

# 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."*

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## 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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