

Niccolo Vitug. “Edilberto and Edith Tiempo and Archipelagic Thinking in Philippine Literature in English.”

The husband and wife writer team Edilberto and Edith Tiempo are well-known in the field of Philippine Literature in English. One of the topics discussed by the couple in their various writings is the experience of moving through the Philippine islands for various reasons. This is not something that takes place in relation to the Philippine archipelago: it is also something that figures in their access to an education in the University of Iowa, which became the model for the institution that they established, the Silliman National Writers Workshop, as well as in other parts of the United States.

The work of the Tiempos has been under scrutiny because of a perceived complicity with American imperialist forces, as the Silliman Workshop was modeled under a system closely associated with the cultural diplomacy efforts of the United States. On the other hand, there is also an observable growth of the development of regional literatures traceable to the work of the Tiempos. The founders and teachers of the writers workshops in the regions outside the National Capital Region of the Philippines happen to be mostly alumni of the Silliman Workshop.

The current criticism of the Tiempos has connections to political developments in literature at the time of the Marcos dictatorship, which spanned from the 1960s to the 1980s. What is not immediately seen is that this tension is also between writers located in various parts of the Philippine archipelago, with the Tiempos being mostly outside the seat of government. I would like to explore the possibility that the tension, more than simply being informed by anti-imperialist concerns, is also an archipelagic concern, wherein what came into conflict was a matter of finding means of survival and national assertion from Filipinos with various, archipelagoically informed perceptions of what it is to be Filipino.