

Transpacific Connections of Philippine Literature in Spanish

An Introduction

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Not too many years ago, the study of Philippine Literature in Spanish was a very odd thing to do. With the exception of a few translations and some master's dissertations in the Philippines, it was virtually a *res nullius*, an area of research practically abandoned. This neglect created some problems for the few well-intentioned scholars who aimed to understand and research about it. A personal anecdote may illustrate this point. A few years ago, I submitted an article to a very prestigious literary academic journal of a Spanish university. The said journal publishes articles dealing with Spanish and Latin American literature covering all periods and also researches on Hispanic Linguistics. Surprisingly, the editors replied to me in less than 24 hours alleging they just do not publish Philippine Literature. This awkward situation made me think about what would happen if all journals observed the same strict criterion: the study of Philippine Literature in Spanish would sadly be silenced and the recovery of texts for readers—an important and ultimate goal—would be prevented. Fortunately, the article was accepted last year by another prestigious journal from Mexico¹; but I should add that many colleagues encountered similar problems such as articles whose publication

was getting absurdly delayed because the board of a certain journal could not find reviewers for “such a strange thing” or papers whose acceptance in international symposia was being relegated to a peripheral session.

We are living, however, in optimistic times: scholarly monographs—the ones by Adam Lifshey, for example—and annotated re-editions are being published; international conferences are being held; and doctoral dissertations are being defended. Despite these very welcome developments, this particular field of literature remains deeply understudied. Annotated editions are needed² so that the original sources can be made available and accessible to scholars in the field; translations are also urgent so Filipinos with intellectual curiosity might access a literature made inaccessible simply due to the language barrier; and finally, the study of single authors and their literary careers and the recovery and compilation of literary texts from newspapers and literary journals are particularly necessary. There is, therefore, a need to study Philippine Literature in Spanish not as an isolated, odd, and peripheral phenomenon but as an unavoidable cultural consequence of early globalization. It needs to be appreciated as a rich literary system that holds deep connections with other fields, especially Latin American Literature.

Among the important advances developed in the field of Philippine Literature in Spanish during the last decade, the recovery of forgotten texts must be mentioned. Instituto Cervantes launched in 2009 a collection of books aimed to rescue in philological editions the best of this relatively unknown Philippine literary tradition (the prose of Adelina Gurrea, Jesús Balmori, Antonio Abad, Enrique Laygo have been published). I myself edited two texts (by Teodoro M. Kalaw and by Buenaventura Campa) for a well-known Spanish publishing house and Georgina Zóbel published in 2013 a bilingual edition of *La Oveja de Nathan* by Antonio Abad. *Komisyon ng Wikang Filipino* published in 2016 a Tagalog translation—sadly, without introduction or notes—of a travel book by Antonio Luna: *Impresiones* (1891).

In 2003, two prestigious peer-reviewed journals (*Kritika Kultura* from Ateneo de Manila and *Transmodernity* from University of California-Merced) published special issues devoted to the study of Philippine Literature in

Spanish. December 2018 was indeed a *mensis mirabilis* for the field: *Revista de Crítica Literaria Latinoamericana*—a top-ranked journal of Latin American Literature—published a special issue covering this literature from colonial times, and University of Antwerp organized for the first time a major international symposium on exactly this literature with 39 enthusiastic scholars coming from the US, Mexico, Europe, and the Philippines. Many issues were discussed in that meeting, an essential one being the fact that Philippine Literature in Spanish could not be understood in isolation but in connection with other contending literary traditions of the archipelago: namely, the Tagalog and English traditions. Another important topic was the very fact that Philippine authors were in contact with and read other authors in Spanish both from Spain and Latin America, thus making this literature a central piece in the globalized network of literatures in the Spanish language.

Therefore, this special issue of UNITAS appropriately titled “Transpacific Connections of Philippine Literature in Spanish” comes at a very suitable moment. A group of international scholars fills the above-mentioned gap by using a comparative approach in order to provide a better understanding of the relevant literary influences and overlooked intellectual exchanges that took place on both sides of the Pacific Ocean. John Blanco explores how the literary figure of the Moor was present in both Mexican and Philippine late colonial period and the importance of considering the necessity and value of considering the country as a transpacific frontier province of New Spain: they were not only part of the same trade space but certainly of a cultural one, too. Kristina Escondo and Ernest Hartwell show the strong similarities between the anticolonial ideas in Cuba, Puerto Rico, and the Philippines by analyzing the works of José Rizal, José Martí, Antonio Luna, and the intellectual work of the *Ilustrados*, all of whom undoubtedly aimed to shape their respective national identities. Gasquet offers a reading of a little known travel text by Pardo De Tavera and his critical encounter of *Hispanidad* in Argentina. The hidden subversive meanings in the apparently innocent short romantic novels of Pedro Paterno, published a few years before his death, are scrutinized in López-Calvo’s contribution while the particular reception of *Modernismo*, the most relevant literary trend in the Spanish-

speaking world at the end of the 19th century, is the core of the researches of Álvarez-Tardío in poetry, Barrera in a novel by Jesús Balmori, and Mojarro in a travel book by Teodoro Kalaw where the lipéño journalist attempted to imitate the aesthetic turn of Gómez Carrillo. Philippine-Mexican and other transpacific links and relations are addressed in the articles by Park, Villaescusa, and García. De la Peña studies the parallelisms between certain literary figures in 20th century Philippine and Latin American novels while Ortuño addresses the meaning of *Hispanidad* among the Spanish-speaking Manila elite and their embrace of *Arielismo* as a form of refusal of the Anglo-Saxon culture.

What this varied array of scholarly works makes evident is the deep bonds Philippine authors kept with their Latin American counterparts and how Philippine Literature developed in contact with other literatures written in Spanish. The fact that they belonged to the same cultural sphere made them develop very similar ideas as it had happened at the end of the 19th century even when certain authors never read each other. Nevertheless, these works also demonstrate the need for more scholarly investigations especially digging through journals and in archives, and for the recovery of largely neglected texts and contrasting them with their sister literatures. It is my hope that this collection of works might encourage new scholars, especially from the Philippines, to get immersed in a precious and largely overlooked literature, unique in so many ways as the reader will now have the opportunity to find out.

Notes

1. Jorge Mojarro Romero, "El estudio de la literatura hispanofilipina durante el siglo XX." *Nueva Revista de Filología Hispánica*, vol. 66, no. 2, pp. 651-681.
2. As of this time, three new editions are being prepared for publication: *La carrera de Cándida* by G. Gómez Wyndham; *Mi Óbolo* by María Paz Zamora Mascuñana; and a collection of short stories by Benigno del Río.