

philippine studies

Ateneo de Manila University • Loyola Heights, Quezon City • 1108 Philippines

Awaiting Trespass

Review Author: Francisco Arcellana

Philippine Studies vol. 34, no. 4 (1986): 545–547

Copyright © Ateneo de Manila University

Philippine Studies is published by the Ateneo de Manila University. Contents may not be copied or sent via email or other means to multiple sites and posted to a listserv without the copyright holder's written permission. Users may download and print articles for individual, noncommercial use only. However, unless prior permission has been obtained, you may not download an entire issue of a journal, or download multiple copies of articles.

Please contact the publisher for any further use of this work at philstudies@admu.edu.ph.

<http://www.philippinestudies.net>
Fri June 27 13:30:20 2008

was formidable and was there to stay. Only after this initial phase would the "sign of the cross rather than the sound of the arquebus" (p. 270) increasingly determine the pacification of the Philippines. What makes the issue critical is precisely because it was *the initial* encounter and what transpired there would have a serious bearing on the events to come.

These interpretations may be challenged and one wishes that Sitoy could have devoted part of his last chapter to discussing the interpretations made by historians writing on that era. Still, one must commend Sitoy for embarking on this extensive and quite comprehensive project. The sixteenth to eighteenth centuries in Philippine history are anathema to some historians precisely because of lack of access to sources and more importantly, the difficulty of handling them. Sitoy's attempt to traverse this "road not (often) taken" in Philippine history is a valuable addition to the discipline.

Henry S. Totanes
Department of History
Ateneo de Manila University

AWAITING TRESPASS (A PASIÓN). By Linda Ty-Casper. New York and London: Readers International, Inc., 1985.

Awaiting Trespass (A Pasión) is Linda Ty-Casper's sixth novel, published in New York and London by Readers International. It couldn't be published here (in the Philippines), says the back of the jacket, "for political reasons." RI, says the jacket's inside back flap, "is a non-profit organization. . . . dedicated to making available in English the best recent works by writers from outside the developed West." Many of these works have suffered political censorship in their countries of origin because the censor knows that powerful and honest writing can be dangerous — literally. A selling point.

When Ms. Ty-Casper was fictionist-in-residence at the last UP Creative Writing Center Summer Writers Workshop in fiction, she was asked by the young fellows for advice on how to write *around* the Marcos regime to be able to get published. She said: you don't have to write ideology; just write honestly about what the regime is doing to the people; *that* can be more powerful than any ideological writing!

Awaiting Trespass tells what the Marcos misrule has done to the Filipino people; here particularized in the Gil clan. It has no ideology outside of the Christian human; it is not ideological writing.

Ms. Ty-Casper, who has been writing sustained Philippine historical fiction, here gives us a novel of contemporary Philippines in what has turned out to be the twilight of the Marcos era. It is a logical development in her declared art of fiction.

Awaiting Trespass is a *pasión*: *pasión* of course derives from the Passion of the Lord as chanted by Catholic Philippines at Eastertide. It is also a small book of hours—though not the hours that begin with prime and end with none.

It is, too, a book of numbers like the fourth book of the Old Testament, and a book of revelations like the last book of the New.

Awaiting Trespass—"awaiting" is good old Middle English and "trespass" is Middle English too derived from Old French derived from Latin. Middle English, Old French, and Latin are a long way from Filipino and the Philippines: this is an initial difficulty.

The novel's occasion is the wake and burial of Don Severino Gil who is described in the book jacket blurb as *an aging playboy*. No playboy like an aging playboy.

The protagonists are cousins, not necessarily kissing — Telly, the aging playboy's favourite niece, and Sevi, the aging playboy's priest-son, whose vocation is uncertain.

The story is told in the present tense — the narrative present. A remarkable feat, but how contemporary can you get?

The novel is really Telly's story — Telly who is described in the back of the book jacket as "a 49-year-old divorcee who composes poetry spontaneously. . . . who has a tendency towards suicide." Really just a tendency, not a death-drive, not a will-to-death.

Sevi, whose calling is contested, according to the same blurb, is a true priest nevertheless, a priest for real.

The time span of the fiction is three days—Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday, the heart of the working week. And the novel works hard within that time frame; the heart of the novel is revealed—awaiting trespass is to wait on God.

Telly's poetry threads the narrative, but more astonishing than her poetry are her insights woven through the novel, really astonishing insights whether earned or not.

All the action happens in Manila, the old though not the original Manila—mostly in the old Azcarraga, where the ancestral home of the Gils is. There's action in St. Paul's, too, on Herran, the area of the North Harbor, La Loma — all familiar earth although practically all the world is remembered in the course of the novel's unravelling, especially Katonah in the United States of North America.

Trespassers, not those awaiting trespass, *will be violated*, says a sign outside Katonah.

A strange Book of Hours is the wake for the aging playboy dead, the encoffined Don Severino Gil — A Book of Strange Hours/Locked/By Self/Drowned in grace.

Stand up and be counted, you—but not as just an elegant fact, not as a

glimmering numeral, an imagination without an imagining self.

Telly perceives Sevi as he who joins the lives of the Gils *now*, "join" in the sense of "gather", the one awaited to give the Gils a cause—the Gils whose lives are Blank Books of Revelations, with human weakness and frail hearts.

Awaiting Trespass is all this—a *pasión*, a small book of hours, a book of numbers and a book of revelations. But it is also a compendium of all the things you have wanted to know but have been afraid to ask about the Republic of the Philippines under Imelda and Ferdinand Edralin Marcos.

Francisco Arcellana
Department of English
University of the Philippines

PILIPINAS CIRCA 1907. By Nicanor G. Tiongson. Quezon City: Philippine Educational Theater Association, 1985. 266 pages.

When the Spanish *zarzuela* was transplanted to the Philippines in the nineteenth century, it offered not only entertainment for the elite in cities like Manila and Iloilo, but also training in Western theatre of a realistic mode for a generation of actors, directors, producers, scene designers, composers and writers. By the first decade of the twentieth century, the form had taken root in the vernacular theatre, previously dominated by the *komedya* and religious theatre like the *sinakulo*.

In the different provinces and languages of Luzon and the Visayas, and eventually Mindanao, *sarsuwela* troupes indigenized the form, which crystallized into a musical comedy of manners that focused on domestic situations, folk foibles, and a romantic view of life and mores. Where theatrical presentations had always been a feature of religious festivals and fiestas, the *sarsuwela* provided a first taste of professional theatre, in that touring troupes came to be organized, staging plays for a fee, and stars like Atang de la Rama, "Queen of the Zarzuela," became the toast of the archipelago.

In the 1920s, however, faced by competition from vaudeville, the movies, and the new English-language "legitimate" theatre (product of the schools, which since 1901 had been using English as medium of instruction), the *sarsuwela* waned in the cities, surviving mainly in the provinces far from the electronic media. It took the sixties, with student activism and the surge of nationalism, to bring about new interest in the form. In a search for national identity, attention focused on various aspects of indigenous art and culture, and drew *sarsuwelas* out of trunks and memories and onto scholarly scrutiny and revivals. Eventually, new *sarzuelas* came to be written — Amelia Lapena Bonifacio's *Ang Bundok*, Bienvenido Lumbea's *Ang Palabas Bukas*, Isagani Cruz's *Halimaw* — which updated the form with current themes and