

Cultural Daily

Independent Voices, New Perspectives

Denise Duhamel: "Yes"

Denise Duhamel · Thursday, March 8th, 2012

Denise Duhamel, a professor at Florida International University in Miami, is the author, most recently, of Ka-Ching!, published by [University of Pittsburgh Press](#) (© 2009), which also published her book Queen for a Day, where you may find her poem, "Yes."

Yes

According to *Culture Shock*:

A Guide to Customs and Etiquette

of Filipinos, when my husband says yes,
he could also mean one of the following:

- a.) *I don't know.*
- b.) *If you say so.*
- c.) *If it will please you.*
- d.) *I hope I have said yes unenthusiastically enough
for you to realize I mean no.*

You can imagine the confusion
surrounding our movie dates, the laundry,
who will take out the garbage
and then I remind him
I'm an American, that all his yeses sound alike to me.
I tell him here in America we have shrinks
who can help him to be less of a people-pleaser.
We have two-year-olds who love to scream, "No!"
when they don't get their way. I tell him,
in America we have a popular book,
When I Say No I Feel Guilty.
"Should I get you a copy?" I ask.
He says yes, but I think he means
"If it will please you," i.e. "I won't read it."
"I'm trying," I tell him, "but you have to try too."
"Yes," he says, then makes *tampo*,
a sulking that the book *Culture Shock* describes as
"subliminal hostility . . . withdrawal of customary cheerfulness
in the presence of one who has displeased" him.

The book says it's up to me to make things all right,
 "to restore goodwill, not by talking the problem out,
 but by showing concern about the wounded person's
 well-being." Forget it, I think, even though I know
 if I'm not nice, *tampo* can quickly escalate into *nagdadabog*—
 foot stomping, grumbling, the slamming
 of doors. Instead of talking to my husband, I storm off
 to talk to my porcelain Kwan Yin,
 the Chinese goddess of mercy
 that I bought on Canal Street years before
 my husband and I started dating.
 "The real Kwan Yin is in Manila,"
 he tells me. "She's called Nuestra Senora de Guia.
 Her Asian features prove Christianity
 was in the Philippines before the Spanish arrived."
 My Husband's telling me this
 tells me he's sorry. Kwan Yin seems to wink,
 congratulating me—my short prayer worked.
 "Will you love me forever?" I ask,
 then study his lips, wondering if I'll be able to decipher
 what he means by his yes.

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