

Guest Editor's Introduction

Philippine Studies commemorates the 150th anniversary of José Rizal's birth with four articles that assess the impact and legacy of the national hero's *Noli me tángere* (1887) and *El filibusterismo* (1891). The two most salient facts about these novels are that they, along with Rizal's correspondence, are now read by most Filipinos in translation, and the fact that they, like any other literary work, can be read in a number of different ways.

All four articles look closely at the problems and challenges of reading and translating these two chefs d'oeuvres. In so doing, they show how the enduring interest in and long-staying power of Rizal's novels have depended not only on the manifold ways in which these novels have been able to "speak" to their readers across the chasm of years as well as changing mores, contexts, and perspectives, but also on the contest over meaning that they have provoked and the means and stakes of the struggle they entail.

John N. Schumacher revisits the Catholic Church's controversial response to the 1956 Republic Act 1425 that mandated the teaching of Rizal's "life, works and writings" in all public and private schools, colleges, and universities. He compares several drafts of a 1952 pastoral letter prepared by the Jesuit priest and historian Horacio de la Costa with the 1956 Statement written by Fr. Jesus Cavanna and issued by the church against the Rizal Bill. Schumacher's careful analysis reveals important differences of opinion between De La Costa and Cavanna over Rizal's depiction of the Spanish religious orders and colonial-era church practices. De la Costa, grappling with questions of fictionality, intentionality, and biography in his reading of Rizal's satire, argued that Rizal's criticism targeted the abuses committed in the name of the church by its representatives rather than the doctrine of the church itself. De la Costa affirmed the value of Rizal's novels by calling for more research, translation, and teaching to be done on them in order to better educate young Filipino readers in the nuances of Rizal's position on religion and the church.

The 1956 Statement was itself an act of interpretation, but one that was diametrically opposed to De la Costa's reading. In reading Rizal's criticism of

church abuses as an outright attack on the church, the statement armed itself with its own justification for condemning the novels. Moreover, in making it a “sin” to “read these novels in their entirety, or to keep, publish, sell, translate, or communicate the same to others in any form” (to quote Archbishop Rufino Santos), the bishops attempted to arrogate to themselves the right to control not only how the novels should be read, but who may read them and who may have access to them. Although the bishops proved unsuccessful in preventing Filipinos from reading Rizal’s novels, Schumacher argues that they “merely removed the possibility that there would be an annotated edition explaining the possibly offending passages”—a move that, I should add, ultimately harmed the church by lending credence to critics who accused the church of promoting obscurantism. Schumacher’s essay casts Horacio de la Costa as a “Catholic protagonist of the ‘new Propaganda Movement,’” and, in showing that nation building was not necessarily incompatible with religious belief, provides readers with a nuanced account of the debates and divisions within the Catholic Church.

It is telling that Cavanna’s condemnation of the novels as attacks on the church is based on his citation of a passage from Rizal’s letter that was originally written in German and subsequently translated into Spanish, and then “paraphrased” by Rafael Palma in his Spanish-language biography of Rizal, which in turn was translated into English by Roman Ozaeta. In the course of the letter’s journey across languages, its contents shifted in meaning as Palma inserted the phrase “rituals and superstitions” where no such phrase existed in the German original and its Spanish translation. Cavanna’s reading of the novels as satires of the Catholic religion and church in effect draws on Rafael Palma’s own motivated reading of Rizal—a powerful illumination of the vicissitudes and consequences not only of “a translation of a translation,” but also a reading of a reading.

The politics of reading and translation are the central concern of Anna Melinda Testa-de Ocampo’s essay, which looks at two early, and by now little-known and unread, American translations of the *Noli me tangere*. Testa-de Ocampo traces what she calls the “afterlives” of Rizal’s first novel by showing how various emphases, mistranslations, and omissions in *An Eagle Flight* (1900)—itself based on a French translation of the *Noli*—and *Friars and Filipinos* (1902) were shaped by the particularities of translation, and, just as important, by the wider intellectual project of introducing a little-known former Spanish colony to its new American masters, and by the habits of reading, tastes, and perspectives of the American reading public for

whom these translations were intended. These translations affirmed Rizal’s heroism and martyrdom while insisting on his reformist stance. But they also differed substantively in their understanding of how important the issue of friar abuses was to the overall “message” of the novel.

The problem of translation is also addressed by Ramon Guillermo in his essay on one of the most memorable episodes of *El filibusterismo*. In Chapter Thirteen, “The Physics Class,” Rizal tackled the issue of the alleged inferiority of the “raza malayo-filipina” in the field of science by pointing out the sorry state of colonial education in the premier university of the country. As with Schumacher and Testa-de Ocampo, Guillermo employs careful textual analysis with great effect by comparing the handwritten and printed versions of the *Fili* as well as several Filipino translations of the novel. His tracking of the “intertexts” (the texts and concepts cited in the chapter) leads him to the problem of how to translate into Filipino Aristotle’s seminal concept of *to ti ên einai* (what was to be) or *to ti esti* (what is), rendered into Latin as *essentia* and English as “essence.” The comic absurdity of Padre Million’s brand of casuistry, which slyly moves the discussion of “surface” away from physics and into metaphysics, is lost in subsequent Filipino translations that fail to convey Millon’s deliberate confusion of categories. Horacio de la Costa’s call for further research and translation remains as urgent in our day as in his.

Guillermo also addresses head-on the issue of Rizal’s use of biological explanations, based on then-popular theories of race and heredity, to account for the inferior performance of the *indio* in the field of the sciences. Here, again, the problem of translation rears its head in Blumentritt’s translation into German of Rizal’s Spanish, a translation that downplays the biologism of Rizal’s idea of intelligence in order to bring Rizal’s notion into line with Blumentritt’s own brand of “enlightened humanism.” By highlighting the consequences (not all of them intended) of the work of translation, Guillermo makes an eloquent case for the necessity of paying close attention not only to potential “gaps” in and between the languages in which we read and understand Rizal in our time, but also to real differences between our thinking and perspective and Rizal’s, arising from the specificity of the historical and intellectual context in which Rizal lived and worked.

This critical awareness of the changing meanings and contexts that shape our understanding of Rizal is forcefully argued in Filomeno V. Aguilar’s study of the keyword *filibustero* in Rizal’s second novel and other writings. Aguilar tracks the migration of the term across referents and centuries, from its origins in sixteenth- and seventeenth-century piracy in the Caribbean to its applica-

tion to nineteenth-century Yankee militarist-adventurers and Cuban revolutionaries to its late nineteenth-century arbitrary use by the state in colonial Filipinas to its final, belated appearance in metropole-Spain's official dictionary after "Mother Spain" had already lost its colonies.

The semantic instability of the term was instrumental in conjuring up the specter of *filibusterismo* in the Philippines, a specter whose association with "terror and freedom" in discourse and imagination proved eminently capable of being translated into real acts of violent repression on the part of a colonial state that found itself under increasing pressure from its restive subject population. Far more important, in his second novel, Rizal exploited the semantic instability of *filibustero* to turn the loyal Spanish subject Crisostomo Ibarra into the revolutionary Simoun. Rizal endows Simoun with the mystique of the nineteenth-century filibuster from the Americas, but in revealing to his readers that Simoun, whom other characters in the novel take for a "foreigner," is actually a "Filipino" (at least in the classic sense of one who was born in the Philippines and considers the Philippines home), Rizal summoned up the apocalyptic image of a Filipino revolution-to-come. The power of this conjuration practically guaranteed his execution, but also turned his name into a rallying cry of the revolutionary Katipunan and secured his legacy for the Philippine Republic in its checkered career over the past hundred years.

Filibustero's origins in piracy lead Aguilar to adopt a "maritime optic" that highlights the critical but hitherto understudied contribution of the seafaring "Manilamen" to late-nineteenth-century Philippine history. As cosmopolitan as the *ilustrados*, some of them were actually real-life filibusteros who, as mercenaries, were in the service of both the Qing state and the Taiping rebels in China, and who, as revolutionaries, organized themselves in support of the Philippine revolution. While the *ilustrados* have seen their reputation take a beating in the long twentieth century, the Manilamen have not only cemented their reputation as some of the finest seafarers in the world, but also seen their itinerant life stories quietly but gradually become the life stories of a great number of their fellow Filipinos, now christened "Overseas Filipino Workers." Their lives as Manilamen and OFWs are reshaping the grand narratives of the Philippines and the world in ways that reveal the possibilities and limits of nationalism, not only in Rizal's time, but also in ours.

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