

HERE, THERE AND EVERYWHERE
An Analysis of Edith L. Tiempo's *His Native Coast*

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The major part of my paper analyzes Edith L. Tiempo's novel *His Native Coast*¹ as an instance of border crossing in a Philippine literary text by a Filipina writer. For purposes of introduction and comparison, my analysis is preceded by my brief critique of a short story, "Yours, Faithfully" by Lydia Villanueva Arguilla. The common denominator between the two texts is their subject matter, namely, close encounters between Filipino women and American soldiers after the Second World War.

Arguilla's story is easy reading, while Tiempo's requires at least two-and-a-half readings for thorough comprehension. Although "Yours, Faithfully" is not a well-known piece, Dr. Isagani R. Cruz included it in his anthology *The Best Philippine Short Stories of the Twentieth Century*.² The story focuses on certain memorable aspects of the postwar period in Manila. *His Native Coast*, likewise, depicts the end of the war, but we hardly get a glimpse of Manila, the setting being confined mainly to the environs of Dumaguete. Chapter V of the novel, entitled "Un Bel Di" (after the aria from Puccini's *Madame Butterfly*), competed as a short story and won first prize in the English short-story category of the Palanca Memorial Awards for Literature in 1968–69, a decade before the publication of the novel itself. *His Native Coast* shared first prize with F. Sionil Jose's *Tree* in the novel-writing competition sponsored by the Cultural Center of the Philippines.

"Yours, Faithfully"

In his brief introduction to "Yours, Faithfully," Dr. Cruz identifies Lydia Villanueva Arguilla as the widow of Manuel E. Arguilla, "the great writer who died at the hands of Japanese soldiers during the Second World War."³

Ms. Arguilla was a member of Marking's Guerrillas, and after her husband was arrested by the Japanese in 1944, she fled to the mountains to join Marking and his wife. She was a painter, essayist, short-story writer, and poet. In New York (1948) she took courses at Columbia University with the short-story critic Martha Foley.⁴

Cruz comments that "Yours Faithfully" is

about American soldiers enjoying the company of Filipino women after the Japanese had been driven out of Manila. One particular woman—the central consciousness—insists on meeting one particular soldier on her own terms. The result is a story that reveals, in mostly dialogue format with a letter tacked on at the end, the mind of a mature Filipino woman. Read against the background of Manuel Arguilla's heroic death, as well as the war itself, the story offers a way to wed national tragedies and personal dilemmas. This is a story about two kinds of violence—the violence of war against human beings and the violence of men against women.⁵

No actual violence of men against women occurs in the story but we will let Cruz's comment pass. Of greater interest is the impact of the Filipino-American encounter on the central consciousness, "a mature Filipino woman," as Cruz describes her.

For senior citizens above the age of seventy, the subject of postwar Philippines conjures up images of GIs dating or courting Filipino women. We may assume that many Fil-American romances led to marriage; however, a stigma sometimes attached to relationships between local women and their foreign boyfriends. The term *hanggang pier lamang*, or "up to the pier only," made fun of women who hoped to sail to the USA with their fiancés, only to be stranded at the pier. Other *femmes fatales* earned the derogatory nickname "pampam girl," or prostitute.

The unnamed narrator-protagonist (for convenience let us call her Lyd, her nickname in real life) displays first-hand familiarity with the euphoria of those days. "It was April of 1945. . . . American soldiers smiled at every Filipino. The novelty of the V-sign and greeting of 'Victory, Joe!' had not yet worn off."⁶

Lyd's attitude toward the liberating forces is initially ambivalent—she likes them, she likes them not, she likes them... She hints of a time when the excitement of the GI presence will wear off, but she ends the story on a grateful and sentimental note.

Nothing spectacular happens in the story but the dialogue is significant enough to reveal cultural differences between Lyd and her friend Rose on the

one hand, and two American lieutenants who stop their jeep on the road to pick them up. The men, Oren and Harry, immediately ask, "How about a date, honey?" Hitchhiking not being a feature of the local cultural landscape, Lyd feels slightly guilty as they accept the ride: "A couple of Americans. We waited for them three years. Friends. Even if I just met them. It isn't done in this country, but it would be now."⁷

Rose, a half-American Filipina, wants to be friendly but her limited vocabulary of American slang creates the impression that she is "being fresh." Apparently more Filipino than American in her upbringing, she objects when Harry tries to put his arm around her for a photograph. Harry appears to be "more familiar than friendly."⁸ Lyd tells the soldiers bluntly that she and Rose went out with them only because they were Americans who had come from across the ocean to liberate the Philippines. They could have a "nice, clean, good time" together but there would be no kissing and petting. Oren replies, "Sweetheart, if we wanted loose girls we could have them any time. But we like you."⁹ His remark bears out the stereotypical image of the GI as perpetually on the prowl for easy women.

The lieutenants have the habit of addressing the girls as "sweetheart" and "honey," and think nothing of saying "hell" in their presence. When the girls voice disapproval of their language, Harry remarks, "We're low-brow Americans. All we talk is slang." Then follows a "hanggang pier" offer in the guise of a marriage proposal: "Seriously, honey. I like you. ...I'll marry you and take you to the States."¹⁰

In countries that hosted US military camps after the war, it was common to hear the natives complaining about arrogant GIs. ("They're oversexed and they're over here.") In the Philippines, reincarnations of the pampam girls of yore swarmed in communities near the bases, boosting the economy and swelling the population of Fil-American children. Such conditions persisted during the lifetime of the Military Bases Agreement, dividing the Filipino people into pro-bases and anti-bases factions who debated the issue bitterly until the Senate voted in 1991 to abrogate the treaty.

Independence, national integrity, and the dignity of Filipino women were among the keywords of the furor over the bases. Feminists regarded the women as victims of exploitation, and rightly so. The socioeconomic and diplomatic complications of the military bases are, however, never mentioned in "Yours, Faithfully," not even in the form of foreshadowing, probably because nobody expected things to turn dismal in the future.

Arguilla's main concern is with the romantic potential of the fictive situation. Oren and Lyd are having dinner by candlelight one evening. Oren ponders the fact that never in his wildest dreams did he imagine he would be sitting in Manila chatting with a Filipina. He recalls feeling a "spasm of grief"

when he first saw Manila from the air. He had expected to tour the Walled City, the *Jai-Alai*, the nightclubs, but instead found “heaps of rubble.”¹¹ Life in the Army makes him feel he is just a “government issue” like his clothes, shoes, and food rations. Sometimes, lying in his bunk, he wonders, “God, why am I here? How did I get here?”¹²

Lyd, meanwhile, tells Oren about her happy past with the man she loved, and how the war passed over her life “like a giant bulldozer.”¹³ She admits, though, that her personal tragedy was merely one of millions. (Her loss injects a bit of autobiography into the story.)

Sincere sympathy develops between Oren and Lyd. They enjoy the piano music in the lounge; they dance to the hit tune “White Christmas.” By this time Oren’s military indifference has evolved into affection for the country and people he has come to know, like his lady friend across the table.

“I’d be a poor friend if I lumped you and your story with millions. Before I came out here the Philippines to me was just some group of islands in the Pacific that America was honor-bound to redeem from the clutches of the Japanese. Filipinos were people who were natives of the Philippines. But if I were back in Ohio now and a typhoon were in Manila and I heard about it, I wouldn’t just feel vaguely sorry for the mass of anonymous sufferers. Before I ever came out here, yes. But not now. Now I’d think of you. I’d think of actual Filipinos I had come to know. And my sympathy would be very active, very real.”¹⁴

At first blush a romance seems to be in the offing, perhaps an honest-to-goodness wedding rather than a farewell at the pier. Oren offers to take Lyd for a spin in the cool night air but she turns him down. He bends to kiss her but she evades his move.

“Honey....”

“Don’t. Don’t spoil it all. It’s been so perfect.”

“I’m sorry.”¹⁵

They bid each other a permanent good night. For the Filipina dreaming of a US visa, and an American fiancé to boot, the story ends in a manner we would call *bitin*, or hanging, as well as disappointing. How could any woman in her right mind allow this opportunity to pass? Lyd, however, listens to her head instead of her heart. Days later she writes him this note:

Dear Oren—it was a lovely evening. You made it so. And it wasn’t a dream, though in a way it was. And as dreams end so does this one—at its loveliest and best.

An hour of beauty and trust and friendliness in a world of disillusionment and ugliness and pain—surely it is something worth keeping and remembering so.

God bless you and keep you for more gracious days of peace, of permanent affections, of safe and measured living.

God keep you for that interrupted college education, home, family and friends and white Christmases.

God grant you a soft spot in your heart always for my country—you and all the other Americans who came over to help us get back from the invader what is our own.

Yours, faithfully...¹⁶

Beyond the tenderness, the good wishes, and the gratitude—silence. Multiple meanings may, however, be read into the silence. We may consider the moral climate of that era, which called for decency and propriety in both human behavior and literature. Open manifestations of sexuality were taboo. It is also possible, if not probable, that even if the central character was “faithfully” in love with Oren, she repressed her feelings lest she become a “hanggang pier” victim.

His Native Coast

Like Lydia Arguilla, Edith Tiempo (Philippine National Artist for Literature) bypasses the socioeconomic and diplomatic effects of the American military presence in the Philippines. Accounts of the rigors of war are minimal in *His Native Coast*, except for a few references to a group of Japanese prisoners about to be transported to Australia, ill-tempered combat troops, and the evacuation of guerrilla units from the Negros mountains to the lowlands. Strangely enough, although Arguilla was in the resistance movement, her story omits that part of her life, whereas Tiempo describes the jungle guerrilla setting as if she herself, like her heroine Marina, had clambered over the crags and slid down a waterfall.

The most obvious similarity between “Yours, Faithfully” and *His Native Coast* is the romantic angle: two Filipino women reject the overtures of two American soldiers. In *His Native Coast*, a short scene depicts several female members of the guerrilla staff who happen to meet three American soldiers coming towards them. The girls and the fellows stare mutually and seem to have identical thoughts. One girl, Renee, sings out, “Hi, Joel!”, whereupon Marina pinches her and whispers threats like “no movies” and “no parties.” Thus the two groups pass each other in silence. Renee, annoyed at Marina’s matriarchal manner, remarks, “... the conquistadores go without aid and

comfort tonight.”¹⁷ Marina, determined to keep her companions in head-over-heart mode at all times, is almost a clone of Lyd in this scene, but, as we will note later, Marina surpasses Lyd in complexity of character and motivation.

Unfulfilled desire is not all there is to these two stories, much less *His Native Coast*, where the protagonist is far from acting or talking like a fun-loving GI Joe. Tiempo takes pains to have Michael Linder defy the stereotype of the GI who would think nothing of abandoning his girlfriend at the pier. Much more than Oren’s, Michael’s assignment in the Philippines gives rise to a many-faceted world-view which, coincidentally or deliberately, reflects the novelist’s own global philosophy.

Six chapters make up the novel. Chapter I (*Pagatban*), set in a mountainous forest in Negros, introduces us to the two principal characters: Marina Manuel, the daughter of an Ifugao woman and a Batangas congressman (both deceased), and Lieut. Michael Linder, a member of the American guerrilla forces recently arrived from Australia to link up with the resistance movement in the Philippines. Marina, a schoolteacher at Silliman University, has been with the Pagatban underground since the war began. The year is 1944, almost the end of the Second World War, and time for the organization to move to the lowlands.

In Chapter II (*Viñas*) the guerrilla command and the US army occupation staff run the town of Viñas until the disrupted civil government can take over. The Viñas sugar-mill community is the center of action and socialization. We meet plantation people, the most prominent being Don Gonzalo de Villa Beruz and his brother Don Carlos, descendants of Spaniards who came to the Philippines in the seventeenth century.

Michael falls in love with Marina and proposes marriage. Weeping, she accepts his kiss but declines his proposal. His military assignment over, he returns to the US after four months.

Chapter III (*Columbus, Ohio, et al*) is devoted to Michael’s efforts to get readjusted to the United States. He has a few half-hearted love affairs, failures all, including a brief sexual encounter with Fenia, girlfriend of Sgt. Jimmy Carr, his comrade in Pagatban. All the while, he remembers the tropics and thinks of Marina. He looks on Fenia as a kind of surrogate for Marina because of her bookish manner of speaking. Later he learns that Marina has married Paulo Lacambre, chief chemist at the Santa Rosa Sugar Central. She has stopped teaching in order to settle in Santa Rosa.

After nine years, Michael gets an offer to be personnel manager in Beruz’s sugar central. Something fishy is going on at the Santa Rosa mill, and Beruz hopes that Michael, being a typical efficient American, will be able to pinpoint the culprit. Michael regards Beruz’s offer to import him as a stroke of luck.

In Chapter IV (*Revisited*) Michael is back in the feudal-style domain of the *hacenderos*. He is met at the airport by Paulo Lacambre, a “refined and high-class thug type”¹⁸ who could pass for the descendant of a Spanish Moor. Paul almost immediately takes a trip to Manila, giving Michael his first opportunity to meet Marina again after ten years. He suspects, from what Beruz has told him, that Paulo is involved in the large-scale theft at the mill.

Michael notes that Marina’s house in Bagacay is extensively decorated with rough unvarnished figurines and other native woodcraft. from Lagawe, her mother’s hometown.¹⁹ The figurines represent tribal personages, such as the medicine man, the warrior, the water-boy. Her bookshelves are lined with works by Faulkner, Tagore, Victor Hugo, Tolstoy, Camus, Jose Rizal, Kierkegaard, Dostoevsky, Romulo, Eliot, Yeats, Mann, Sartre, etc.—a truly cosmopolitan collection. Marina herself has published a book of poems. Nothing in her décor reflects the man of the house, who happens to be the illegitimate son of a Spaniard and a seamstress. Unlike Marina, who takes pride in her mother, Paul is “touchy” about his.

One day Marina’s brother Ernesto and his fiancée Debbie, an anthropology major, come to visit Marina in Bagacay. Debbie describes a religious ceremony—a mixture of animism and Christian ritual— she has just witnessed in a backwoods chapel where a tribe of Actas and mountain residents worship. The young Christ was represented by a big-headed black pygmy wearing a glittering robe. People took turns capering before the tribal image to the fast beat of a drum. They stamped and flung out their fists at it in threatening, mocking gestures. When they were done, they threw coins at the feet of the statue and left the chapel.²⁰

Debbie, who is doing research on pre-Christian Philippine culture, offers her interpretation of the ceremony:

“Those people are worshipping the way they know how. It shows their own crude sense of justice, or maybe it is pride. It’s this way: ‘Look, Christ-god, I’m giving you money and I dance for you in the bargain. But by Christopher who carried you, you’d better do your own part and give me what I want or—look out, that’s all!’”²¹

Marina approves of Debbie’s reasoning, which makes Michael believe that Marina is still carrying the torch for her tribal mother. Back alone in his cottage, he reviews his relationship with Marina. Nothing has changed; he still feels strongly about her, and she knows it.

In Chapter V (*Un Bel Di*) Marina asks Michael why he came back to the Philippines; his reply is that he wanted to find out the real reason why she gave his marriage proposal the thumbs-down. She reminds him that she is

“partly tribal, Ifugao,” and that her late mother was a “pagan turned nominal Christian.”²² Michael fails to grasp her logic.

Don Gonzalo Beruz tells Marina he is disturbed by reports about Paul’s involvement in the irregularities at Santa Rosa. Two months later Michael meets Tan Chuan, a Chinese businessman with whom Paul has had suspicious dealings. Tan appears ready to tell all. Marina is upset by the reports but doubts that her husband is guilty. The scandal is serious enough to have attracted the attention of the NBI. The suspicion is that Paul’s Chinese partner is linked with a group plotting to take illegal control of national prices for sugar.

As Michael drives out of the Central grounds, he is attracted by the flicker of candles inside a barrio chapel. Peering in through the window, he sees Marina performing a trance-like ritual dance in front of the black statue of the pygmy Christ. She is barefoot and looks unbearably tired.

Marina, he called, but his cry had no voice. And he would not call her because he knew very well how she had gone there in her proud pain. She was there, where else, to place her burden on the shoulder of the Christ, that black brooding stranger in the chapel.

As he walked back to the car Michael realized that he wasn’t shocked. He understood absolutely how Marina happened to be there, she had to shift a weight that had grown unbearable for the moment. . . . And knowing the kind of friends she had in the community, he saw how she thought she had no choice—she, who had not danced or even seen the old dances in a long, long time, was being driven by her need to find recourse again to these deep pounding rhythms of the blood, to wash away pain, to lift up the wordless petitions of the heart, to shift or at least share a shame and a hurt not easily defined or articulated to a fellow human being. And he saw how she had no choice, she had to do it in the way she’d known long ago from her mother’s people.²³

This paragraph ends “Un Bel Di” as a short story but the chapter is not yet over in the novel itself. A bolo fight between two mill workers exposes the sources of corruption at the mill and closes the chapter. Paul disappears from the scene (and the novel), having fled to parts unknown.

In Chapter VI (*His Native Coast*) Marina vanishes from Bagacay. Michael goes chasing after her, having heard that she has taken a plane out of Dumaguete and bought a ticket to Santa Fe, Nueva Vizcaya. His mind cringes at the thought of Marina among the inhabitants of her mother’s hick town. “It wasn’t just that she did not belong there now and had never belonged there, but that somehow Lagawe was so final, so unwise and wrong for her.”²⁴

He hikes to clearings in the hills, searching among the shacks, admiring the Ifugao women clad in bright plaid jackets and sarongs, and men wearing G-strings below their jacket tops. For the first time he feels that he is seeing in

the flesh the carved figurines in Marina's living room.

During his search for Marina, Michael makes the acquaintance of two mining engineers, an American and a Filipino, who are in the exploratory stage of setting up a mining project in the vicinity. Industrialization is about to invade the peaceful Mountain Province.

Michael is finally led to the house of Marina's uncle, Lakay Simeon Banwag, who seems to have been expecting the "*Melicano*" to drop by. Simeon shows him a faded yellow-brown photograph of Marina's parents. Except for the short flared nose, the woman is Marina all over again. Simeon admits that Marina is in Lagawe.

After more than a month in Simeon's house, Michael makes an astonishing discovery—a cardboard box in a corner of his room, with Marina's name on the tag. The box contains a pair of high-heeled leather shoes. He realizes that she has made an irrevocable decision and that she could possibly be walking barefoot at this very moment on the hill-slopes of her mother's town.

He packs his clothes and leaves the hut, planning to be in Manila before midnight. By noon of the next day Michael Linder will be back at his desk at the Santa Rosa.

Crossing Linguistic Borders

Edith L. Tiempo is an outstanding example of the Filipino writer who writes in English and crosses linguistic borders, literally and figuratively. The English she uses has "its own cultural load" even as she adapts it "to integrate a distinctly Filipino perspective, thereby making it a cross-cultural instrument."²⁵ I define culture in its traditional sense as the general pattern of human behavior and its products embodied in thought, language, action, customary beliefs, tools and artifacts, social forms, and so forth, peculiar to a particular group. The group passes on its culture to future generations and to other groups with their own distinctive cultures. Hence, the notion of crisscrossing cultures and the cultural amalgamation called multiculturalism.

Abstruse problems of cultural identity and diversity against the background of romantic love constitute the framework of *His Native Coast*. Unfortunately, the professorial admixture of ideas results in an overcerebral narrative style. Dr. Cristina Pantoja Hidalgo, critic and Tiempo admirer, comments that "no other novelist spends as much time on the description of details of food, clothing, or landscape as does Edith Tiempo, sometimes to the point of slowing down the narrative pace."²⁶ In my opinion, certain sections could have been excised, such as Michael's chance encounter with the mining engineers in Chapter VI and irrelevant happenings in Chapters

III and V. At the risk of sounding presumptuous, I will digress to question the choice of “Un Bel Di” as a first-prize winner in the short-story category of the Palanca awards. For one thing it has no discernable plot pattern outside the superstructure of *His Native Coast*. As a short story it suffers from lack of form or structure, and has no unified effect, elements emphasized by formalist critics under whose influence Tiempo wrote fiction and poetry. In more than half of this lengthy chapter we drift from scene to scene, from dialogue to dialogue, without perceiving the cause-and-effect continuum that normally makes up a plot. Dr. Cruz is right, indeed, in comparing the chapter to a narrative of manners and other trivialities.²⁷

There is nonetheless much to commend in the novel as a whole. It is, for one thing, a highly educational read, this double-focus on two parallel quests for identity—an American’s and a Filipina’s. Very few Filipino writers would dare project an American male’s point of view with such self-confidence. If she succeeds, it is because Michael Linder is a rare kind of GI, an intellectual like the novelist herself. In college he majored in the humanities and received a degree in business. He converses with Marina on a supra-intellectual plane about highbrow topics like the teaching of Chaucer’s *fabliaux* in her literature classes at Silliman University.

Let us scrutinize Edith Tiempo’s use of English as “a cross-cultural instrument.”²⁸ She was educated in the English language like every other Filipino of her generation, and must have displayed her gift for creative writing early in her youth. The most prestigious professor of English at Silliman University, she co-founded (with her husband, writer Edilberto) the Silliman Writers’ Workshop, reputed to be the longest continuing writers’ workshop in the Philippines. She received her master’s degree at the State University of Iowa, where some of her writings were discussed by visiting poets and critics like Robert Penn Warren and Cleanth Brooks. In addition she studied with Paul Engle and Robert Lowell, renowned poets of that era. For her doctoral dissertation at the University of Denver she submitted a novel, *A Blade of Fern*, which was later published in Hong Kong, the first book by a Filipino among a list of Asian writers.²⁹

The American influence on the writing style in *His Native Coast* shows all over the place. In other words, the author crosses a linguistic border and remains on the other side 80 percent of the time, while geographically she lives in the land of her birth. In Michael Linder’s shoes, metaphorically speaking, she crosses to the Philippines, then to the USA, then back to the Philippines. The crossing/recrossing, leads to surprises in the kind of English (i. e., American-flavored English) spoken by some of the Filipino characters. For example (italics supplied):

*Alcaraz stared at Carr and the little angry veins started to pulse at his temples. "Great pickled leeches!" his words hissed in the quiet room.*³⁰

"Son of a bitch!" might have been a more intelligible exclamation to Filipino readers than "great pickled leeches!", whose meaning is lost to me, I'm afraid.

Here is Lieutenant Rivas reprimanding his men:

*"Look alive, you bunch of lilies! A double-step's a double-step, I don't care if it's here or Fort William McKinley!"*³¹

"Bunch of lilies?" I wonder if Rivas's men appreciated the metaphor.

Note the use of particular words and the intonation of these two lines uttered by Marina as she recounts certain incidents.

*"Yes," she said, "it's a holy vengeance that one must express in niggling little furies."*³²

*Such a dear fuddy-dud, she thought, he would kick up a fuss about nothing.*³³

Ernesto, too, displays a capacity for combining highfalutin speech with slang:

*Ernesto got up and took the thin volume [of Marina's poems] from the shelf. He gave it to Michael. "It's all there, Mr. Linder. Marina's spook, or bogey, as you call it." Ernesto returned to his seat, saying, "You know how it is—it's Margaret she mourns for—and so it's easier to meet it there than in the—uh—involuted conversation of two women."*³⁴

In the above extract Ernesto parodies the beautiful concluding lines of Gerard Manley Hopkins' poem "Spring and Fall: To a Young Child." ("It is the blight man was born for/ It is Margaret you mourn for."³⁵) Quite unusual that Ernesto, who is not presented in the novel as a literary buff, should quote Hopkins as if he were addressing a class of English majors.

So successful has Tiempo been at imbibing American English (her Silliman background may have helped) that Chapter III (*Columbus, Ohio, et al*) could well have been an extract from American fiction. In one scene (one that could have been dispensed with, by the way) Michael happens to be chatting with his friend Sid, who is married to an American-speaking Japanese

girl named Hoko. Sid and Hoko are looking for an apartment to move into. There can be no denying the American ambience in the following dialogue:

The Japanese girl was holding her glass in both hands and was resting it on her knees, but she put it down on the low table before her. She turned to her husband with her palms held together in front of her in an unconscious gesture. "Sid, what do you think? Me, it's okay."

The little smile Hoko lifted up at Sid apologized for her rather uncertain answer. Sid rolled his eyes hideously at his wife and growled, "You like it, Hoko, we take it. I hate like shit to come home to that house and you know it."

"Quiet, big boy," Hoko said placidly. "I mean, watch your language."

"Well," he boomed, "it's true. That place we have now is a stinky deal. Mrs. Mervin Jespersen and her church women on Wednesday nights! Thing is, it's not even a real yak session, they jab away with their knitting needles—the everlasting socks and stuff for the orphan house. And they sing hymns. Ga-a-a-a!"

Drastically different is the linguistic border-crossing in the last chapter of the novel. By this time, although we never see her again, we know that Marina has crossed over from Negros Occidental to Ifugao country in quest of her indigenous identity. Michael Linder, meanwhile, tries to locate her by crossing the same geographical/linguistic border. Suddenly nobody except Michael is speaking American English anymore. We hear the Ifugao language (similar to Ilocano, with which Edith Tiempo, a Nueva Vizcayan, must have been familiar).

"Sino kita-en 'yo?" he [a young boy] questioned Tirso.

*"Ni Lakay Simeon."*³⁶

"Anyá manen, Arcadio?" The deep-voiced query came from close at hand, back of the hut.

"Ad-da 'Melicano," the boy Arcadio said portentously.³⁷

The sound of the Ifugao idiom does not distress Michael one bit. This is a far cry from his attitude when he had just arrived in Negros. At first he disliked the natives' awful accent and their mingling of English and the vernacular. It seems that by the time of his visit to the northern highlands—ten years after his stint in the south—he has learned to appreciate the native tongue just as he has learned to love the Philippines.

East Meets West

Clearly, Tiempo is more engrossed in cultural differences than in other matters relative to the US military presence in this country. Early in the plot, Michael and his colleague Jimmy Carr discuss the Philippines' "schizoid" character. Jimmy is the embodiment of whatever is ideal in the Fil-American mixture, being a handsome blend of American and Filipino features. Michael perceives a parallel between this mixture and the confusing blend of Eastern and Western values in Philippine culture. Jimmy adds that our nationalistic neighbors like India probably regard Filipinos as "disoriented":

"Excuse the accidental pun. Look how you dress, other Asians would say, your books, your medium of instruction in your schools, your law courts and legislature, your homes. The daughter chews gum, the boy wears a cowboy suit and all he needs is a toy gun and a puppy coyote. The baby feeds on Gerber's concoctions...."³⁸

Jimmy's role is to be a sounding board for Michael's observations. The issues they discuss are familiar to us all, having been articulated for decades. What makes their debate somewhat thought-provoking is Michael's attribution of the cultural mix-up to "folks like Marina, the doctors, the lawyers, those we call the enlightened ones, it's they who seem to be responsible for the split sensibility or whatever you call it."³⁹ Michael at this stage has not yet fallen in love with Marina and is unaware of her hang-ups.

To return to "Yours, Faithfully," we note that Oren and Michael have certain traits in common, but heroism is not one of them, chiefly because these stories are not about the Second World War *per se*, but about the predicament of American soldiers coming face-to-face with cultural tensions in an unfamiliar country. Oren wonders what he is doing in Manila; Michael has similar feelings of displacement, at least at the outset, August, 1944. Michael is bothered by the absurdity of his being in Pagatban, amidst this "rather excessive scenery from Maugham and Conrad...."⁴⁰ After six weeks in that region he still has to "set his mind against a crowding sense of unreality" at the sight of the mountain range.⁴¹

The Colonel's shouts and the ebbtide and the jungle twilight suddenly felt like a dragnet around Michael, and for a few moments he was seized with dizziness and vertigo. He pushed away the feeling. His panicky antidote to these twilight seizures was always the same and it had something to do with his companions on the nearby islands. For some reason at this time of the day he felt compelled to think about

those other groups that the sub had left on Leyte and Palawan and Mindoro and a few other islands that also had creepy jungles. In the picture he usually conjured up in his mind, these other GI's were all of them exactly in his predicament. Uprooted Americans drifting around the rain trees and river banks and beaches and, like him, somewhat shaken by feelings of dislocation....⁴²

One might wonder if Tiempo had an American audience in mind. This is of course debatable; it is nonetheless a valid issue in light of Michael Linder's point of view, which seems to dominate the novel. Chapter III is all about the years he spends daydreaming of Marina and the jungle while trying to recapture his prewar lifestyle. In short, the perspective in a large part of the text is not "distinctly Filipino."

In the two parallel quests for identity, Marina's is more fervent and zealous, creating the false impression that her obsession with her tribal roots is the only theme of the story. Isagani R. Cruz, commenting on Chapter V (*Un Bel Di*) writes, "The gathering storm can be dispersed only by returning to one's roots. This is one of Edith L. Tiempo's recurring themes: only the rituals and myths of the past can overcome the troubles of the present."⁴³ Dr. Cruz oversimplifies the theme—it is actually more intricate than that. We never even learn if Marina's return to her roots solves her dilemma.

The Trouble with Marina ...

Outside of Marina herself, it is Michael who is most affected by her psychic distress. She bares her soul to him and nobody else.

"There was a time not so long ago when I wanted to go back to Lagawe, that's my mother's town.... All my life I've consumed myself with dreaming. I've been spent with watching, concerned with the forces in my blood, in my bones, without being true. I feel I haven't been able to do, to be. It's as if I wasn't really sure who I am, why I am."⁴⁴

She believes that the incongruity between Michael's American background and her Ifugao heritage would aggravate her quandary. Even among her associates in Pagatban she is regarded as a "strange bird," being a "very literate and rather attractive person, whose mother had been a tribal woman."⁴⁵ In Viñas she is introduced to Diana Roca, the bejeweled, supercilious wife of the manager of the Santa Rosa Sugar Central. Ms. Roca regards Marina as some kind of primitive creature, and the conversation between the two women is peppered with sarcasm. Tiempo seems to be taking a not-so-subtle swipe at hacienda

society, particularly the Spanish-Filipino *mestizos*, as well as urban *ilustrados* who harbor stereotyped notions of ethnic groups and folkways.

What Tiempo does not explain, in spite of her insightful portrayal of Marina, is why a brainy woman like her marries a man with whom she has nothing in common. As a fictional character, Paulo (with the exception of his Moorish features) is not clearly visualized; furthermore, we know little about their marital relations. (No children are mentioned in the text. Would children have affected her plans?) In one of the few opinions she expresses of her husband, Marina says he is “going to make his little pile all by his own smart self, then he won’t be like his father and a few others around here—an old race just hanging on.... There are numerous Pauls in this country, a new breed. They’re all over Manila and our other crowded cities.”⁴⁶ And what does Paul say about her Lagawe dreams? Not a word.

Unable to rid her of her fixation, Michael recognizes that Marina is a paradigm of the Filipino entangled in a web of crisscrossing cultures.

He had thought Marina was his magnificent, if somewhat neglected, obsession, but it now seemed it went beyond her. By a conspiracy of chance Marina must agonize over the abrupt cultural disparities that went into her life and her nature—and Michael couldn’t help identifying her with the wide and restless diversities of this little Asian country.⁴⁷

Not strange that Marina should reject the academic life and choose to haunt Lagawe and her father’s town with her own dim searching and indecision. She was probably a kind of ghost in Bagacay, too, with the town’s conglomeration of restless sensitivities—pagan, Christian, Victorian-Spanish, American, Chinese-Indian-Malay, Filipino. The pygmy-God Christ who lurked in the haunted memory of this country.⁴⁸

If Marina is a paradigm of the confused Filipino, Bagacay is a microcosm of the Philippines itself. Michael is that rare bird, the foreigner who sympathizes and understands. In spite of Marina’s self-inflicted dilemma, he continues to love her. He knows that her reversion to the pagan dance of her mother’s people, performed in the grass chapel, “would not be rejected by the dark and bespangled Christian God of that chapel.”⁴⁹ Marina’s trance-like dance in the chapel is the most memorable scene in *His Native Coast*, the climax of what must have been many years of planning and writing on the author’s part. One wishes, though, that Tiempo had clarified Marina’s prior religious inclinations in order to stress the crisscrossing cultural aspect of her

pagan dance.

Marina's appeal lies in the uncommon quality of her search for national, racial, and cultural identity. To Michael she is too much of an intellectual—exuding glamour at that—to retire from sight in the uplands of northern Luzon. Her sophisticated taste in books clashes with her yearning to return to the boondocks she left when she was only nine.

Incidentally, Tiempo's description of Marina's facial features seems to be anthropologically inaccurate. "The short Indonesian oval face was thoughtful now and almost sad."⁵⁰ "Marina and the brother had strong carved features and the straight brown-black hair of the true Indonesian."⁵¹ As for the Ifugaos in the hills, "In features they were Mongolian-Indonesian and they were quite simply reserved."⁵² The stress on the Indonesian features is apparently meant to enhance Marina's indigenous image. However, give or take a few hybrid racial traits, Indonesians and Filipinos look exactly alike. An Indonesian walking the streets of Manila could be mistaken for a Filipino; a Filipino shopping in Jakarta could pass for an Indonesian. Tiempo may have been laboring under the outdated theory, called "waves of migration," propounded by UP anthropologist H. Otley Beyer, that the original inhabitants of the Philippines arrived on these shores in three "waves" consisting of Negritos, Malays, and Indonesians. The fact is that during the discovery and excavations of the Tabon Caves in Palawan (1962–1970), archaeologists found scientific and cultural evidence—skulls, jawbones and teeth, charcoal remnants of cooking fires, fossilized bones of cooked birds, pottery, flaked stone tools—that the caves had been occupied by human beings for about 50,000 years.⁵³ Nobody can presume that the Tabon cave man or woman was a "real Indonesian" or a "Mongolian-Indonesian" and therefore indigenously Filipino.⁵⁴

Michael on the Move

Owing to our colonial experience, racial intermingling, globalized economy, linguistic code-switching, ethnic cultures and subcultures, to say nothing of around eighty native languages and dialects, we Filipinos have often asked ourselves who and what we are. The mass exodus of overseas contract workers (a counterpoint to Marina's backward look) has complicated the identity crisis, inspiring wishful predictions that Filipinos will soon colonize the world. (The size of the Filipino immigrant population in the USA is second only to China's.) To my knowledge, Americans did not, until recent years, have a habit of asking who they were. They were simply Americans. However, the rise of Islamic fundamentalism, the widespread migration of Middle Easterners to the United States and Europe, the bilingual educational policy designed to accommodate immigrant children, and terrorist violence in various parts

of the globe have compelled governments to reconsider the classification of the immigrants in their respective countries. Are they primarily Americans, Chinese, Indians, or Arabs?

When Edith Tiempo was writing *His Native Coast*, issues such as ethnic loyalties and cultural identities barely existed, at least not as stumbling blocks to social cohesion. The tradition of America as a unified nation, albeit a melting pot of races and cultures, had almost the force of a national myth.⁵⁵ Michael Linder is a second-generation Central European—Czechoslovakian father, German mother—but he hardly mentions a search for identity on his part. He only recalls how his father felt at home in the Czech community, but outside of it he could not go along with certain American practices and values. Michael's mother (he calls her *Mutter*), in the meantime, still says, "Ja, ja," instead of "yes."

Michael's incipient problem is not how to preserve his American-ness but how to wean Marina from her obsession with *her* lack of identity. And yet he ends up crossing borders even more daunting than hers, the outcome being a discovery of *his* own identity. His vexation over Marina could be an unconscious mask for a similar angst on his part. I have misgivings about Dr. Hidalgo's reading of Michael as the typical "arrogant male," "bewitched, bothered and bewildered."⁵⁶ Is she perhaps forcing the feminist issue? I honestly found Michael likeable from the very start, and my liking for him increased as I read on. Tiempo is at her best when she describes in rich detail Michael's reaction to his Philippine surroundings. From his perspective we detect the gradual transition from feelings of discomfort to appreciation of the lush landscape where he spent his last weeks as a guerrilla. Consider his initial consciousness that he was out of joint in Negros:

And it wasn't just sky, land, water; it was time itself that was trapped here. One day he was in Francisco, then in Sydney, then abruptly in the Philippine jungle where his mission had no apparent connection to the past, and not even to the most recent events of the war—and it often seemed not even to the future. The mountains were a constant enveloping discomfort, like the heat and the humidity and the fog. Sometimes it felt as though time in the form of twenty-four hours cycling and limping throughout the world had constricted their jaded turmoil into this cut-off pocket of the earth.⁵⁷

But his mindset evolves. Instead of receding into misty distance with the passage of time, his remembrances come forward to both haunt and delight him. Back in America, he thinks constantly of the country and people he left behind, "and from the distance of two years he could say they were a people

he had been glad for knowing.”⁵⁸ One day, in a restaurant near a train depot, he comes across Francis Waxman, a guerrilla he knew in Pagatban. Waxman’s memories of those days are far from pleasant. He refers to “that creepy place beside the river on Negros island.”⁵⁹ He confesses that he has no desire to poke around those jungles again. “Once in a lifetime is enough.”⁶⁰ To which Michael replies defensively, “Oh, I don’t know. It’s a growing little country trying to find itself. It could be pretty exciting.”⁶¹ The conflict between their respective world-views increases one’s sympathy for Michael. The blue forested outline of the mountains often takes a panoramic shape in his mind. Sights and sounds blend in his recollections—the killing of a deer, the creaking of bamboos, the raindrops on the cogon roof of his shack, the bird cries at night, the waterfall, the shape of the peninsula, the convergence of riverbanks. And of course the image of Marina in every nook and cranny of the mountain range.

Then, quite suddenly, he finds himself among Filipino mountain dwellers of a distinct sort, wearing traditional home-woven costumes. Michael thinks it’s great that even if Marina’s uncle Simeon and he don’t speak a common tongue and are so different, they seem “able to understand each other on the things that would have been difficult or uncomfortable to articulate.”⁶² Simeon appears to be the epitome of the indigenous Filipino. Helping the old man plow his field, Michael enjoys the therapeutic value of the work. He likes the way the people carry on their activities according to the fundamental rhythms of nature. While he is being led back and forth over the field at plowing time, it is the carabao that sets the pace.

The most striking symbols in the novel are Marina’s high-heeled shoes, which are undoubtedly linked to images of her bare feet and slippers in previous chapters. Ironically, her shoes have been in Michael’s room for over a month without his knowing it, as if daring him to follow her while simultaneously discouraging him from doing so. He asks one question that still perplexes him:

Did you have to run away and give up? And yet he felt her weakness as surely as if it was in his own bones, and he wished keenly that she could accept reassurance then and there—to make her see the waste in the kind of retreat that refuses life, or maybe, is just a choice for barren living; to let her know that in any case he did understand, having had his own bit of all that, and to tell her of his big vague impulse to see it through for her. Obscurely, he knew that he was bound to prove for himself what she had refused to accept in her own life—how one need not always be rooting physically or metaphysically in any one place. After all, one’s identity was something that was, in many ways, frankly ubiquitous.⁶³

This bears upon my observation that Michael's earlier puzzlement masks his unconscious venture into his own self-searching. Marina's weakness was also "in his own bones." I disagree with Dr. Hidalgo's assertion that Michael, "although basically sensitive and capable of genuine emotion," "brings into this project—not intuitive understanding, compassion, tentativeness, humility—but 'rational' analysis, logic, the certainty that 'true knowledge' is possible" She sees Michael's desire to "understand" as actually a need to "'win over,' to control, to dominate." This would make him an anti-female villain! Marina, Hidalgo adds, has to "protect" herself by either withdrawing or escaping altogether. She refuses to be defined or penetrated, resists understanding and therefore containment.⁶⁴

Hidalgo's feminist reading overlooks the apparent sincerity in Marina's longing to locate her roots, as well as Michael's determination to prove that "one need not always be rooting physically or metaphysically in any one place. After all, one's identity was something that was, in many ways, frankly ubiquitous." He could very well be humming the Beatles song to Marina:

*I will be there, and everywhere,
Here, there and everywhere.*

This is the novel's central message, not the return to one's primordial roots as the solution to modern-day problems. Considering that the dominant point of view is Michael's, then the central message is also his. As he descends from northern Luzon, he is no longer "bewitched, bothered, and bewildered." On the contrary he is satisfied in the realization that he has the power to choose how he will order his inner environment, his very being, his identity. He could very well have been born in the Philippines as in Ohio. Like Marina's abandoned shoes, his return to his desk at the Sta. Rosa represents a homecoming of sorts, a transplant in the deepest psychic sense.

If, to Marina, Lagawe is in the heart, to Michael the Philippines is his native coast.

Notes

1. Quezon City: New Day Publishers, 1979.
2. Manila: Tahanan Books, 2000.
3. Isagani Cruz, ed., *The Best Philippine Short Stories of the Twentieth Century*, 126. To readers of Philippine fiction, Manuel Arguilla is better known as the author of the much-anthologized short story "How My Brother Leon Brought Home a Wife."
4. Florentino B. Valeros and Estrellita V. Gruenberg, *Filipino Writers in English* (Q.C.: New Day Publishers, 1987), 19.

5. Cruz, 127.
6. Arguilla, "Yours, Faithfully," 129.
7. Ibid., 128.
8. Ibid., 129.
9. Ibid.
10. Ibid., 131.
11. Ibid., 133.
12. Ibid.
13. Ibid., 134.
14. Ibid., 134-35.
15. Ibid., 135.
16. Ibid., 135-36.
17. Edith L. Tiempo, *His Native Coast*, 72.
18. Ibid., 168.
19. Lagawe, the capital municipality of the province of Ifugao, is no longer as pristine as it may have been before the war and immediately after. The Ifugao State College is located in Lagawe, and a modern Department of Education building is located in the area the residents refer to as "downtown." Photographs do not show anybody wearing a G-string. Jeeps and tricycles are the most common means of public transport. You can have your cellphone repaired at a place called LCC.
20. Ibid., 191-92.
21. Ibid., 192.
22. Ibid., 217.
23. Ibid., 258-59.
24. Ibid., 265.
25. Thelma B. Kintanar, "Border Crossings in Philippine Literary and Critical Texts by Women," in Call for Papers for *Review of Women's Studies* vol. XVIII No. 1, UP Centennial Issue 1.
26. Cristina Pantoja Hidalgo, "'Bewitched, Bothered and Bewildered': a Re-reading of the early Edith Tiempo Novels," in *A Gentle Subversion – Essays on Philippine Fiction in English* (Q.C.: University of the Philippines Press, 1998), 86.
27. Cruz, 127.
28. Dr. Thelma B. Kintanar uses the term "cross-cultural instrument" in her Call for Papers for the *Review of Women's Studies*, no. XVIII No. 1, UP Centennial Issue 1.
29. Valeros and Gruenberg, 19.
30. Tiempo, 5.
31. Ibid., 22.
32. Ibid., 41.
33. Ibid., 53.
34. Ibid., 193-94.
35. *The Pocket Book of Modern Verse*, ed. Oscar Williams (N.Y.: Pocket Books, Inc., Cardinal Edition), 136.
36. Ibid., 281.
37. Ibid., 282.

38. Ibid., 27.
39. Ibid.
40. Tiempo, 2.
41. Ibid., 9.
42. Ibid., 13.
43. Cruz, 381.
44. Tiempo, 113.
45. Ibid., 39.
46. Ibid., 220.
47. Ibid., 195.
48. Ibid., 196.
49. Ibid., 259.
50. Ibid., 35.
51. Ibid., 39.
52. Ibid., 277.
53. Robert B. Fox, "Tabon Caves," *Filipino Heritage*, Vol I (Lahing Pilipino Publishing, Inc., 1977), ed. Alfred R. Roces), 91-97; "Who Came First?", Ibid., 57-59.
54. See Sylvia Mendez Ventura, "Why the Filipino Should Walk Proud," *Woman's Home Companion*, 2 August 1973, 15-17. Article based on interview with anthropologist F. Landa Jocano, who debunked the "waves of migration" theory.
55. en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Multiculturalism
56. Hidalgo, *A Gentle Subversion*, 112.
57. Tiempo, 9.
58. Ibid., 152.
59. Ibid., 156.
60. Ibid., 157.
61. Ibid.
62. Ibid., 285.
63. Ibid., 297-98.
64. Hidalgo, 113.

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