

# philippine studies

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

---

## **Oyster Country The Wedding of Crisostomo Ibarra**

Constantino Tejero

*Philippine Studies* vol. 43, no. 3 (1995): 537

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](mailto:philstudies@admu.edu.ph).

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

## CONSTANTINO TEJERO

**Oyster Country**

Bodies choke the mouth of the river  
 Slime in the shallows swallows the ankles  
 of clam-pickers, their toes digging  
 to root in the shifting sand, their baskets  
 afloat on the purple brine.

It is sunset in the sea of my country  
 My soup bowl I bring for the gathered clams  
 here where the wind sucks the life out of one's breath  
 where the wave sucks the sand from under one's feet  
 where twilight sucks the sky from above one's head  
 The shell-pickers come.

My soup bowl cools, cracks in the chill wind  
 The soft moist muscle of oyster  
 salt-sweetish on the tongue hardens, turns  
 bitter meat as it clogs the shocked gullet  
 Have I swallowed a lot of pearls, or  
 eaten the stones of my sandy land?  
 My lips I have bruised for sure  
 on the sharp-edged oyster shall.

Now wary when they wade so as not to wound  
 the softer spots of their feet on oyster shells  
 the night steals their vision, they hold on  
 to a ground that's constantly moving  
 a sea that swallows, a land that disappears  
 Things suck.

**The Wedding of Crisostomo Ibarra**

They have come to the wedding, even the skeleton  
 Of the father arising from the melancholy mire  
 Side by side with things past, things present, and things forgotten.

The bride is alone, her slender body quivers like a lyre  
 Amidst the laces that cover the rotting faces,  
 For it is whispered among the fierce glitter or jewels  
 Of a choice for the groom between two lives, two deaths. She sees  
 History marching under her bridal window, the duel  
 Of fire and sword, the dying, falling, and uprising, on the brink.  
 Horses wrestle with men—and now, on this eve of love,  
 Her handsome groom has gone out for a moment sadly murmuring  
 Of dangerous things, things of the future, things to be avenged.  
 The mournful bride leans upon a wall, between gladness and terror,  
 As though she has been given a gift of an oil lamp  
 That might contain either a secret poem or nitroglycerin.

Something in the house will slowly bloom or quickly explode,  
 For the groom has gone out to get the oil lamp for the feast—  
 No, she will not faint in the sala, though deep inside she staggers,  
 She touches her hair, smiles to each illustrious and honored guest.  
 Welcome the guests, the manang, the beatas and señoras,  
 With a swish of scented fans, with a swirl and slither of silk—  
 A toast to the Governor-General and his queridas—  
 A touch on the scapular, a wishing of honey and milk.

The moonlight is on the stairs, the moon above the rooftop,  
 The orchestra plays a valse to sinister shadows,  
 Time passes by and sees, stops, desolate on a precipice.  
 The door is shut. The groom is late. Who will bring the oil lamp?  
 The door is shut. The curtain shakes. Who will let the groom in?  
 But soft- What is that? A rustle of silk, or bolos sharply  
 Gnashing behind the leaves and vines in the lattice—  
 'Tis I, señorita, dying upon your balcony. . . .

RUEL S. DE VERA

### **Pictures of the Floating World**

In waterfalls  
 of unbroken color,  
 we gather up  
 pale rivers, red volcanoes  
 and the blue  
 kimono of sky.