

Reading Military Masculinity In Fil-Hispanic And Spanish American Novels

Wystan De La Peña

University of the Philippines Diliman

Abstract

The Fil-hispanic novel and its Spanish American counterpart share the preference of mining history for narratives. For Spanish American novelists, there is a sub-genre called the *novela de la dictadura*, where the figure of a military leader called *el Caudillo* becomes the center of the narration. This development is a function of their region's political history and the series of elite leadership upheavals where the military sector is an active participant, if not the principal instigator. There is no equivalent in the Fil-hispanic novel, but the figure of a military man is present in two novels, Jesus Balmori's posthumously-published *Los pájaros de fuego* (2011) and Antonio Abad's prize-winning *La oveja de Nathán*. This paper looks at the treatment which Fil-hispanic and Spanish American novels — specifically, Gabriel García Márquez's *El general en su laberinto* (1989) and *El otoño del patriarca* (1975) — give to the figure of the military man, his corporeality and the expressions of his military masculinity, and looks at how the representations echo or critique their historical realities.

Keywords

Fil-hispanic novel, Spanish American *Caudillo novel*, military masculinity

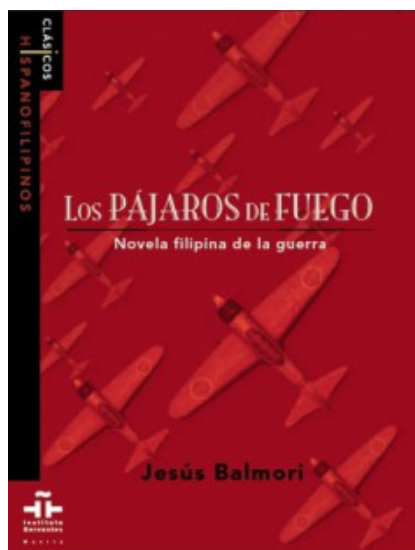


Fig. 1. *Los Pájaros de Fuego* (2011) by Jesus Balmori

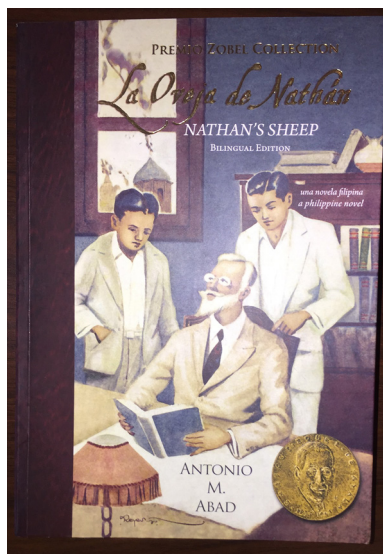


Fig. 2. *La oveja de Nathán* (1928) by Antonio Abad

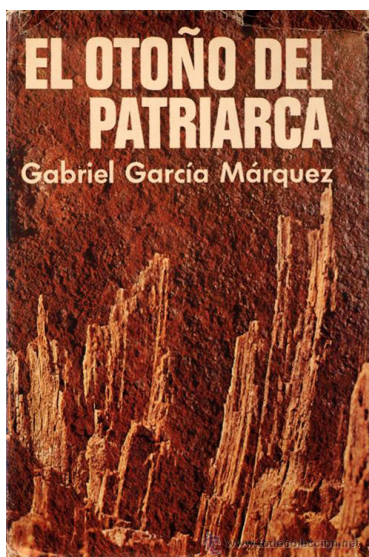


Fig. 3. *El otoño del patriarca* (1975) by Gabriel García Márquez

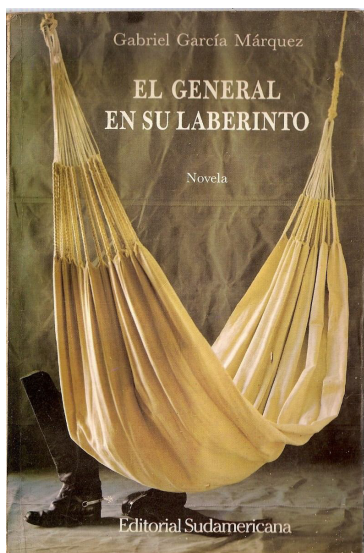


Fig. 4. *El general en su laberinto* (1989) by Gabriel García Márquez

Military masculinity as an embodied and performative attribute of the male soldier and an important component of the characterization of the nation. Traditional gender binaries have assigned the figures of the land and the country to the feminine principle (seen in women deity figures of fertility and agricultural harvests) and the concept of culture and government to men (evidenced in the figure of the lawgiver as a man). *Motherland* as an abstract notion of a piece of geography, the place of one's birth, is always linked to *heroism*, the totality of actions that entail courage to accomplish a difficult task or face a foe in defense of principles, persons or properties. *Motherland* is always accompanied by the sense of belonging, thus requiring emotional attachment and loyalty.

This paper reads the male soldier's body and military masculinity in two Fil-hispanic novels, Jesus Balmori's *Los Pájaros de Fuego* (2011) and Antonio Abad's *La oveja de Nathán* (1928), and two Latin American works, both by Nobel laureate Gabriel García Márquez, *El otoño del patriarca* (1975) and *El general en su laberinto* (1989). The reading of the novels is premised on the idea that the military body is deployed as a metaphor for the body politic, or a representation of the nation, thereby positing a commentary on the political situations at the time of the novels' production.¹ There will, however, be no attempt made to cross-reference the readings of the our novels, only a separate dissection of the representation of the male soldier's body, the embodiment of his military manhood, to reflect on the novels' echoing of their contemporary historical realities.

The soldier as a traditionally masculine role is an offshoot of the public-private division of the world—the woman runs the private domain defined by the household, while the man rules the spaces beyond the home, the public sphere; the woman takes care of the domestic chores of child-bearing and childrearing, while the man handles the bigger responsibility of nation-building. The woman-as-geography/*Motherland* is represented as needing protection to be provided by the man-soldier, whose protective actions on behalf of the former constitute "heroism."

Motherland and the *nation*, despite the apparent linkage between geography and the imagined community, however, become two different

concepts: the *Motherland* as female is relegated to the image of the territory's physical space, or the natural environment; the *nation*, as a product of social evolution, with its accompanying ideas of state structures and government, is envisioned as a male attribute. The latter is seen ruling, cultivating, and managing (even "defending") the former.

This woman-nation-space/man-soldier-defender model fits the mold Philippine society was being engendered into during the American colonial period (McCoy 44). The army—the collective of male defenders of the woman-nation—thus constitutes the "schools of the nation," an institution responsible for the education (or defense, if one will) of the country, and participation in the military becomes a rite of passage from boyhood to manhood. This is especially true in the post-Westphalian European era, when participation in the military becomes an important part of cultural life (Mansbach and Rhodes 63), and, one can add, socialization. In pre-1870 Prussia, the profession of preference for men was that of a military officer's, and membership in the officer corps was earned either by studies in military academies or by engaging in professions affiliated with auxiliary army services (engineering and medicine, for example). Jewish men in Europe, long marginalized because of their religion—which envisioned masculinity in the practice of Torah scholarship, rather than in the display of martial arts expertise (Salkin 57)—sought assimilation into mainstream "gentile" society through conscription into the army. Religion as an issue would, however, show its ugly face in the controversial sacking of Alfred Dreyfus, the French Jewish artillery officer whose rise within the military echelons got checked only by his polemical trial for treason in 1894.²

This European ideal of military manhood gets transplanted not only in postcolonial Spanish American republics, but also in the Philippines, courtesy of their elites who studied and lived in the old continent; in the case of the latter, the colonizing Americans. As historian Alfred McCoy notes, screenings of cadets for the Philippine Military Academy in the late 1930s required that successful candidates be archetypes of masculine beauty and strength (McCoy 47). In Latin America, the first decades after the acquisition of independence saw a period of political instability marked by rivalry

between the old elites and new forces for control of the state. The emergence of the *Caudillo*, the man-on-horseback figure, was a response to the need to impose military intervention to impose order. But rarely was this Caudillo a man with a military background; rather, most Caudillos were leaders of regional forces representing particular economic and social interests (Cammack et al 45, 150).

As any discussion of military masculinity will inevitably touch on issues of gender, it is important to note here is that the study of this aspect of manhood aims to focus on what is called the *warrior discourse*. Hinojosa (2007) defines the warrior discourse as a set of beliefs which constitute not only the institutional narrative of the military, but also a general set of ideas regarding the meaning of masculinity (though in his specific case, Hinojosa refers to “American masculinity”). Military masculinity, Hinojosa continues, is a key symbol of manhood and a form of hegemonic masculinity (72).

The scrutiny of military masculinity as depicted in the novels discussed here focuses on the representations of select male characters in soldier roles—the ordinary foot soldier’s in the Fil-hispanic novels, and of the *Caudillo*, the politico-military strongman in the Latin American oeuvres—and what these images may mean for the works’ literary habitus and milieu. This study posits the idea that the characterization of military masculinity—the term *guerrero* masculinity will be used hereon to mean the same thing—as seen embodied in the protagonists under study reveals a reading of such a manhood that echoes popular imaging or critique of military manhood (or of the military institution) at the time of production of the novels. The soldier’s body, whether of the ordinary soldier’s or of the military commander’s, is thus deployed as a site of social critique. No less than García Márquez himself pointed out in a 1989 interview that a reading of his entire literary output situated on a specific historico-geographic context of Spanish America was possible (Vargas Vargas 31). The particular case of *El general* as historical metafiction is an interesting one, as the work

presenta un personaje no definido, problemático, ambiguo. Esto se contrapone con la imagen homogénea que muchos biógrafos habían hecho de él [Bolívar], porque según García Márquez...únicamente consideraron

un aspecto de su vida. Entonces Bolívar ha sido tratado por la historia tradicional como prócer y no como hombre (Vargas Vargas 38).

[presents a non-defined, problematic, ambiguous character. This is in contrast with the homogeneous image that many biographers have made of him (Bolívar), because according to García Márquez they just took in consideration one aspect of his life alone. Thus, Bolívar has been treated by the traditional history as a hero, and as a man]

Pulido Herráez agrees, saying that while other important historical figures have been presented with controversial aspects of their persons, historiography has always treated Bolívar as *El Libertador* and García Márquez's *El general* rendering him as a flesh-and-blood character is an exceptional case (560). With this in mind, the dissection of the representations of the military body in the four novels examined here and the intertextual connections such images have with historical time becomes a reasonable project.

The Filipino Soldier as Defender of Freedom and Democracy for *Patria, Madre, y Amor*

The man as defender of female figures in the narratives is a common theme in Fil-hispanic writing and Spanish American literature. Reyes (1991) has pointed out the love story as a framework in Philippine narration. Sommer (1991) does the same for Spanish American letters calling such narratives as the region's "foundational fiction." In both schemes, the male patriot-lover expresses his love for the *patria*, the *Madre Patria*, the Motherland, or, in concrete terms, the nation's territoriality, by showing readiness to die while defending her. He holds a woman close to his heart, the woman object of his affections, his *mujer amada*, the dreamed-of mother of his children, a partner in a family unit which would give meaning to his willingness to sacrifice himself for the *Madre Patria*. While the *Madre Patria* is an abstract concept made concrete by the nation's territory, the *mujer amada* invests emotional meaning into that territory—the presence of the beloved in a specific geographical space which the *amante* vows to defend is what makes that particular place his *patria*.

From this male patriot-lover comes the figure of the *soldado*. He calls as *patria* (the phrase “hijo de la patria” comes to mind) the land of his birth. It is *Madre Patria* to him. But the process of *discursively reproducing* [read: protecting, thus allowing to continue to exist], the *madre* requires the identification of a love object, the *amada*. With this *amada*, he starts a family; his children thus acquire a *madre* and a *madre patria*, and the land of his birth acquires richer meaning.³

The soldier’s willingness to fight and die for the *Madre Patria* is also an expression of love for the *amada*. In this light one must look at Fernando Robles in *Los pájaros de fuego*, when he responds to a call to arms and dons a military uniform. One should note that the *uniforme militar* with all its trappings invests the wearer with a different kind of masculinity. This happens to Fernando:

Se veía otro hombre ante el espejo, otro Fernando más alto, más arrogante, más distinguido. ¡Lo que podía el traje! ¡Lo que transformaba una funda desbordante de llamativas franjas y dorados emblemas! (79)

[He found another man in front of the mirror, another Fernando, taller, more arrogant, more distinguished. What a suit can do! What a transformation a boundless case of flashy stripes and golden badges can do!]

To better understand the social psychology behind Fernando’s transformation, one has to go back to the Westphalian creation of nation-states and their need to establish a professional army for their own defense, a move away from the medieval practice of kings of summoning feudal lords under his rule to provide citizen troops, or of contracting mercenaries to raise an army. The army institution required the adoption of a dress uniform system as an identification marker, thereby superseding the use of banners, traditionally employed to lead and identify soldiers during battlefield charges.

Donning a uniform becomes, for the soldier in a professional army, not mean means acquiring an identity marker to signal belongingness. A soldier’s body is no different from any ordinary citizen’s, but acquisition of the military dress, which becomes an extension of the body (note the Pfanner

quote below explaining the use of the uniform to enhance physical appearance), invests the soldier's body with a status inaccessible to non-military members of society. The uniform initiates the private-citizen-turned-soldier into a hierarchical brotherhood of warriors in a world administered by a rigid chain of command and governed by rules different from the society it exists in and ordered to protect.

Pfanner explains the symbolism of the military uniform:

It also calls for respect and fear and symbolizes strength and power: it includes features designed to make its wearer appear broader or taller, and thus to enhance the soldiers' stature in the eyes of comrades, civilians, and the enemy. Finally, it helps to create an identity of appearance and an *esprit de corps* and is therefor conducive to the bonding process (94)

The colors of the uniforms have also become a means to identify the soldiers, whether from regular armies or from guerilla or paramilitary forces, wearing them—"Redcoats" to refer to British colonial troops during the American War of Independence; *Braumhemden* ("Brown Shirts"), Adolf Hitler's paramilitary forces that played an important part in his rise to prominence after World War I; *Camicie Nere* ("Blackshirts"), the paramilitary wing of Benito Mussolini's National Fascist Party; "Blue Berets" the popular label for U.N. peacekeeping forces; and "Green Berets," for the elite U.S. Special Forces, among others.

The military uniform, has, through the centuries, evolved to adapt to different functions and rituals, like parades and non-combat duties, and the requirements of warfare, like camouflage.⁴ Moreover, a soldier's rank in the hierarchy in the chain of command is shown in his uniform through the use of insignias, medals or ribbons, shoulder marks, and patches.

Political attention to non-military clothing came with the emergence of the political power of the lower classes in the wake of the French Revolution. Language played an important part in redefining/reimagining hitherto-marginalized people through semantic reversals of terms referring to sartorial appearances: the *sans-cullotes* in France during the late 18th century or the *descamisados* of Juan and Eva Peron of 1940s Argentina were two cases. The

two labels, used to refer derogatorily to the *hoi polloi*, were redefined as lexicons of power.

When Marta sees Fernando for the first time wearing his uniform, she says he looks like a prince, like a Hollywood star with a role as general. With just the uniform, Fernando feels a transformation into

Otro hombre, sí completamente nuevo y diferente al Fernando de los juegos de corbatas modernistas y la rosa amarilla y el clavel escondido en el ojal de la chaqueta. Otro en cuerpo y sobre todo en espíritu desde que se sintió ceñido por la coraza kaki que parecía aprisionarle en una nueva dignidad y un nuevo honor. Ahora podía llamarse filipino plenamente. Ahora podía sentirse verdadero patriota. Y hasta cuadrarse marcial ante el Héroe de la raza, ante todos los héroes nacionales, para decirles reverentemente:

—Nosotros, los que saludamos a la aurora, no os olvidamos a los que caisteis en la noche! (80)⁵

[Another man, completely new and different to the Fernando who had sets of fin-de-siècle ties, and the yellow rose and the carnation hidden in the bottonhole of the jacket. Another person in body but especially in spirit since he felt clinged by the khaki shell that seemed to have him imprisoned in a new dignity and a new honor. Now he could call himself Filipino, fully. Now he could feel like a true patriot. And even marcially face the heroe of the race and all the national heroes to tell them respectfully: We, the ones who greet the sunrise, we don't forget the ones who felt during the night!]

With the military uniform, Fernando transforms from a civilian, scion of a wealthy family, into an *hijo de la patria*, a son of his *Madre Patria*, or the *amante* of his *mujer amada*; he becomes a *guerrero*, a defender of both. The correct motive is important here—the idea of willing self-sacrifice should be present. Note how the same military uniform does not give the same sense of prestige to Sandoval, Fernando's doctor brother-in-law, who, like him, does not survive the war. In Sandoval, there is only personal greed—for the Robles' wealth (“en realidad le importaba más el dinero de Don Lino que la fidelidad amorosa de Natalia” [46])

Mariano Bontulan is Fernando's counterpart in *La oveja de Nathán*, and his characterization goes beyond the wearing of a soldier's uniform. In Bontulan,

the novel explores the meanings behind a soldier's battlefield heroics. The novel opens with him aboard a ship on a trans-Pacific crossing enroute to his grand adventure—to fight in the trenches of France during World War I. He is unlike Fernando, who dons the uniform to defend *Filipinas* from imminent danger. In Bontulan's world, the danger is half a planet away, in the fields of Flanders; from there, no threat to the *Madre Patria* is forthcoming. But Bontulan's decision is related to defending the *Madre Patria*, nevertheless; or at least he makes it so in his mind. As an American colonial subject, a bearer of an American passport, colonial discourse has compelled him to accept two *Madre Patrias*: Filipinas and Estados Unidos. This is where Bontulan's case becomes interesting, as it lends itself to commentary on the co-optation of the colonial subject. Bontulan's co-optation is seen in how he defends his I-will-fight-in-Europe decision before Don Benito Claudio, his benefactor and mentor:

— *Voy a hacer la guerra a la guerra—contestó limpidamente el linotipista—. Voy a a hacer la guerra para que el mundo sea un sitio seguro para la democracia, y porque esta guerra sea la última....Voy a hacer la guerra para salvar a la civilización, amenazada por Alemania y sus aliados.* (220)

[I am gonna make war against the war –replied cleanly the lynotipist-. I am gonna make the war so the world might be a safe place for democracy, and so that this war might be the last one... I am gonna make the war in order to save the civilization, threatened by Germany and ois allies.]

As a soldier in the American Expeditionary Force under General John Pershing, he is not defending *Filipinas*—he has offered himself to be the proverbial sacrificial lamb in defense of the so-called democratic values of Filipinas' second colonizer ("Yo seré soldado...yo seré soldado. Soldado de la Libertad," he even tells a friend [232]). He would be Fil-hispanic fiction's answer to the real-life Tomas Claudio (1882-1918), the first Filipino who died in the Battle of the Marne, in France. Claudio died in the defense of freedom and democracy; his fictional counterpart has been brainwashed, or has brainwashed himself, to do the same sacrifice—to defend not just America, the colonial mother, but also Filipinas, the real *madre patria*.

How does fighting for American ideals of freedom and democracy translate into fighting for Filipinas, the *madre patria*? In Bontulan, one sees the Christ sacrifice archetype (even the Greek hero figure) so common in Filipino texts, where the male character acts as a savior of women, his beloved and his Motherland. To act out his destiny as a human/Filipino “Christ,” he has to go through a series of tests to prove his *guerrero* manhood and his embodiment of values associated with a hero, like bravery and self-abnegation in the face of danger. Bontulan’s heroics in the trenches do not go unnoticed. Unlike Fernando, he survives the war, becomes a living witness to the horrors of the “No Man’s Land,” located between the barbed wire on both trenches; he even leads a group of soldiers in neutralizing a machine gun nest. He eventually gets wounded—but he earns his spurs; he becomes a bemedalled war hero, decorated three times.

The war hero image is a game-changer in Bontulan’s life. He gains prestige in upper class urban society which would have ignored him had he remained his pre-war self—a *pinaampon*, a son left by his mother to a rich benefactor, who voluntarily assumes responsibility for his education, to transform him into a man, to have him learn the ways of successful manhood, to make him an *hombre*. Bontulan easily leverages this post-war prestige into economic advantages—the hero image becomes so valuable that he has to have a tailor make him new sets of uniforms for his public appearances to adulating crowds; he acquires a well-paying job which allows him to enjoy the American version of material success—two mortgages: a house and a car. Note that in his mind, these acquisitions are for the women in his life, material expressions of his love for them—the house for his wife, and, by extension, his children; the car for his mother. Note also that his rise in social status does not translate into a different relationship dynamic with the American colonizer; he remains a colonial subject. He remains a typesetter, albeit a better-paying one. This time, he works for an American. Unlike his American commander in the trenches who recommended him for a medal, his American boss opens up a dilemma in his mind.

Unlike Fernando in *Los pájaros* who dies—and his death may be read as a metaphor for the death of a Filipino Hispanic culture that he and his class

represented (de la Peña, *Ang Nabigong Japanofilia*)⁶—Bontulan lives to fight another war. This time, it is not a war fought with guns and bayonets as he did in the trenches; this time, it is a war in defense of his *Madre Patria*, against the racist attacks of a champion of Americanism, his employer, his economic lifeline, his colonial handler.

From *Soldado de armas* to *Soldado intelectual*

Unlike Fernando, whose actions hardly grab the limelight in Balmori's novel, Abad's *La oveja de Nathán* allows us to look into Bontulan's mind as he ponders his quandary. Unbeknownst to him, his post-war situation is another war; this time, it is a war for Filipinas, the *Madre Patria*. Seen from a larger perspective, his second *guerra* coincides with the sending of Philippine independence missions to the United States to argue for political self-determination for Filipinos. The politicians led by Manuel Quezon (1878-1944) bear the burden of proving political readiness of the Filipinos; ordinary Filipinos like Bontulan carry the weight of proving their intellectual capacities for independence.⁷

This is where Bontulan's *guerrero* masculinity evolves, a transformation not experienced by Fernando. From a *soldado de armas*, he becomes a *soldado intelectual*, an intellectual who fights not with bullets but with ideas. He leaves to Quezon and his entourage the job of talking politics and campaigning for independence in the halls of the American Congress. In the fields of France, he has proved his worthiness—in his mind he insists that America should not fail to see that—to enjoy liberty, as he has fought for the very abstract ideals America represents. In doing so, he argues in his mind that he has defended *Filipinas*, by providing a discourse articulated by his willingness to sacrifice himself and thus prove that his *Madre Patria* merited independence.

This is where the anti-Filipino sentiments of his employer (note that this man was a soldier who fought against Filipinos in the Philippine-American War) confound him. At the start, he lives a lie: the be-medalled example of Filipino heroism in the battlefield silently justifies his continued employment by a rabid “enemy” of his people. It would have been bearable if his employer only verbally expresses antagonism towards Filipinos. But

he does more: he makes Bontulan an accomplice by making him translate his sentiments into actions—Mr. Edwin Moore writes hostile editorials and makes Bontulan compose them in the press room. Bontulan’s work as a type-setter—putting together blocks of letters to form the text of Mr. Moore’s editorials—is an act of writing (re-writing to be exact, or the reproduction of discourse) —in itself; worse, he does not [re]write his original thoughts—he is composing for the printing press someone else’s intellectual output. His job will eventually lead to Moore’s ideas getting disseminated; each reader of his editorials becomes a site for discursive reproduction of anti-Filipinohood.

It comes as no surprise that his mother, Ta-Titay, dies towards the end of the novel, just when Bontulan’s moral compass is being heavily tested. His mother’s death—what may be seen as the signalling of an impending demise of the *Madre Patria*—becomes the turning point in Bontulan’s decision-making process. He decides to quit his job. He cannot be the co-opted colonial subject anymore; his mind has been freed—“purified,” if one will—by his willingness to offer his body as a sacrifice to defend abstract American ideas.

This is the moment when Bontulan finally comes out of his ideological cocoon and spreads his wings as an intellectual warrior, a *guerrero intelectual*. His manhood is no more defined by brawns; now it is guided by his mind. All those years of living with Don Benito Claudio and imbibing his teachings have culminated in this moment: Bontulan has become, hopefully in his mind, the Don Benito of his social class, if not his generation.

From soldier to intellectual is a transformation denied to Fernando. Fernando is just depicted as the rich scion of a wealthy family which would eventually lose its greatest wealth, its children, instruments for the reproduction of the bloodline. Fernando is no intellectual—he could hardly fend the arguments of a Japanophile uncle. What is highlighted in Fernando’s persona is his *amante* character: he loves Marta, and he loves his *Madre Patria*.

The economically-challenged Bontulan, however, is of a different streak. Before his decision to go to war, he roots for Germany; he even defends his pro-German and anti-British ideas before his mentor. He shows signs of being a thinker; moneyed Fernando does not. The decision to fight with the

Allies is an intellectual decision on Botulan's part, a decisive stand he makes, notwithstanding the doubts boggling him.. That he agonizes over telling his loved ones —his mother and his fiancée—indicates the intellectual debate raging inside his head.

There is more that meets the eye in the change from Bontulan *el guerrero* to Bontulan *el intelectual*. Seen from the larger context of Fil-hispanic literary production, the intellectual is another kind of Filipino soldier or warrior. One may even say that he represents the logical evolution of *guerrero* masculinity in the discourse of Philippine letters in Spanish.

The Filipino fight against Spanish colonial rule—until the push for secularization of the parishes in the late 1700s (which was more an ideological conflict between Spanish ecclesiastics and colonial officials) and the Propaganda Movements in the 1880s—was a struggle waged with weapons. Only with the coming together in Spain of progressive-minded expatriate Filipino students and other intellectuals (some were foreigners like Blumentritt; others, from the group of political exiles expelled from the country in the wake of the 1872 Cavite Mutiny) did a coherent Propaganda Movement—a war of minds—could be waged. Instead of bolos and makeshift arrows and spears, these intellectuals fought with their Spanish—the language of oppression turned into a language of resistance—and their pens: the newspaper *La Solidaridad* was born; it lived from 1889 to 1895, long enough for the world, the Madrid government especially, see that the *indios* in the far-flung Asian colony had an arsenal of intellectual gifts that allowed them to write histories, churn out novels, compose poetry, annotate texts, whip out satires, and critique every single declaration the colonial system would throw at them

The Spanish American *Caudillo*

García Márquez's novelistic highlighting of the military leader, the *patriarca*—an aged, physically and mentally sick, and cruel leader in *El otoño* and a fictional Simon Bolivarín political and physical decline in *El general*—follows a long tradition in Spanish American long fiction known as the

Caudillo novels. Morales Padrón (1983) classifies the *Caudillo* novels under the sub-genre *novela de la dictadura*.

To better differentiate the two labels, it will be helpful to look at Rebollo Torío's (1999) etymological dissection of *caudillo* and *dictador*: after tracing the Latin ancestry of *caudillo* and its semantic proximity to the *cacique* (a local chieftain), a lexicon native to Spanish America, he says that *caudillo* does not connote anything negative the way *dictador* does. A *caudillo*, he says, can mean a military commander who leads troops in defense of his territory; a *dictador*, on the other hand, does not have such positive connotations. He cites the case of Francisco Franco, ruler of Spain from 1939 to 1975, who appropriated the title *Caudillo*, but refused the label *Dictador*, which his critics used to call him. While Franco was a true-to-life general, Rebollo Torío points out that a *dictador* need not be an individual with a military background; he only needs to be seen as someone acting with impunity, not subject to the laws of the land, which he rules absolutely (331-332). Noguero Jimenez lists other terms used to refer to historical and fictional Spanish American strongmen, all of which suggest characteristics of a despot are *Patriarca*, *General*, *Patrón*, *Jefe* or *Padre de la Patria*. She even makes an inventory of attributes of the Caudillo personality: messianism, a redeemer sense of patriotism (the only-I-can-save-this-country mindset), megalomania, thanatophilia and misanthropy (92).

El otoño narrates the miserable existence of an infirmity-beseiged and superstition-controlled dictator. His name, Zacarías, is mentioned only once—a narrative suggestion of the insignificance of his identity marker.⁸One important facet of the *patriarca's* characterization is his egocentrism. This I-am-God mindset governs his actions, the more noteworthy ones being lunatic in nature, like his efforts to canonize his mother and proclaim her as “patroness of the nation” and “healer of the sick,” among others. This lunatic behavior—reminiscent of the ancient Roman emperor Caligula's, who named his horse as a senator—brings to mind Amate Blanco's point: the *patriarca's* egocentrism becomes the source of the ridicule he is subjected to (102).

A key characteristic of the *Caudillo's* characterization is the strongman's isolation and solitude. This is a double-edged sword: it seems to show his weakness and at the same time provides the key to understanding the process of mythification of the *Caudillo* in the novels. Morales Padrón claims the *Caudillo's* solitude is unavoidably needed to create an aura of omnipotence, whether it be in Asturias' *El señor presidente* or Roa Bastos' *Yo, el Supremo* (254-255). With omnipotence comes power: the *Supremo/Dictador/Caudillo* is a person of absolute power, and in real-world politics, he is "señor de todo...y se ha convertido su régimen en una dictadura, el país es una finca particular y la hacienda pública constituye sus propios fondos" (Morales Padrón 236). Yet this power brings isolation, which gives Spanish American narratives the chance to explore the idea of mythification of the *Caudillo* figure.

The *Caudillo's* body suffering from marginalization and isolation is scrutinized in *El general*. The fictional *Libertador* is pictured as an indecisive general, his life options limited and he experiences helplessness in his life. He is trapped by his circumstances, much like a laboratory mouse in a maze. Moreover, while used to a hard life, to the daily life of a soldier on campaign, *el general* is troubled by pain which his lover Manuela Saenz knew was coming from a "certidumbre melancólica de que había de morir en su cama, pobre y desnudo, y sin el consuelo de la gratitud pública." (14). This possibility of dying alone, helpless, and unacknowledged by a public that used to adore him heightens the sorrowful sensation coming from his pitiable physical condition: his doctors find him a diagnostic dilemma and can only offer him pain relief, not a cure. Even those surrounding him and apparently responsible for his care are unalarmed, prompted by the doctors' failure to identify his illness: "pues hacía más de cuatro años que las padecía, sin que ningún médico se hubiera arriesgado a intentar alguna explicación científica" (16).

A similar case of isolation and marginalization is seen in another García Márquez work, *El coronel no tiene quien le escriba* (1961). The image is further aggravated by the idea of the retired colonel relegated to oblivion...by the very government he once served. This officer, who had been comrades-in-

arms with Macondo's Col. Aureliano Buendía of *Cien años de soledad* fame, spends 15 years waiting for some notice for his pension. He fails to realize for a decade and a half that the end of the war also means the end of his service as a military leader, a position from which he gets his sense of importance. He is thus reduced to a life of poverty and misery. The work ends with a word in Spanish, an expletive, which best captures the emotional storm raging inside the mind of a 75-year-old former military man faced with hunger.

The sense of being forgotten is also felt by *el general*—he is abandoned by friends, whose loyalty he thought he would always have. His prestige has evaporated; the country turns into a *laberinto*, a metaphorical prison, for him, as he cannot leave it for not possessing a passport. Meanwhile, his undiagnosed illness results in his physical deterioration and decline, making it difficult to recognize him. In fact, stopped by police at some point of his journey, they fail to recognize the general. His illness is at such a stage that he fails to attend to a banquet prepared for him at a port town because he feels weak and has no appetite.

Isolation is also accompanied by the loss of commonality with the rest of humanity. The *patriarca's* body is robbed of ordinary human traits: his digits do not leave fingerprints, nor are there marks on the palms of his hands. Neither does he have any recognizable facial features. These corporeal anomalies make the *patriarca* a freak, and his appearance apparently forces him to stay away from the public eye.

Meanwhile, talk about *el general's* death has been going on for the past six years. He has been found once lying on the floor of the hut which served as his general headquarters, trembling and feeling cold in the middle of day, surrounded by hens he could not shoo away. He was thought to have an abdominal illness whose most serious manifestation was an indifference to the world and an absolute inner calm.

García Márquez's strongmen are no pictures of raw masculine strength. The general's weak body is presented early in the novel, and this weakness inevitably opens the door to the possibility of his dying soon:

...tenía el cuerpo pálido y la cabeza y las manos como achicarradas por el abuso de la intemperie. Había cumplido cuarenta y seis años el pasado mes

de julio, ya sus ásperos rizos cáribes se habían vuelto de ceniza y tenía los huesos desordenados por la decrepitud prematura, y todo él se veía tan desmerecido que no parecía capaz de perdurar hasta el julio siguiente. (10) –

[... had a pale body, and the head and the hands were extremely burnt by too much exposure to the outdoors. He just had 46 y.o. last July, and his rough Caribbean curls had become ashes and his bones were disorganized by a premature decrepitude, and the whole person looked so deteriorated that he didn't seem able to last until next July.]

The *patriarca* has no strength to offer himself. Even his military might is an illusion: he assumes power following a coup, but he remains in power due to the support of the British and American navies.

Manhood and Sexuality

No discussion of manhood can happen without touching on on sexuality; or in the particular case of the *Caudillo*, his sexual prowess. The affirmation of his sexual conquests complements the description of his military successes. His triumphs in the private world of the bedroom complete his sense of *guerrero* masculinity seen in the public world of the battlefield. The bedroom and the battlefield are binary points in the construction of his *guerrero* masculinity: the latter he controls while in uniform, the other he conquers while in a state of undress.

Such, in fact, is the sexual magnetism of the Bolivar figure in *El general en su laberinto*⁹ that women reportedly easily offer themselves to be bedded, but he is too weak to even perform. Nuns in one town he and his troops triumphantly enter have to lock convent doors and order the windows closed so that the novices will not succumb to any pulls of the flesh upon seeing him.

But the *patriarca*'s body, despite its avowed masculine sexual prowess, is said to be feminine, with taciturn eyes, pale lips and the hand of a sensitive bride. The figure of the *Caudillo* evokes the image of commanding individual, a dominant—even domineering—male figure. Yet *El Otoño*'s patriarch, in Arteaga Quintero's view, is a male ruler whose actions, beliefs, and lifestyle are influenced, even dictated upon, by the women figures that surround him, effectively rendering him an effeminate character. Although said to

have been born with a large testicle, the *patriarca* nevertheless, is weak and controlled by the women surrounding him (Arteaga 58-60), contradicting the suggested notions of increased strength due to a larger-than-average testosterone factory.¹⁰

Demystifying the *Caudillo*

The so-called “Hitler myth” (Kershaw 1987) is a good take-off point in looking at the phenomenon of the creation and demystification of the *Caudillo*. In his political biography of the Führer, Ian Kershaw defines the “Hitler myth” as a “heroic image and popular conception of Hitler imputing to him characteristics and motives for the most part at crass variance with reality” (2). Partly a creation of propaganda, partly a creation of the German masses’ imagination, the “heroic Hitler image” and the “Führer cult,” Kershaw says, established “a mass phenomenon, providing the Nazi regime with the legitimation of an adored leader enjoying an unprecedented degree of adulation and subservience from the people” (5).

What is interesting in Hitler’s cult image is how its dynamics intersect with the hero status of Simon Bolivar (1783-1830) accorded to him by his contemporary Latin Americans. Hitler offered post-World War 1 German society with a charismatic leadership that responded to the need for recovery of the prosperous pre-1914 German economic life and the restoration of German national pride. Hitler envisioned as solution the *Lebensraum*, operationalized as the wresting back of control of lost German territory in then-Eastern Europe as a result of the 1919 Treaty of Versailles. Bolivar’s version of *Lebensraum* is the liberation of Spanish America from colonial rule, and his feats as *El Libertador* no doubt helped bolster belief in the Great-Man Theory that took currency in a century that witnessed the rise of leaders like Napoleon Bonaparte (1769-1821) and Otto von Bismark (1815-1898), both military conquerors like him.

Defeat in war demolished Hitler’s hero image; for Bolivar, it was his political decline resulting from the rejection of his republican ideas by the urban elite. García Marquez’s *El general en su laberinto* (1989) is a fictionalized account of Bolivar during his last months of life, when he was suffering the

consequences of the reversal of his political fortune. The novel provides a platform from which to discuss the demystification of soldier heroes.

The hagiographical treatment given of Bolívar in Spanish American narratives presents a problem *El general* tries to resolve. In creating what Angulo Noguera calls “una versión descalzada de la ‘verdad’ histórica impuesta,” the novel tries to bring to the surface what has been omitted in the Bolívar biographies (46).

García Márquez’s Bolívar in *El general* is like his historical alter-ego: like the real-life Bolívar who died of tuberculosis, the former exhibits physical and mental illness; he is left with a few followers, and he no longer enjoys the pleasure of seeing jubilant welcoming crowds as he enters the cities in his itinerary. What this fictional Bolívar leaves readers is a *Libertador* in human form, with flaws and weaknesses, much unlike the larger-than-life Bolívar his biographies and historical accounts narrate.

El otoño on the other hand presents a satire on Spanish America’s military governments and their leaders especially those from the 20th century, as not a few of them—from Nicaragua’s Anastasio Somoza (1925-1980) to Chile’s Augusto Pinochet (1915-2006)—grabbed power with the blessings and support of other important states, notably the United States (Franklin D. Roosevelt’s “he’s our son of a bitch” comment comes to mind here). In the mid-1970s when *El otoño* came out, two particular Caudillos may be said to be targetted by the novel Cuba’s Fidel Castro and Pinochet).

Conclusion

Given the common identification of the *Caudillo* as the “padre del país,” one can easily read into the conflation of the figures of head of state and father of the national polity in the *Caudillo* novels a deconstructive critique of Spanish American military dictatorships during the Boom years. The military man’s proclivity to show itself as strong is contradicted by the weakness and illness of the *patriarca* and the fictional *Libertador*. The usual illusion of *Caudillos* that they are loved by their constituents is contradicted by the marginalization and isolation their character suffers in the novels.

There is an abundant repertoire of *novelas de la dictadura* in Spanish America; the historical connection is very clear: the countries of the region, once called in a derogatory manner as *banana republics*—one can recall the fictional United Fruit Company and the massacre of banana plantation workers in *Cien años de soledad*, and the real-life American corporation United Fruit Company—have, throughout the 20th century, ushered in military leaders who would evolve from seemingly-patriotic men in uniform to degenerate dictators.

The male principle also operates in the Fil-hispanic novel. The *guerrero* is a hero figure and defends the nation. During the American period when Abad's novel was published— that era when discovery of native mythological roots was the fashion, Filipinas was seen as the consolidation of the male and female principles. It is an idea embodied in the legend of Malakas and Maganda—the Philippines' mythological parents said to have sprang out of a common bamboo. Their names are just that, appellations; they are not attributes. One can be Malakas and still be Maganda; Maganda .can still be strong while being beautiful.

So in a dichotomized imaging of the country, where both Malakas and Maganda principles are present, the military man, the soldier, the *guerrero*, Fernando Robles in *Los pájaros de fuego*, and Mariano Bontulan in *La oveja de Nathán* only form half of Filipinas; the other half is borne by the Martas and the Natalias of *Los pájaros* and the Emilias and Ta-Titays of *La oveja*.

The Philippines has a different experience as compared with dictator phenomenon in Spanish America. Ferdinand Marcos (1917-1989), as the *dictador/Caudillo* figure in Philippine history, did not assume the presidential office as a man in uniform, although he was once one. He was allegedly a man of the law; but his imposition of martial rule in Philippine society changed the political dynamics and the operation of the law in the land. The novels that have been written since—unfortunately, only in English and Filipino—talk about a *dictadura* much different from the dictatorships Spanish America underwent through its messianic *Caudillos*.

Notes

1. Such a reading is possible. Efraín Kristal cites critic William Raymonds' reading of García Márquez novels in *The Colombian Novel, 1844-1987* "in the context of the historical and regional peculiarities of a nation" and analyzes the novelist's "take on historical events addressed by other Colombian authors" (2).
2. Bredin's Dreyfus biography (1986) provides an excellent discussion of the dynamics of military and civilian life of French fin-de-siècle society.
3. The play on the concepts of *madre* and *madre patria*, and *amada* can be seen in the *Noli*, where Maria Clara, the *amada* of the lead character, sings in Chapter 23 that moments spent in the *patria* are sweet; on the other hand, "dead is the breeze for him who does not / [have] a country, a mother, and a love." (*Noli*, trans. Lacson-Locsin, 186).
4. The case for a camouflage uniform came in the wake of the large number of French casualties in World War I, principally due to the insistence of the French High Command on national pride, that France's soldiers should wear the blue-and-red uniforms representing the nation's colors, thereby easily exposing them to German gunshots.
5. Rizal's influence in Balmori is clearly seen in this do-not-forget-us-those-who-fell-in-the-night passage, the last words by Elías to the young Basilio towards the end of *Noli Me Tángere* (1887).
6. The decline of Hispanic culture in the Philippines—symbolized by the deaths of the Robles children and uncle—is a motif that resonates in not a few post-1945 English language titles. A foremost example is seen in Nick Joaquin's play, *Portrait of the Artist as Filipino* (1966); the most recent case is Anna Maria "Bambi" Harper's novel *Agueda: A Ballad of Stone and Wind* (2012).
7. This uncannily recalls the exhortation in Rizal's other novel, *El Filibusterismo* (1991), to acquire education as proof of worthiness to acquire freedom, and the aversion for armed hostilities as a means to acquire it.
8. Interestingly, the *Caudillo* in Miguel Angel Asturias' *El presidente* (1946) is also unnamed.
9. Castañón (78) notes that some sectors consider *El general en su laberinto* as either a tribute or an act of treason against Fidel Castro (1926-2016) or Che Guevarra (1928-1967), pillars both of the 1959 Cuban revolution.
10. It is interesting to note that while novelists like García Márquez invest the *Caudillo* figure with sexual prowess as a function of his masculinity, a woman writing about Spanish American male sexuality avers that it is not the sexual conquest of a women that affirms manhood in their culture, but penetrative

sexual intercourse with a fellow male. She refers to it as “the hidden bisexuality of Latin men and even says that Vargas Llosa’s *La ciudad y los perros* has many references on the matter (Paternostro 28-29).

Works Cited

- Abad, Antonio. *La oveja de Nathán*. Bilingual ed. Translated by Lourdes C. Brillantes and Georgina Padilla y Zóbel. Filipinas Heritage Library and Ayala Foundation, Inc., 2013.
- Amate Blanco, Juan Jose. "La novela del dictador en Hispanoamerica." *Cuadernos Hispanoamericanos*, No. 370, April 1981, 85-102, cervantesvirtual.com/nd/ark:/59851/bmcf0n1
- Arteaga Quintero, Marlene. "El Otoño del Patriarca: En la novela del macho triunfa lo femenino." *Sapiens: Revista Universitaria de Investigación*, Vol. 8, No. 99, June 2004. inacademia.edu/15040828/El_Otoño_del_Patriarca_En_la_novela_del_macho_triumfa_lo_femenino.
- Asturias, Miguel Ángel. *El Señor Presidente*. Alianza Editorial, 1982.
- Bredin, Jean-Denis. *The Affair: The Case of Alfred Dreyfus*. Translated by Jeffrey Mehlman. George Braziller, 1986.
- Cammack, Paul, David Pool, and William Tordoff. *Third World Politics: A Comparative Introduction*. Red Globe Press, 1990.
- Castañón, Adolfo. "Gabriel García Márquez, *El General en su laberinto*," *Review*, 76-79, <http://bdigital.unal.edu.co/40787/1/12252-31276-1-PB.pdf>.
- Costa de Moraes, Wesley. *Las masculinidades bajo Pinochet: simbología y simbiosis en Mala onda y Tony Manero*. University of Toronto, 2013, https://vtechworks.lib.vt.edu/bitstream/handle/10919/23252/Costa_de_Moraes_W_T_2013.pdf.
- García, Juan Carlos. *El dictador en la novela hispanoamericana*. University of Toronto, 1999, tspace.library.utoronto.ca/bitstream/1807/12912/1/NQ45793.pdf.
- García Márquez, Gabriel. *El coronel no tiene quien le escriba*. Alianza Editorial, 1993.
- _____. *Cien años de soledad*. Edited by Jacques Joret. Ediciones Cátedra, 1987.
- _____. *El general en su laberinto*. Plaza & Janes Editores, S.A., 1989.
- _____. *El otoño del patriarca*. E-book. docs.google.com/file/d/0B4CzRM_58khtN3BhREN5LXdjZ28/view
- Hamilton-Paterson, James. *America's Boy: The Marcoses and the Philippines*. Anvil Publishing, 1998.
- Joaquin, Nick. *A Portrait of the Artist as Filipino*. Alberto S. Florentino, 1966.
- Hinojosa, Ramon. "Recruiting" the Self: *The Military and the Making of Masculinities*. University of Florida, 2007, etd.fcla.edu/UF/UFE0021114/hinojosa_r.pdf.
- Keegan, John. "Warfare and Masculinity." In *Global Politics in a Changing World: A Reader*. Ed. Richard Mansbach and Edward Rhodes. Houghton Mifflin Company, Inc. 2000.
- Kershaw, Ian. *The Hitler Myth: Image and Reality in the Third Reich*. Oxford University Press, 1987.

- Kristal, Efrain, ed. *The Cambridge Companion to the Latin American Novel*. Cambridge University Press, 1991.
- Mansbach, Richard and Edward Rhodes. *Global Politics in a Changing World: A Reader*. Houghton Mifflin Company, Inc. 2000.
- McCoy, Alfred W. *Closer than Brothers: Manhood at the Philippine Military Academy*. Anvil Publishing Inc. 1999.
- Morales Padrón, Francisco. *América en sus novelas*. Ediciones Cultura Hispánica del Instituto de Cooperación Iberoamericana, 1983.
- Noguerol Jimenez, Francisca. "El dictador latinoamericano (Aproximación a un arquetipo narrativo)." *Philologia Hispalense*, vol. VII, 1992, 91-102, revistascientificas.us.es/index.php/PH/article/view/2036/1881.
- McCoy, Alfred W. *Closer than Brothers: Manhood at the Philippine Military Academy*. Anvil Publishing Inc., 1999.
- Paternostro, Silvana. *In the Land of God and Men: A Latin Woman's Journey*. Penguin Group, 1998.
- Perruci, Gamaliel. "The Study of 'Great' Leaders in Latin America." Paper presented at the Second Art of Management and Organization Conference in Paris, France, September 7-10, 2004, pdfs.semanticscholar.org/bf64/8b9998cd3a-47d84e7e9afec0c0f521459928.pdf.
- Pfanner, Toni. "Military Uniforms and the Law of War." *International Review of the Red Cross*, vol. 86, no. 853, March 2004: 93-124, icrc.org/eng/assets/files/other/irrc_853_pfanner.pdf.
- Pulido Herráez, María Begoña. "El general en su laberinto y la crisis de la historia narrativa." *Revista Iberoamericana*, Vol. LXXII, No. 215-216, April-September 2006, 559-574, revista-iberoamericana.pitt.edu/ojs/index.php/Iberoamericana/rt/printerFriendly/98/0.
- Rebollo Torío, Miguel. "Tres Dictadores, Análisis Lingüístico (en Valle Inclán, Roa Bastos, y García Márquez)." *Anuario de Estudios Filológicos*, XXII, 1999: 329-349, dialnet.unirioja.es/descarga/articulo/58964.pdf.
- Reyes, Soledad. *The Romance Mode in Philippine Popular Literature and Other Essays*. De la Salle University, 1991.
- Rizal, Jose. *El Filibusterismo*. Translated by Ma. Soledad Lacson-Locsin. Bookmark, 1996.
- _____. *Noli Me Tangere*. Trans. Ma. Soledad Lacson-Locsin. Bookmark, 1996.
- Roa Bastos, Augusto. *Yo, el Supremo*. Edited by Milagros Esquetro. 2nd ed. Ediciones Cátedra, 1987.
- Salkin, Jeffrey K. *Searching for My Brothers: Jewish Men in a Gentile World*. The Berkeley Publishing Group, 1999.

Sommer, Doris. *Foundational Fictions: The National Romances of Latin America*.

University of California Press, 1991.

Vargas Vargas, José Angel. "El general en su laberinto: un acercamiento a la realidad latinoamericana." *Filología y lingüística*, XIX (2), 1993, 31-38. <https://doi.org/10.15517/rfl.v19i2.20209>.