as Edith Tiempo rethought New Criticism for Filipino critical and creative practice so did her students like Merlie Alunan when they dealt with indigenous themes and feeling in the works of writers in the languages.

In a time when clamor on the need for language revitalization arose from the Philippine countryside, Alunan taught in her workshops the techniques of craft using local literary sources. By “surfacing tradition,” she sought to provide the beginning writer in Waray a view of how poets of the tradition like Iluminado Lucente, Eduardo Makabenta, Sr., and Casiano Trinchera deployed language to produce irony, wit, and humor in their poems. With their keen ear for the folk, traditional Waray poets were able to transform everyday utterance into veritable poetic expression. For Alunan, Lucente, Makabenta, and Trinchera represent the best of the tradition and serve as models for young writers who wish to write in their own native language. She would encourage young writers in every workshop to study their own literary tradition even as they read other literatures in the world. She would insist on the use of folkloric materials in literary and other creative labors. She would tell writers in every workshop to develop a deep sense of place and history. All these while teaching the craft of writing and emphasizing situating oneself in one’s culture. If New Criticism fulfilled the need for form other than the usual strict syllabic count of the traditional *siday*, the generic Waray word for poem, local literary sources quenched the thirst for substance, that is, for a sure hold on native ground, apart from the many literary traditions and movements in the history of thought that the young writer was also advised to read. It could be said then at this point that the introduction of New Critical principles in Leyte and Samar modernized writing in Waray.

Here, one hears a familiar strain similar to Tiempo’s statements on Philippine poetry: its being in between “an older, native imagery” and “a new tool for expressing that imagery.” The only striking difference is that the indigenous in Alunan’s turf is not written in English but is represented in its own terms, in the nuances of the native language, which Alunan taught in her workshops.

Tiempo has earlier addressed the issue of language and material of Philippine poetry in English: "As a voice for our native nuances, therefore, English may either be found wanting at times, or it may so adulterate the native flavor with its own special associations as to distort the intention of the utterance" (263); and "Certain English words and phrases become incongruous when they are used to depict non-existent equivalents or falsify the parallel situations they intend to depict; something, roughly, like painting in one medium what should most 'naturally' be done in another" (1). In Alunan, however, one finds the answer to Tiempo's anxiety: "I had become uneasy with the sense of inappropriateness I felt when dealing in English with the native experience.... I began writing in Cebuano" (142) and "... I realized that writing in English effectively cuts the writer off writing about life in the countryside. This recognition moved into a stronger realization: as long as English is the dominant language in Literature, as long as we are not using the mother tongue in our creative expressions, we are not giving voice to our people (Villas, "Interviews: Merlie M. Alunan").

Alunan, thus, took Tiempo's revision of New Criticism further by not only using the indigenous as material for poetry but also conveying this material in the native tongue. In a commentary on modern writing in the Visayas, Alunan argued: "Poetry published over the last thirty to forty years departs in form and techniques from traditional Visayan poetics. These transformations and departures are not only inevitable but necessary. Most contemporary Visayan poets today are university-trained and hence have a wider choice of resources to work from" (187). More specifically, in a celebratory essay on new writing in Waray, Alunan writes: "Except for Victor N. Sugbo, the new Waray writers found their voices first in their own mother tongues. However, they are all university-trained. It is evident in the styles and poetic techniques they have adopted, and the way they have brought the traditional forms of native Waray poetry closer to contemporary modes of writing. They use the same aesthetic and critical principles familiar to writers the world over. The poem completed, whatever be its medium, surely belongs to all of humanity, as much as it belongs to a particular language and geography which are its origins" (93). In Alunan, the issue of language and material and the meeting of the two arrive at a resolution.

As a teacher and critic of Visayan literature, Alunan has influenced the production of contemporary writing in Waray. This is evident in the books she has reviewed, translated, and introduced in the past decade which witnessed a surge of new writing in the language. The next section is a commentary on the works of three contemporary Waray poets that demonstrate both New Critical and indigenous tendencies. The result is a hybrid poetics that is neither New Critical nor native but both and in-between.

### THREE CONTEMPORARY POETS IN WARAY

Three poets dominate today's contemporary Waray literary scene: Victor N. Sugbo who came out with *Inintokan* published by the University of the Philippines Press, the first individual poetry collection in Waray that was released since Francis Aurillo's *Tingug ha Canto* (Voice from a Street Corner) in 1990; Voltaire Q. Oyzon who had his first poetry collection, *An Maupay ha Mga Waray ug iba pa nga mga siday* (What's Good about the Warays and other poems) released through a grant from the National Commission for Culture and the Arts (NCCA); and Janis Claire Salvacion, winner of the NCCA Writers Prize 2012, who had her poetry collection, *Siso sakradang ug iba pa nga mga siday han tagoangkan* (Siso sakradang and other poems of the womb) published by the Ateneo Institute of Literary Arts and Practices (AILAP) and under the NCCA Ubod New Authors Series. All three acknowledge Alunan as their mentor, having been trained in her workshops at the UPVTC.

As the most significant figures in contemporary Waray poetry today, these three and their respective collections have been well-received by readers and critics. National Artist for Literature Virgilio S. Almario says in his blurb for Sugbo's *Inintokan*: "*Isang katangi-tanging tagapagbandila ng panitikan si Sugbo at makikilatis ito sa nilalaman ng Inintokan. Taglay ng mga tula ang pambihirang malasakit ni Sugbo sa nagisnang kultura ng kaniyang rehiyon at ang tinig ng dalubhasa sa pinakabagong estetikang Modernista't Kanluranin.*" (Sugbo is an important advocate of literature, and we will notice this in the contents of *Inintokan*. The poems show Sugbo's remarkable compassion for the culture of his region and the scholar's voice well-versed in Modern/

Western aesthetics). On Oyzon's *An Maupay ha mga Waray*, New York-based Filipino novelist and critic, Gina Apostol writes: "What a stroke of genius—to choose to render in poem our agile, embarrassingly nuanced, profoundly crude and guileful language [the Waray] (for it is, to my mind, our skeptical, duplicitous language that is *an maupay ha mga Waray*). Oyzon is not the only Waray poet I have read: he is an exceptionally supple one....His poetry makes apparent and transparent the nature of our language, which is, of course, our self" (32). Alunan, in her introduction to Salvacion's first poetry collection, *Siso sakradang*, declares: "*Siso sakradang ug iba pa nga mga siday*, I dare claim, is the first collection of poetry by a woman poet in Eastern Visayas, an augury of good things to come in Philippine writing. I'd be more than happy to be proven wrong in this: that Janis Salvacion is the first young woman to dare the perilous path of the writer in Eastern Visayas. Meanwhile, I am happy to have the honor of ushering in this young voice, using Waray, her very own language, into the body of Philippine Literature" (x).

#### VICTOR N. SUGBO'S *ININTOKAN*

*Inintokan* is Sugbo's thesis on poetry, his creative process as a poet, his *ars poetica*: "Inintokan' is a Waray word whose root is derived from 'intok,' which in English means 'to knock against or into something.' Usually, the term is associated with something that breaks and chips off like glass. The process of writing a poem is similar to that of being hit by something—a thought, a memory, or a wave of feeling—that takes a small chip out of our humanity, and changes us." Built on this premise, the entire collection is divided into three parts or in Sugbo's words, "three ways of being 'intok': (1) 'nasabud' or knocked against something, (2) 'natinggiran' or chipped off, and (3) 'nakalambre' or knocked into something to the point of breaking" (xiii). The presence of an organizing principle for an entire collection is a New Critical influence, but what is most interesting about this work is the way in which it weans itself from its New Critical "origin."

Sugbo achieves this by drawing from his cultural resources. A sense of place pervades the collection. The landscape of his home province, seen from the windows of the bus he would take to Ormoc whenever a

poem “would not reveal itself clearly to [him],” is the source of his poetics. It is not surprising that one finds in his work what Alunan calls an “intimate geography.” Places are invoked and called by name: *Cancabatoc*, the bay fronting Tacloban City Hall atop Kanhuraw Hill; *Amandewing*, the mountain range that cuts Leyte in half; *Santa Rita*, a town in Samar; and *Hindang*, a town in Leyte. The poem, *Iglalara Ta Ikaw Hin Banig* reminds the reader that to keep the communal memory whole, one has to remember not only what is seen in the map but also what lies outside the parameters of the visible. The persona is a mat weaver who sings the names of the towns that comprise her island-home:

Dagko nga mga bungto  
 Catbalogan, Calbayog, Catarman,  
 Calbiga, Borongan, Balangiga ug Guiuan.  
 Tatahi-on ko hin dulaw, pula ug rosa  
 Basi hisabtan nga ini permi mo binibisita.  
 Pero an amon bungto nga Basiao  
 Sugad man han iba nga waray mo pag-inpan  
 Akon aasulan, naghuhulat  
 Nga hinaot imo hisaygan (4).

(The central towns/ Catbalogan, Calbayog, Catarman,/ Calbiga,  
 Borongan, Balangiga, and Guiuan,/ I will color red, yellow,  
 and pink/ So you will see the places you frequent./ But my town  
 Basiao and all those/ You have never dreamed of/ I will paint blue,  
 hoping/ To make you wonder.)

Mat weaving becomes map making, a cartography that charts the recesses of what is excluded in “conventional maps” such as the national imaginary, the national literature, or the national language. Sugbo suggests it is the task of the poet as mat weaver to sing the stories of our places, our homes, lest we forget and become fragmented.

This poem holds the entire collection together, as it articulates the vision to which Sugbo has committed himself: “... to regain ground and to show to the world community that this language that they have looked on with disfavor is still the best medium to express their own experiences and feelings” (Arinto 221).

The landscape of which he writes is peopled with memorable folk: *Inse Poren*, *Apoy Toyong*, *Inay Dameng*, *Inse Medying*, *Apoy Mundo*, *Na Trining*, *Na Talina*, *Mana Oseng*, *Mana Uta*, *Manoy Intek*, and *Na Tulya*. The poem, *Oban* (White Hair), is a grandson's account of his grandparent's laughter and stories that filled the house and how he ached to climb Amandewing's slopes just to see them. In *An Akon Inuoli* (Going Home), the persona goes home to get healed: "*Makikigkita ako kan Na Talina/ Kay inin naninig-a ko/ Nga abaga kinahanglan tuthuan,/ Inin akon kabutlaw tarayhupan*" (To see Na Talina/ For the stiffness/ In my shoulders she needs to spit on,/ This weakness she needs to blow away) (60). One hears a play of the word "uli" (going home), root word of "maulian" (get healed) which lends multivalence to the poem. Being culturally specific, the healer's acts of "tuthuan" and "tarayhupan" can only be poorly translated as "spit" and "blow away," which might appear odd to Western ears but are actual healing practices of Leyte's barrio folk up to this day. Says the persona:

Sirong han talisay igpupuruko ko  
 Inin dara ko nga mga ugmad  
 Ngan atubang hinin naglilinaw  
 Nga dagat han Hindang  
 Akon inuoli an tanan  
 Basi ako man maulian (60).

(And in the shade of the talisay tree I sit,/ Taking out these panic  
 I brought with me/ And looking out to the clear/ Waters of Hindang/  
 I give back everything/ That I may recover.)

*Engkantada*, the last poem in the collection bears the same feeling. In a tone of supplication, the persona addresses the invisible guardian of the mountains whose disappearance caused the loss of abundance associated with her presence. He mourns this loss because even children do not know her and old people no longer gather to tell tales about her. He prays:

uli na gad  
 ngan tambala  
 inin kabubkiran pati kapatagan,  
 tanoga hin damo nga katingalahan (70).

(come,/ and heal/ these mountains and plains,  
 thread once more your spells and wonder.)

One observes, as in the poem above, that Sugbo's poetic terrain is not only populated by folk characters but also supernatural beings. It is sacred ground guarded by shamans and sorcerers. These constitute the "lore" or "mythic framework" culled from Leyte-Samar oral literary traditions that Sugbo infuses the world of his poems with. He said: "Merlie Alunan used to tell me that whenever I write in English, it doesn't sound like an English poem, but it sounds like a Waray poem written in English" (Arinto 228). And these poems, indeed, resist translation. Thus, the reader finds in Sugbo strange creatures such as the *alok*, a hideous nocturnal monster of Waray oral lore, *Ingko Guyong* securing his property with the whisper of a curse to keep thieves at bay in *Gin-awogan* (Hexed), and *Apoy Mundo* using a charm against *Maria* who shields herself from him with a spell. These poems take the form of the *orasyon*, the repetitive and responsorial prayers of the *tambalan* (healer) or the *mamaratbat* (woman prayer leader). The poem, *Orasyon han Kabataan nga Maglabot han Aslum ni Inay* (The Children's Prayer and Inay's Pomelos), exemplifies this:

An kan Inay mga aslum  
 Nananaringsing nanmumukad

*Ha lungib nga ginookyan*  
 Imo kami tabangan

An kan Inay mga aslum  
 Namumukad namumunga

*Ha lungib nga amon ginookyan*  
 Imo kami tabangan (28).

(Grandmother's pomelo trees/ Sprout leaves and buds.//  
 In the cave where we live/ Lord, help us.// Grandmother's  
 trees are now fruiting.// In the cave where we live/Lord, help us.)

The poem takes the substance of a folk incantation, inserted between couplets in free verse, simulating the playfulness of children who wish to steal fruits from their old neighbor. What the poem achieves is the seamless interconnection of form and content. It is a modern Waray poem: New Critical because of its strong sense of organic unity; indigenous, because it makes use of an old cultural practice.

#### **VOLTAIRE Q. OYZON'S AN MAUPAY HA MGA WARAY**

Oyzon's *An Maupay ha Mga Waray* (What's Good about the Warays) also exhibits a strong sense of place. His poems document the experiences of the folk in his hometown, Barugo, his muse, his wellspring of creativity. Far from Sugbo's nostalgic tone, his is bitingly ironic, a trope taught by the New Critics but also found in the early 20th century poetry of Lucente, Makabenta, and Trinchera. It is with this voice that Oyzon incises the economic and spiritual poverty that besets his poems' personae. His subjects include an Overseas Filipino Worker, a young child witnessing marital violence, a poor sot who had to be buried without the benefit of a mass because he had no money for it, and a young man who had to become a soldier to feed his family. The distress of the personae in the collection is only contrasted with the love of home that they exude. See the poem, *Didto ha Amon* (Back home):

Dinhi ha hirayo,  
 ginigilitan  
 an akon kasingkasing  
 han kamingaw—  
 ako magbabalotan  
 ngan tiuli magdidinalagan (25).

(In this far country/ my heart/ slit/ by deep sadness,  
 bundled up again/ running for home.)

The poem, *Hi Uday* (Uday), proves the same insight:

Didto han tuna nga iya kinadto,  
nasunit hiya. Nagsaklang han lubi  
agud makita isla han Leyte (26).

(One day in the new land where she'd gone,/ she felt a piercing pain./She climbed a coconut tree/ to catch a glimmer of the isle of Leyte.)

Longing for home is strongly present because what makes a place is not physical geography but community. In *An Surat ni Dansoy ngadto kan Tipay* (Dansoy's letter to Tipay), the persona expresses desire for the beloved who is working abroad, as one can surmise from *An Duha nga Kanta ni Tipay* (Two Songs of Tipay), another poem in the collection with the same characters. The poem begins with an epigraph taken from a Waray folk song: "Di ak nagtatangis han waray banig..." (I'm not crying for want of a mat) (17). Written in four quatrains, the poem's meter is irregular with some lines running only up to seven, nine or ten syllables. This is shorter than the dodecasyllabic lines of traditional Waray verse. The poem obtains its musicality through the rhyme scheme, *aabbccddeeffgghh*. Following the cadence of the traditional folk song, this performance blends traditional form and contemporary content. With the epigraph at the beginning, the poem gives new meaning to the old folk song, setting it in our own time which has seen many Filipinos leave the country for jobs abroad.

Imparting new meaning to traditional forms is what Oyzon also does in *Nagbalyo-balyo ako hin Nanay* (Changing mothers). A poet with a deep love for his mother language, he distils a century of linguistic hegemony in the Philippines in four stanzas, depicting how the mother language, metaphorized here as "Nanay," is relegated to amnesia. He shows a child learning a foreign language in school for the first time without the benefit of first learning his own. This child goes through changes: from *nanay*, she calls her *mama*; from *mama*, she calls her *mother*; from *mother* to *mommy* (Oyzon 40). The poem suggests that the loss of language is gradual, and that oftentimes, the very institutions that should protect the interests of the young are the very institutions that legitimize

oppression in its various forms. But the poem does not end there. In between every stanza is inserted a line from the first verse of Iluminado Lucente's *An Iroy nga Tuna*, a lyric of freedom sung during the American colonial period. Its first stanza's last line reads: "Hahani hira nanay, pati kabugtoan" (Mother is here and my siblings, too). Oyzon rewrites this into "Banyaga hira nanay, pati kabugtoan" (Nanay and siblings are foreign to me). The forfeiture of one's claim to one's own language because of unjust language policies and educational practices, Oyzon suggests, is the same as being colonized again. Thus, in Oyzon, Lucente is read anew.

For a literature to grow and flourish, the poet has to have freedom to move between the traditional and the contemporary: relocating the old and refining the new. Since the Filipino writer is inexorably postcolonial, meaning "hybridised, involving the dialectical relationship between [Western/colonial] ontology and epistemology and the impulse to create or recreate independent local identity" (Tiffin 95), he cannot help but implement ways of seeing and saying, producing and receiving, that will neither be Western nor native but in-between. The Waray poet is a postcolonial Filipino writer, resisting the meanings that came down to him in official historiographies and finding fresh insights that renew our vision of history. His vocation is to remember or better yet, to remember.

The writer in Waray is aware of this need to re-member. Henri Bergson once wrote that there are two kinds of memory: one that you imagine and one that you repeat. It is the first type of memory that Oyzon executes in his poem *Pagbarol* (Drying Fish), where the persona reimagines the American colonization of the Philippines as rape. He masterfully ties this with the process of making dried fish and parallels this image with that of a rape scene. Unafraid to venture into this crossroad of imagination and history, the persona-observer in the end comes to grips at what he neither wishes to forgive nor forget: "*Hadto nga oras, an Amanlara/ mapag-ad na. An bulan/ padayon han pagsaklang./ An salog han Amanlara/ tak-om nga nagliliro/ dara han dulong/ han katabang ngan kaasgad.*" (At that moment, Amanlara/ is infused with salt./ The moon continues climbing./ The poisoned river whirls/ mute as the struggle/ between bitter and sweet.) (38).

In Oyzon's poetry, one discerns a consciousness of craft. The careful setting of the lines and the choice of images to produce the right effect is New Criticism at work in contemporary Waray poetry. But form is not everything, and here lies the danger of reducing modern Waray literature into an extension of the New Critical school. For in Oyzon, one sees the poet's involvement with his community. It is love of place and language that drives him. And he writes his experiences in the language he loves. He does not live outside history. He lives in it, rethinks it, rewrites it. And this is the poet's role: "Something of our birthright remains to leaven the imagination. To remind us of the way we were, how it had been" (Alunan, 6).

#### **JANIS CLAIRE SALVACION'S *SISO SAKRADANG***

Poetic craftsmanship is the strength of Salvacion's *Siso sakradang ug iba pa nga mga siday han tagoangkan* (*Siso sakradang and other poems from the womb*). This is gleaned from the diction and tone of the persona in each work to each poem's neat line cutting. The poetic world is inhabited by women of various backgrounds: a mother, a wife, a lover, a mistress, a little girl. Her point of view allows for woman in all her plurality, thus adding layers of tension to her poems. In *Siso sakradang*, she deals with the contradictions of her many selves and finds herself, each one of them, among the fragments.

Daday, a five-year-old girl, is the speaking voice in *Drowing ni Daday, Lima ka Tuig* (*Daday's Drawing, Five Years Old*). Like all children her age, she draws pictures of her family to remember what was: the food that her mother cooked in that beach in Harupoy and her mother's songs as her father played the guitar. She addresses her mother and with innocence asks her: "Yana, Nanay, kay-ano di ka na nakanta?" (Now, Nanay, why don't you sing anymore?). The answer is revealed by Daday herself:

Aw kuan ngay-an, Nanay, Nanay,  
 di ko na la ig-uupod pagdrowing it dagat.  
 Bangin la paghulson hit mga balud  
 it akon ulonan, kun inkaso,

igdurog ko ini nga papel kada gab-i  
 yana nga gumikan na hi Tatay  
 sakay han Philtranco nga't ha Manila.  
 Kinahanglan kuno niya mahirayo  
 basin na ako makaiskwela. (32)

(Aw, Nanay, Nanay,/ I will not include the sea in my drawing./  
 The waves might wet my pillows in case/ I sleep with this every  
 night/ especially now that Tatay has left,/ aboard the Philtranco  
 for Manila./He said he needs to go far/ so I can attend school.)

The separation caused by dislocation is gentled by the child's gaze. Yet this gentling is not an escape from the cruelty of paternal absence and economic lack. By way of sketching images, Daday confronts the situation with sheer honesty and sees the pain of the present with clarity. She invites her mother to see this image, and she wants this image to be permanent:

Dali na Nanay, kita a gad anay,  
 human ko na igdrowing  
 hi ako, hi ikaw, sapit naton hi Tatay.  
 Yana akon liwat ini kokoloran  
 kay kun pabay-an ko nga бага lapis la,  
 sus, Nanay, Nanay, kasayon daw mapara. (32)

(Quick, Nanay, look at this first,/ I'm done drawing/  
 me, you beside Tatay./ Now, I'm going to color this/  
 because if I leave it pencil-sketches/ sus, Nanay, Nanay,  
 it would so easily be erased.)

Poverty haunts the addressee in *Hi Nay Inyang, Usa nga Parag-uma Ha Barangay Madalunot, Pinabacdao, Samar Nag-iihap han iya Adlaw han Kawarayan* (Nay Inyang, Farmer in Barangay Madalunot, Pinabacdao, Samar, Counting Her Days of Lack). She tells Iday:

... an pag-uswag han amon kinabuhi  
 an katalwas ha kakurian, nasugad hini—

uno, dos,  
     dalusdos

uno, dos,

dalusdos  
     nadalusdos,  
         nadalusdos,  
             nadalusdos. (20)

(... progress in our lives/ our salvation from poverty is like this—//  
 one, two,/ slip // one, two, slip// slip, slip, slip.)

While the straight lines indicate stability, the indentions in the poem imitate the slipping away of any modicum of development in Nay Inyang's life. Progress evades her as soon as she grasps it. We are not told why she says this to Iday. The only context provided is found in the poem's title. Nay Inyang is a farmer in Barangay Madalunot (the Waray word for slippery) in Pinabacdao, one of the poorest municipalities in Samar. Her counting represents the rhythm of her life: always gasping for air as one does after reading the poem's kilometric title followed by terse lines with short pauses in between. Rage does not interrupt this rhythm, and she sounds resigned to her fate: Nay Inyang slips deeper into poverty.

In *Pangadi ni Otoy San-o Kumatuog Usa ka Gab-i* (Otoy's Prayer One Night Before Going to Bed), a conversation ensues between mother and son after they prayed before bed time. The sign of the cross, the Roman Catholic Christian prayer invoking the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, seems to lack something. Otoy immediately recognizes this and disrupts the solemn occasion with his three-year-old question: "Nanay, Nanay,/ hain man an *Mother*?" (Nanay, Nanay,/ where's the *Mother*?) (29). The poem disturbs history that has continuously excluded women from its imaginary, an exclusion that results into a gap that could only be sutured if women engage themselves in the fierce questioning of society and its institutions.

Salvacion's project, it seems to be, is to speak the unspeakable, more powerfully so, because she does this in her own language, where male writers have been the dominant voice. "*Kay-ano// kinahanglan ako buakon para ha imo?* (Why// did I have to be split open for you?)," she asks the child in her womb (*Para Kan Clara*, For Clara) (37). The other woman, as in the piece, *Ha Akon Inop* (In My Dream), the woman who lived her life with two husbands, as in *Leonora*, the mother who left her child without a word, as in the poem, *Dyip* (Jeep), are given a face from which they could be known. The mother who deals with the fact that one day, she would have to let her child go had this resolve in *Siso Sakradang*, the title poem of this poetry collection: "*Pero ugsa hito,/ ha yana,/ ini nga humarapit nga higayon,/ bubul-iwan ta anay ikaw ha hangin/ agud saluhon/ han akon mga kamot/ nga naghuhulat/ ha imo paghugdon*" (Before then,/ at this moment,/ this time at hand,/ let me loose you to the wind/ so I could catch you/ with my hands/ spread open, waiting/ for your fall) (39). *Siso sakradang* is a chant parents sing whenever they play with their children the game of riding on their feet. The chant is interspersed and repeated three times in the poem with increasing intensity.

Like in Sugbo and Oyzon, one sees in Salvacion the importance of mining one's culture for its wealth of lore and history. With the sure voice of the poet, she interrogates history, exposes poverty down to its ugly bones, and examines fearlessly the agony of a child with a father who left home to work in a foreign land so he could send a daughter to school. Her poems demonstrate a respect for form, but it is form that is integral to content. In this sense, Salvacion is New Critical. As a poet, she is concerned with aesthetic truth, and she takes it as her task to present that truth in the multiple perspectives the female in/sight can afford. In this sense, Salvacion remains "native," in touch with herself and her community, which is the source of her poetry.

## CONCLUSION

New Criticism did not reach the country as it is, untouched by its very first teachers, Edith and Edilberto Tiempo. From the historical sketch given, one sees how the Tiempos, Edith in particular, rethought the tenets of American New Criticism to make it suitable for the Philippine

condition. The Silliman Workshop which they founded became the center of creative writing in the country. The workshop commenced the spread of New Criticism to other parts of the country. Its alumni established writing workshops of their own. One of these alumni included Merlie M. Alunan who founded the Visayas Writers Workshop or VisWrite, later known as the UPV Creative Writing Program. The workshop was instrumental in the current upsurge of new writing in Waray. When New Criticism reached Alunan's hands, it was no longer of the Iowa kind but the Tiempo's version which she, in turn, further revised to make appropriate for her own context.

With this theoretical revision in place, writers in Waray practiced in effect what was thought of as New Criticism. But the analysis showed that it was a Tiempo and Alunan kind of New Criticism, a theory now thrice removed from its Southern Agrarian beginnings.

New Criticism modernized writing in Waray. The works of Victor N. Sugbo, Voltaire Q. Oyzon, and Janis Claire B. Salvacion represent the best of this new crop of contemporary writing. Their works are seen to be a mix between traditional forms and New Critical aesthetics or New Critical practices and indigenous material. These writers bring Edith Tiempo's difficulty with the English language to express Filipino sentiment to a resolution by writing their poems in their own languages, which in the case of these three writers, is Waray. This could be credited to Merlie Alunan, a student of the Tiempos, who encouraged young writers to learn their traditions and return to writing in their mother tongue.

It is hard to ascertain where this trend will lead in the coming years. With the current vigor in literary production, contemporary Waray literature may turn out more new writing, that is, the kind of writing that will revise even further and veer away from the New Criticism handed down, in a dis/continuous way, from Engle to the Tiempos to Alunan.

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