Depictions of City and Country in Kerima Polotan's *The Hand of the Enemy*

BARBARA MAGALLONA

ABSTRACT

Kerima Polotan's works of fiction have long been overshadowed on two levels by the specter of history. First, her novel *The Hand of the Enemy* has been evaluated as a representation of a specific period in Philippine history, the Colorum Uprising of 1924-1931 and then analyzed by Caroline Hau in her *Necessary Fictions* through the lens of history and nationhood. Second, Polotan's association with President Ferdinand Marcos through her husband's appointment as executive assistant and speech writer negatively affected how fellow writers and readers of the period perceived her work. This essay then attempts to address a gap in studies on her novel through a close reading of the novel's various settings. The essay will compare and contrast sets of categories—city and country, natural geographies and anthropogenic places—and analyze how they shape and reflect the ideas and thoughts of the novel's heroine, Emma Mercene-Gorrez, as she goes from country to city, then city to country twice in the course of the novel. Some application from a conceptual framework of geography in fiction will complement related ideas drawn from Filipina writers in English. Overall, this study aims to establish a link between narrative locations and what the poet Marianne Villanueva termed "something more personal and inward, a landscape of memory."

Keywords: Setting, Philippine literature, Kerima Polotan, memory

In 1961, Nick Joaquin described Kerima Polotan as "the steadiest producer [of all] Philippine women writers" and one who has "more prizes than any of them" (ix). Joaquin rooted the themes and motifs of Polotan's work in her estrangement from her father, which remained unresolved until his death. "Her anguish over a relationship left dangling in the air, unresolved by a deathbed embrace, troubles her fiction, so cold on the surface, so angry at the roots. The Polotan heroine is a lonely, embittered, unsatisfied woman who craves to be loved but sees in the hand of the loved one, the hand of the enemy (xii)." Joaquin's

evaluation is one of the few which focuses on Polotan's actual work until after the 1989 EDSA revolution. Analyses of Polotan's work have shifted toward using historical and political frameworks, ironically because of the author's personal life. Caroline Hau states that "Polotan's perceived link to the Marcoses... made her continued presence in the first flush of People Power something of an embarrassment, if not a personal affront, to writers and artists who had railed and fought against the dictatorship or participated in the February event" (2000, 177).

Studies on Polotan's work remain scarce. Focusing on Polotan's short stories, Emeliza Torrento-Estimo's study notes "that [Polotan's] stories are simply crafted, her sentences written using simple and complex structures, where the use of simple sentences is more dominant and lengthened only by an extensive use of a variety of modifiers" (2012, 53). Hau (2000) comments that Miguel Bernad and Leonard Casper's respective studies of Polotan represent an "attempt to make a place (often quite literally) *within* literary discourse for the political (191)." In Bernad's case, he insists on going beyond a one-to-one correlation between events in the book and historical events, "in effect [taking] away the empirical characteristics of an historical event by abstracting that event into an allegory of a universal rite of passage shorn of its historical specificity" (Hau 2000, 191). Meanwhile Casper "chooses to filter his reading of Polotan's fiction through the issue of gender, arguing that Polotan's heroines experience the dysfunctional nature of Philippine social and political reality as 'sex discrimination' and 'the frustration of female self-fulfilment'" (ibid., 192). Cristina P. Hidalgo (2000) who describes Polotan as "the most important woman novelist of the postwar period" also identifies the novelist's characters as "political beings; their conflicts are engendered by political events" (334). Given that the few studies of Polotan's novel have made use of historical and linguistic lenses without the benefit of a proper close reading, this essay attempts to address this gap.

To accomplish this, the essay probes into different levels of space in the narrative. In establishing a close reading analysis based on setting and its dynamics with character development, the study first compares and contrasts the categories of city and country, natural geographies and anthropogenic places. In turn, these categories are examined as to how they shape and reflect the ideas and thoughts of the novel's heroine, Emma Mercene-Gorrez, as she goes from country to city, then city to country twice in the course of the novel. Her movement from one point to another recalls Raymond Williams' observation that "the life of country and city is moving and present: moving...…in feeling and ideas, through a network of relationships" (1973, 8).

There are various spaces for the novel's action – offices, streets, towns – but this study concentrates on the settings graced by Emma's presence or her ruminations. These include and are limited to certain locations in Manila (Crescent Press, the Gorrez apartment on Sampaloc street, the Zenith Office building, and Domingo Gorrez's apartment in Mabini street) and in Tayug (Dalisay Press, the Gorrez ancestral home along Calle Tanedo and Calle Real, Plaridel High School and a resthouse in Sual). From this list of locales and structures, one discerns a mix of real-life spaces and imagined ones. Polotan makes use of enough actual settings for the reader to create their own spatial projections. Readers of the novel are able to recognize the city of Manila, replete with noisy traffic, dirty streets, and polluted air. They are able to relate its scenes to the dirty politics, which permeate Philippine governance and the sly tricks of the pickpockets who roam the alleys. However, they find themselves imagining what the fictional Zenith building looks like; even here, they might substitute for it, in their minds, a typical glossy Manila high-rise. Tayug may not be recognizable to most people but referring to its location in the Northern Philippines helps conjure up an image of the town square and the fields surrounding it. This place, like any rural locale, teems with neighborly gossip, and one sees this when the novel focuses on promiscuous Norma Rividad.

The essay then attempts to link the external landscape with what Piatti et al. (2009) refer to as "projected space" and what Villanueva calls the Filipina's "internal landscape" (2003, 11). Related to the latter, Villanueva explains that because Filipino women "situate [themselves] in this internal landscape; [they] are at the heart of [their] own stories. The very act of writing is a way of creating this inner space, so essential to [their] well-being" (11-12). She adds that "the writers may write *around* the landscape….but the strongest and most vivid thread coursing through these pieces is the memory of a place" (14). As this essay weaves together the various aspects of Emma's character and her experiences in these settings, one sees how her memories emerge as the text's primary motifs and relate to Villanueva's observation that "the landscape is something we take with us, wherever we go. It is what we carry on our individual journeys (15)." The internal landscape also underlines the movement from actual places to fictional settings and back again. It also serves as the link between the city and country, which shows how the two settings are not disparate spaces but rather connected through the character. Emma's letters toward the conclusion of the novel allow this essay to delineate this internal landscape.

The essay applies the framework created by Piatti, Bar, Reuschel, Hurni, and Cartwright on mapping literature to a sustained analysis of the novel's settings. The central question addressed by their particular paradigm is "what happens when the 'literary world' and the real world meet or intersect?" (Piatti et al. 2009, 180). With such a question, this essay seeks to go beyond conventional literary evaluations of setting in fiction and relates the latter to real environments without lapsing, it is hoped, into sociological reductionism. In their interdisciplinary approach, which merges literary criticism and cartography, Piatti et al. establish three aspects, which make fictional spaces unique. First, for them, is the need to differentiate geospace and textual spaces as literary works can refer to actual spaces or geospaces (as does *The Hand of the Enemy*) and they can also create imaginary settings. Second, spaces in literature do not have the same definite borders on which cartography, as a discipline, otherwise conventionally operates. Third, "fiction is sometimes hard to localize… with no precise correspondences to a given section of the geospace." Piatti, et al. then conclude that "the geography of fiction must be characterized as a rather *imprecise* geography," a mix of real-life landmarks and imagined spaces. Recognizing the many possibilities of settings, Piatti and his collaborators point to the "necessity to break these possibilities down into a coherent system" (184).

Following this necessity, the explicit goal is to make visible the specific geography of literature." The first step is to "[break] down the spatial structure into single elements and their respective functions." The framework of Piatti and company makes use of a system which delineates the spatial elements of a text according to the following categories: a) setting, where the action takes place, i.e. house, village; b) zone of action, several settings such as a city or a whole region; c) projected space, where characters are not present there but are dreaming of, remembering, longing for a specific space; and d) route, along which characters are moving: by foot, by train, on horseback. From here, Piatti et al. indicate that "the process of designing visualisations that depict geographies of literature is a process of translation" (185). These designated settings and zones of action morph from mere descriptions of spaces to layers of representations of them.

This essay examines the two major zones of action, Manila (city) and Tayug (country), and draws comparisons between parallel settings. This strategy involves analyzing descriptions ascribed to the settings and the observations made by the novel's protagonist about them; some annotations of the melding of real places and imagined spaces are enabled in the process. Finally, this essay scrutinizes how these settings shape Emma's emotions and her memories, or the "internal landscape" that Villanueva asks us to map. With this approach, we see the novel move from the concrete to the abstract, from the geospace to the imaginary, from Emma's external to internal landscapes.

The Hand of the Enemy is divided into four parts and, as mentioned, Emma frequently shuttles between two major zones of action, urban Manila and rural Tayug. Hers is a story of disappointment and contentment, faith and disillusionment, as the disinherited daughter of a landed family compelled by her unhappiness over her father's remarriage to leave for, and work in, the city. After her father's death and the bankruptcy of his estate, she leaves the city for Tayug to take up a teaching post at Plaridel High School, and where she meets its principal, Rene Rividad. Assigned as the moderator of the school paper, Emma frequents Dalisay Press where she crosses paths with Domingo Gorrez, who had been fired from an advertising agency in Manila due to workplace politics. Before Emma marries Domingo, Rene confesses his love for her but because he is already a married man, nothing comes of this revelation. Emma and Domingo settle in the country with their two sons, until the Cosios arrive in Tayug, campaigning for "the Big Man" to win the Presidency. The Cosios see that Domingo has the talent for public relations and they have the Gorrez couple run Crescent Press in Lealtad Street. The printing press suffers financial losses and Emma is driven, in one incident of rage, to attempt to kill Mrs. Cosio until Domingo intervenes. With the disastrous experience with the Cosios behind her, Emma persuades her husband to return to Tayug but Domingo is determined to make it in the city, joining *Quality*, a public relations company. Emma watches as her husband performs dirty tricks on this new job, such as smoking out union plotters and pushing bribes to advance his career. Disillusioned, Emma flees to Tayug for a trial separation. When she returns to the city to seek reconciliation with her husband, she discovers that he has moved to an apartment with his mistress, Glo. A devastated Emma seeks refuge in Tayug where she makes plans to spend a weekend away with Rene in Sual. The novel ends with Emma writing a letter to Domingo detailing her abortive attempt at an extramarital affair and Rene's subsequent suicide.

In the narrative's opening scenes, Emma clearly shows distaste for the city and a longing for the country. She endures "humid mornings, the merciless noons, the damp evenings" which "left the skin dry, the body tired" (Polotan 1961, 5). The description of Emma's days in the city offers more than just a condensed portrait of it, emphasizing how routinary city life is. The hours are lumped together around morning, noon, and evening; the activity varies little and its monotony so certain, as it moves, without fail, to the regularized rhythm

of clock and calendar. We see how urban living leaves Emma exhausted day in and day out. Emma "jostled her way through the Quiapo crowd, trying to arrange her face in soft, evocative lines. She did not wish to look like the rest of the anxious, worried people who pushed her for space in jeepney or on sidewalk" (5). The reader witnesses how the crowded and congested city subjects its dwellers to all manner of physical and emotional debilitations.[1]

In contrast, as Emma journeys northward, "on either side of the road, the fields stretched flat and green and lush. She could hold all this in her hand and not be sure what it was that gladdened the heart to get out of the city" (8-9). The countryside offers a crisp space where she is able to breathe easily and move about unhampered, no longer crushed by the city's crowds and pollution. Moreover, unlike the concrete hardness of the city, the countryside has an ethereal feel as Emma could "not be sure what it was that gladdened the heart to get out of the city (8-9)." The countryside gives the weary urbane traveler physical and emotional relief from the city's oppressiveness. More significantly, as this essay will show, the countryside transcends the setting to enter into the projected space of memory and longing as Emma, following some traumatizing life events, pines for, and seeks a return to, the simple life in Tayug.[2]

Probing beyond these preliminary impressions of city and countryside, the imprecise geography of Piatti et al. allows a closer look at specific settings or spaces in which the novel's action takes place. The narrative opens with a bleak scene in Crescent Press, where "Emma Gorrez knew that as soon as she entered the shop, Isabelo, the *cajista*, would pull himself up from his shelf of types and look at her with his small bloodshot eyes, parting his lips in a dreary smile." Further on in the opening paragraph, an allusion is made to Isabelo asking Emma for his wages and "when his requests caught her without money, she would deny him brusquely, angry that he should give her power to render him unhappy (1)." The diction creates a dominantly grim impression: *bloodshot, dreary, deny, brusquely, angry, unhappy*. The mood of discontent permeates "this floorspace at 275 Lealtad St." and extends to the entire edifice itself as "a new structure, hastily built. If you looked closely, you could see where the carpenters had run out of lumber. The eaves jutting out in the back were roofed with old galvanized sheets and even the paint could not conceal the rust" (2). The unfinished quality of the building physically correlates to the rawness of emotions inside Crescent Press. In fact, the establishment is described as an affront to nature as it "stood clearly against the sky, like a broad finger stabbing heavenwards" (2). It is against this background,

significantly enough, that Emma wanders into a projected space as she "wondered when they would begin to be sorry they left Tayug."

While Crescent Press is initially blessed with plenty of orders for ballot sheets and even magazines, it eventually becomes the scene of stress, despair, and murderous hatred. It is Emma who contends with the rising costs and subsequent lack of coated paper, mutinous workers, and drained coffers – all the earmarks of an unforgiving city environment. Domingo, in searching for printing jobs, has been walking through "the excessive heat in the streets" and now looks "wild, old and ugly." "For Emma Gorrez, the peril became physical" and she resorts to destroying the Mercedes-Glockner printer until Mrs. Cosio arrives to stop her from continuing in the wreckage. In the ensuing argument, Mrs. Cosio shouts "Thief!" at Emma, which offends her, and drives her to shove Mrs. Cosio right under the machine's blade. As she stares down at the other woman, Emma's consciousness is transported to a memory of a provincial scene, "the middle of a familiar churchyard… around her was velvet moss." And at that point, Emma pins "Nora's arm beneath the cutter….calmly, she watched the blade descend" (59).

In the diction and events experienced in the setting of Crescent Press, one gathers a dismal landscape—from the poor construction of the building and the struggles of the people in it to the air of frustration and anger surrounding both. The physical setting underscores that "poverty was always crushing" and reduces Domingo into a tired man and evokes an inhuman rage in his wife. Yet, significantly, for a brief moment, Emma remembers one episode from Tayug's history which coincidentally refers to a violent uprising in the town, a generation before. From this juxtapostition of present milieu with past event, a one-time bloodshed in Tayug is effectively made to equate to the city's daily grind. On one hand, death is swift and violent in the country; on the other hand, death in the city is slow and calculated but no less dreadful.

For Emma, this is only the beginning as the episode in the printing press propels Domingo to move to another job in the city, specifically at Quality Office, housed in a structure called the "Zenith" (here a naming rife with ironies). Notwithstanding the superlative connotations of "quality" and "zenith," Emma recognizes the superficiality of the settings thus designated: "How absurd the Zenith looked. It rose on one side of Plaza Tanduay, an outlandish birthday cake seven floors, all glass and gloss, with none of the substantialness of the one building in Tayug you could compare it with—the church, that was like many things in that town, large and plain and forever" (102). In contrast to the seedy description of Crescent Press, Zenith represents

wealth and, if not beauty, at least, a shiny sleekness. However, it shelters a far more insidious evil proliferating in the city: the corporation.

The metaphor of the birthday cake underscores the flossy yet ultimately flimsy standard of the building (after all, the stone edifice of the church is more durable than the glass) and the offices inside it. That Emma compares it unfavorably to the church—"large, plain and forever"—accentuates the shaky foundations of the city while once again projecting the sturdy virtues of Tayug. Alongside reputations and careers, deals and projects are made and ruined in Zenith.

Emma never ventures inside Quality Office, the scene of most of Domingo's corporate crimes but she is privy to one, and hears about and reacts to the rest in yet another setting in the city, their apartment in Sampaloc street. The first time the reader is offered a glimpse of the apartment is in the context of the couple's argument after she confronts him on how his career is corrupting him. Domingo "cut short their argument with one vicious blow of his fist against the bedroom wall." Meanwhile his wife "had retreated to the shadows….and looked out upon a scene of peace: the pavements, empty; the stores across, boarded up; the moon, shattering in a million pieces on the canal waters which were clear for once." In one rare instance, Polotan paints an image of the city streets as serene, shielded from the harsh sun and cloaked by the moonlight. But the description of the room as enveloped in shadows underlines how grim city life has permeated Emma's marriage itself.

Two events occur at the apartment in Sampaloc which highlight this encroaching darkness. One Mr. Navarro intends to sue the vice-president of Quality and Domingo steps in to handle the situation. He invites Mr. Navarro to the Sampaloc apartment for "a little talk about your problem, supper, and the sight of my children, and my wife (a fine woman), and my guarantee that nothing I might propose to you will mean disgrace" (66). During this dinner, Mr. Navarro is persuaded to accept a cheque for dropping his suit but, a week later, commits suicide. To all intents and purposes, the Gorrezes' Sampaloc apartment serves as the crime scene but Domingo's bold mediation in containing Navarro's threat boosts his stature at Quality. For resolving the Navarro case, he is awarded a promotion, complete with his own office and a sizeable raise. Emma, witness to her husband's fatal machinations, despairs of him.

The second event shows how steeped Domingo is in the wheeling and dealing at Quality. He earns the trust of employees who are plotting a strike and on the day they confront the company's president, they find Domingo seated in the office; he had sold out the strikers. To Emma's consternation, Domingo confesses what he had done

in the Sampaloc apartment. When Emma asks, "Are you sure pimping is all you do for the old man?," Domingo hurls his deposit book at her and hits her on the cheek with it. It is at this juncture that Emma decides to return to Tayug for a trial separation.

It is now time to consider the depictions of the various settings in the zone of action that is Manila. On one end of the spectrum is the shabby side of the city as represented by Crescent Press and on the other end, the bustling side as seen in the Zenith building. However, these two disparate settings have one aspect in common, one angle that Emma is all too aware of—human fragmentation. This aspect is best illustrated by Emma's observation concerning the change in her husband in moving from the country to the city. "You were easy to love [in Tayug]," she says to him. "Because you were a good man, because you were whole, complete, not fragmented the way you are now." As she leaves the city and her husband, Emma regards "the warped and twisted faces of city folk" (68). However, deploying our framework, we realize how the city elicits the same binary feelings of aversion and contentment. Emma wilts as Domingo Gorrez reaches his peak in the metropolis. This establishes a porous quality to the novel's settings where one cannot easily generalize that evil resides in the city and the virtues are nestled in the country. It appears that a character exerts its own influence on a given setting, being the transitive and transitory agent able to account for this fluidity.

Another example of this permeable quality between the setting's spaces is the novel's positioning of characters in one area, even as they are thinking about another. Throughout the parts of the novel where Emma resides in the city, she constantly longs for and remembers Tayug, almost there in mind even as she feels stranded in the city in body. In contrast to the "choked district of Sampaloc," Emma recalls and relishes the country's clear, open spaces, and the ample wiggle room it offers to its dwellers. Long before she married Domingo, she applies for a teaching post in Tayug's Plaridel High and, upon arrival, is much impressed by "the town square, neat as a handkerchief....It was planted profusely to hedges but the portion surrounding the north glorieta had been left with enough grass for the use of the students of Plaridel High School" (10-11). She appreciates "the church spire, the rooftops, the gulf beyond," noting the huge natural expanses which remain constant, unchangeable, steadfast (descriptions which she is unable to ascribe to urban spaces). She taught history and, in so doing, immersed herself in another projected space, the Tayug of a previous generation. She reads up on and teaches the story of Amang, who led a violent uprising from the mountains (9).

In her readings, Emma traverses the history of Tayug, from the hills where the rebels plotted and from where they charged, to the tension-riddled fields and the bloodied town square where their rebellion met with its tragic end. Emma teaches her students that "someday another Amang may come along, offering to free you." This depiction of Tayug—the eventful violence stitched into its history—contrasts with the dilatory kinds of cruelty daily meted by the city to its hapless citizens. In the country, nurtured by the eternal hills and expansive fields, strength is gathered to fight for the cause of freedom. Meanwhile in the city, shackled by money and status, a certain kind of sluggishness fosters the reign of intrigue and greed and allows them to fester. It becomes clear at this point why Emma so resents the city—it represents the loss of the most fundamental attributes of humanity, namely, freedom and the instinct for goodness.

A parallel to Manila's Crescent Press is Dalisay Press, located in Dagupan City where Emma first meets Domingo Gorrez who greets her with a smile. Unlike the detailed description of Crescent Press, there is no illustration of Dalisay Press as an office or a building, indicating that it blends seamlessly with its surroundings (this links to our framework's second consideration that spaces in literature can lack the clear boundaries constitutive of cartography). It is in this printing press where Emma falls in love with her future husband. Here, the reader sees a glimpse of Domingo before his ultimate corruption. He is talented in his work ("he typed quickly and well, something that amazed the owner of the press") and tender with Emma ("he found her nursing a headache. He touched her hair gently"). In other words, at this point in the story, Domingo shows he has the attributes for success in any endeavor of his own choosing, with no need to resort, in all aggressiveness, to the corporate shenanigans he would master later (24). Capable of affection, this Domingo is nothing like the abusive man in the Sampaloc apartment. There is an integrity to Domingo at this point in their relationship; already rejected by the city, his disenchantment with it is expressed in one exchange with Emma: "It's not evil alone that has conquered the city, Emma. Not evil, but mediocrity also" (26).

Located between Calle Tanedo and Real Street, the Gorrez ancestral home serves as the other spatial parallel to the couple's Sampaloc apartment. The play on the word "real" highlights the natural element of the larger zone of action which is Tayug and the contrast to the artifice of the city and to the charade that their lives would become in such an environment. The house is described as having rooms "as ample as museums" as well as "sagging eaves and pockmarked windows," a structure storied with the labor of the men who tilled the lands of Gorrezes three generations back, and surviving the devastations wrought by World War II. What sets this particular setting apart from the others is that Emma and Domingo put their own touches to the house by renovating it. Emma adds matted bamboo to the walls of the garage and "had it roofed with nipa," while Domingo builds a new bathroom and installs water pump and a new gate. "The bitterness was in the past," and remained there, as the Gorrezes looked to a future built on the beginnings of a family life they were to lead, with constancy, in a house which they have turned into a home (34). Indeed, the reader here senses a suggestive correlation between the refurbishing of the house and the birthing of their sons, for example. Later on, Emma would wistfully remember this period in her life amidst the city's chaos and the knotty life she was compelled to lead within such an inhospitable, if not hostile, context. With the lush and spacious countryside for backdrop, the reader sees a glimpse of Domingo's better qualities and feels Emma's sense of contentment in the novel's Tayug scenes.

The serene countryside provides a haven for Emma but it could not protect her from the arrival of the city dwellers and slickers Bert and Nora Cosio, who venture there to manage the local campaigns for a presidential aspirant. As the campaign juggernaut of the anonymous "Our Man" (Polotan may have alluded to Ramon Magsaysay here) takes over the town square, the people of Tayug are treated to dulcet speeches ("he is a good man – he augurs an age of peace, prosperity, progress for us all") as well as the customary electoral tokens (t-shirts and bags of sugar). While Domingo immediately agrees to help out with the campaign (the Cosios call on him because the Gorrez name retains its local prominence), Emma shrewdly sees through the Cosios. At this point, Domingo remains clear-sighted when he tells Emma, "[Nora] wants something - and the person who wants something, always dissembles." And as Emma observes Nora "take a dirty baby in her arms" and "sweetly call out, Good day" to the townsfolk, she thinks to herself: "We are dissembling" (39).

Another "artifice" introduced by the arrival of the Cosios is the use of a private imported car, a Ford model, for their campaign sorties (here relating to the category of route in our operative framework). Up till this point, Emma and Domingo either walked or took public transport—simple modes of movement befitting the unpretentious lifestyle led by rural folk. But now as the Gorrez couple helps in the campaign, crisscrossing nearby towns in the car with Nora Cosio into "a dozen sallies into the barrios," Emma ruminates: "We are not doing right." Tainted by their association with the Cosios, the Gorrezes now find themselves subjecting Tayug's communities to the wares and

wiles of city slickers: deceit and cunning. When Nora hints that more is in store for the Gorrez couple, Emma "retreated to the shade of a tree" – a foreshadowing of her retreat into the shadows of the Sampaloc apartment when she knew she had lost her husband to the city.

In effect, two campaigns were launched in Tayug—one for the Presidency and one for the Gorrezes. From the beginning, Emma resisted it all: "it was a counterfeit dream, it had no substance, it offered nothing" (41). Domingo is able to convince Emma to move back to the city, when he throws back at her what she promised him during their courtship at Dalisay Press: "You said once, 'A life with you, Doming, anywhere, doing what you wish." The sincerity of the words uttered in Tayug is now being twisted to subserve the consequent plan for the couple to resettle in Manila. Emma consents to the move but not before venturing "atop Manresa Knoll. Then she turned downhill again towards the high school…. It was the quiet and modest life she had wanted" (69).

As the Cosios arrive in Tayug, carrying with them the ethos of urban living, the reader sees another example of the blurring of spatial boundaries in literature. Once the Gorrezes make the move to the city, Emma finds herself in an unstoppable course as they go into the printing business with the Cosios (an offer made to the Gorrezes in recompense for their assistance to the electoral campaigns), and this catapults Domingo into his Quality career and destroys their marriage in the process.

Six months into their trial separation, Emma returns to the city in an attempt to save her marriage. Unbeknownst to her, while she was away, Domingo had staged his boldest and riskiest move at work through an intrigue which led to the abrupt retirement of his main competitor, Ernesto Bello. Emma, however, learns that Domingo has moved to 212 A. Mabini street, "a large apartment building... near where the motels spelled their American names in neon: *Beverly*, *Penguin*, *Brooksview*." The reader detects a sordidness to the area, and Emma "touched a wooden Bontoc brave that stood darkly in the sidewalk" (103). This figure of ethnicity, stereotyped by lowland and urban culture, appears anachronistic in the glare of the tawdry lights, but it also highlights how Emma, with her dignity and honesty intact, stands out against the sleaze of the urban district.

Inside Domingo's unit, Emma is confronted by her husband's new life with "light green walls hung with many prints. She went nearer for a close look—Van Gogh, Gauguin. She could see the entire room at once: the day couch, the camouflaged closet, the stove-refrigerator" (104). Technology finds itself beside classic art pieces yet the choice of painters is no accident as the roommates Van Gogh and

Gaugin dealt with the thematic of human fragmentation in their works of art (Gaugin was present when Van Gogh infamously cut his ear off, and both men's works, celebratory of mother and human nature, were only appreciated after their deaths). The compactness of the apartment is in stark contrast to the expanse of the family home in Tayug. "It was a handkerchief-sized room, the kind a bachelor or a childless couple would keep–not too neat, casual, strewn with the right props: the rare vase, the Kabuki doll, Kerouac and Gide, Loewe and Lerner." It is in this cramped and crowded space that Emma meets her husband's mistress, Glo, whose "pants were tight around her thighs and showed off the mark of her sex" (105). Domingo had chosen a showy girl for his gaudy apartment in the tawdry side of town. The corruption that had coated his career now darkens and effectively dissolves his marriage.

The effect on Emma is almost instantaneous. She seeks refuge in "the largest department store in the city." Then she flashbacks to the time her husband earned a raise after handling the Navarro case and she had bought a pendant "and hung it around her neck, loud and noisy and vulgar." Now, after encountering Glo, Emma has "the [saleslady] spinning like a top, keeping track of shoes and clothes and toys and lotions." For herself, Emma "spotted a rich, voluptuous jacket, with an impossible price tag" (126). While in the city, Emma resorts to materialism so as to camouflage her shock and hurt; however, on a bus in Tarlac later that day, "part of the humiliation began to sink through and she could feel again…." even as "when she sipped [coffee], her chest threatened to break" (126). The shifting settings and the consequent changes in Emma's affective states here express critical ideas about the attunements of the country to human nature and the city's habitude toward the repression of basic human emotions. The mechanical quality to city life simply melts away in the route here back to the countryside.

Emma however almost teeters on the brink as she turns to Rene Rividad and confides to him about Domingo's infidelity. In a moment of weakness, she goes away with Rene to a resthouse in Sual, a car's drive away from Tayug, and she "saw the colors of the world, the blue and green and red" (134). This is reminiscent of the gaudy neons of Mabini St., scene of Domingo's final betrayal. Recalling that scene is fitting against the freshness of the sea of Sual just when Emma ventures into her own extramarital affair. The readers remain privy to Emma's observations, this time in the form of a letter to Domingo: "This was not for children, this deadly game, only for tired adults like Rene and me, you and your Glo… Grown-up people, worn out, spent, consumed by their mistakes, only they played this game" (135).

By "this game," Emma refers to adultery and when one considers how the settings and zones of action have corralled and goaded the novel's main characters into a primarily downward spiral, there is a clear link between the landscape and its dwellers and their shenanigans. The lapse into adultery has been limited to the fallen Domingo but now Emma brings "this deadly game" to the world she otherwise romanticizes as pristine: the countryside. She also connects this final corruption to the relatively natural landscape of her own moral lapse as she and Rene take a swim in the sea upon their arrival in the Sual resthouse: "Perhaps I loved him already, I thought—*over the edge, ah, down the precipice, and sweet disaster!*" (136). Emma remains cognizant of the consequences of her actions. "I was sure I would discover a truth," she writes to Domingo, "that some blinding revelation would finally crystallize out of the wreckage of all our lives" (139).

In the end, however, the edges of the country, with the wide vistas they offer the weary soul, prevail over Emma who, as she comes to from a moment of lapse, realizes that she is unable, at the same time, to keep her true love for Domingo. While kissing Rene, she utters her husband's name, which breaks the mood and brings her rendezvous with Rene to a shuddering halt. They drive back to Tayug and, significantly, it was "before [they] stepped out into the sun" (and thus, one might think, away from the shadows) that Emma comes to her senses. Rene only plants his lips upon her "brow instead, pure, chaste, like a blessing" (137). By the evening, Rene commits suicide by burning down his home in Tayug. The fire serves as a symbol of purging, of cleansing, for the momentary daring to engage in the corrupt manners of city folk. Incidentally, no such purging seems possible in the city, at least by the novel's terms and turns. After Rene's death, Emma writes to her husband: "I am not nearer that illumination though I have been to one graveyard already. Wisdom awaits us all around the corner, yes, but where? And what else do we lose besides ourselves before we pass around into that other tranquil street?" (139) Once again, Emma's ruminations take root in the setting and she even makes a metaphor out of it for the resolution she is trying to reach.

Piatti and her collaborators define the projected space as one which the characters long for/remember despite where they might actually be, at any given moment. Throughout the narrative, Emma tends to fashion projected spaces of (or out of) Tayug as she longs for the place while feeling marooned in the city. But she also resorts to another medium, which itself is a kind of setting (at least in terms of our framework's notion of 'route'): her letters. The concluding letter (quoted in the previous paragraph) is only the third and final time she

takes pen to paper. Her first letter is written when she applies to be a teacher in Tayug: "Dear Sirs, I am confident I shall make you a fine teacher but I desire first to know the guarantees of the job. Will it ensure this applicant against hopelessness, despair, bereavement? Will it close old doors and open new vistas, so to speak?" (7) The second letter was sent to Domingo after she left him for Tayug: "What does a man work for? Is it not for a corner and a moment to be tender in? Outside the door, beyond the gate, men are always in a rush to get to where there is finally, always, forever nothing. We chase desire but when its hood falls off, it is the macabre face of death" (68-69). All her letters make references to settings—"tranquil street," "new vistas," "outside the door" etc.—and express her yearnings for what she perceives as simple country living. Moreover, her thoughts and reactions are detailed in these epistles, thus making her letters the concrete embodiment (even mappings) of Emma's internal landscape, rooted as it is in (or juxtaposed against) the various settings and zones of action she moves through, inhabits, or abandons in the course of her life.

In being oriented by the system for categorizing and mapping the spaces and settings of fiction drawn up by Piatti et al., this essay has followed Emma and the routes of her life, as she shuttled restlessly between city and countryside. Apart from Emma's clear desire for the latter and obvious disdain for the former, one recognizes how the novel's settings and zones of action take on a life of their own and appear to shape the characters in different and significant ways, giving language and crystallization to their motivations and actions. From Emma's eyes, whose clear-sightedness is made germane by the countryside she so loved and longed to return to, the artifice and ambition that consumed her husband and finally their marriage were indissociable from the culture and ethos of the city where he, by contrast to her, felt at home. While other characters are either corrupted or cleansed in these various settings, Emma alone has the projected space of self-awareness. In a sense, the landscapes of Manila and Tayug meld into each other and in Emma's own internal landscape—her observations, insights, and memories—as these were concretized in her letters which mapped her displacements and resettlements.

In the end, Emma emerges as a survivor, one who triumphs over the temptations of the city and the despair of the heartbroken. Her sensitivity to the external landscapes occasionally wreaks havoc on her internal landscape (her ideas, sensibilities, and memories) but it also acts as her moral compass. She remains clear-sighted and unwavering for the most part, and this emerges in her letters, and in her insistence on the ideals that she personally holds dear. In that sense, Emma's story affirms the poet Marianne Villanueva's assertions about

the necessity of "creating this inner space, so essential to our well-being" (2003, 11-12). As Villanueva puts it so well: "It is a way of building a home for ourselves, in a sometimes hostile and alien environment. It is what helps us to survive" (12).

NOTES

1. It should be noted, at this juncture, that this aversion toward routine later echoes Domingo Gorrez's own impatience with the country, where "he was annoyed occasionally [with his work at the Tayug branch] because it was not a demanding job"(33).
2. Again, Emma's sense of contentment with the country echoes Domingo's sense of satisfaction in the president's office in Zenith, as he "crossed his legs and held his glass more nonchalantly," and this because he is in a workspace where he thrives (124).

REFERENCES

Hau, Caroline. 2000. *Necessary Fictions*: *Philippine Literature and the Nation 1946-1980*. Quezon City: Ateneo de Manila University Press.

Hidalgo, Cristina P. 2000. "The Philippine Novel in English into the Twenty-First Century." *World Literature Today* 74: 333-336.

Joaquin, Nick. 1977. *Nora Aunor and Other Profiles*. Quezon City: National Bookstore.

Piatti, Barbara et al., 2009. "Mapping Literature: Towards a Geogragraphy of Fiction." In *Cartography and Art*, 177-192. Edited by William Cartwright, Georg Gartner, and Antje Lehn, Berlin: Springer-Verlag.

Polotan, Kerima. 1961. *The Hand of the Enemy.* Quezon City: University of the Philippines Press.

Torrento-Estimo, Emeliza. 2012. "Kerima Polotan Tuvera: An Analysis of Her Style and Craft as reviewed from Her Short Stories *The Virgin* and *The Sounds of Sunday*." *IAMURE: International Journal of Literature, Philo-osophy and Religion* 1: 47-70.

Villanueva, Marianne and Virginia Cerenio. 2003. *Going Home to a Landscape: Writings by Filipinas.* Manila: Calyx Books.

Williams, Raymond. 1973. *The Country and the City*. New York: Oxford University Press.