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Chronicles of a Monastic: Three Books by Sr. Teresa Joseph Constantino, O.C.D.

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REVIEW ESSAY

Chronicles of a Monastic: Three Books by Sr. Teresa Joseph Constantino, O.C.D.

Susana Jose/Sister Teresa Joseph Constantino. **Cry, Beloved Mother Church, Rejoice!** Reprint, Quezon City: Castillo Publishing, 1986/2004. xxx, 392 pages.

Josefina Constantino, O.C.D. **Reaching Out to God in the 21st Century.** Quezon City: Asian Catholic Publishers, 1994. 101 pages.

Sister Teresa Joseph Constantino, O.C.D. **Personalizing Russia: Even By Those Who Know Her Little But Love Her Much.** Quezon City: Carmelite Monastery of St. Therese, 2004. vii, 636 pages.

The Catholicism of the Filipino is often portrayed in its folksier aspects, sometimes with malice. Shorn of propriety and good taste, his or her religiosity is thought to be imbued with a native faith and a little knowledge (which can be a dangerous thing). We can argue against such a superficial rendering of the Filipino as Catholic. This essay, perhaps, does something similar by examining a relevant yet unexplored theme: the contemplative dimension of the Filipino. Is there such a dimension, we ask.

I approach the issue not directly but through a side-gate, which is by perusing the work of Sr. Teresa Joseph Constantino, O.C.D.: formerly

Josefina Constantino, professor of literature at the University of the Philippines, newspaper columnist, MIT fellow, Central Bank administrator, and writer. She is now a cloistered Carmelite nun. Even while immersed in the demands of contemplative life, Sister Teresa has managed to compile a noteworthy collection of her writings. This review essay takes up three of her books (each originally written under a different name) and uses these as a window into the mind and spirit of a Filipino contemplative.

The first book, ambiguously titled *Cry, Beloved Mother Church, Rejoice!*, is really an autobiography. It is written as an epistolary, the author telling her story through a series of imagined letters addressed to figures who played a central role in her life of faith. St. Teresa of Avila, mother of the discalced Carmelite order, is one. Another is Fr. James Moran, S.J., father-confessor who guided her to eventually enter the order. In these letters, Sr. Teresa traces the long road to her vocation—a particularly late one. In her letter to Pope John Paul II, she recounts how suffering through her father's death and the war had led her to thirst for union with God, something that would mark her life henceforth. At one point she recalls how, as a professor at U.P., she would be chastised for allegedly proselytizing in class. Included in these letters is one actually written by her critics questioning why she would be seen spending entire nights in front of the Blessed Sacrament at the U.P. Chapel. Through the overlapping themes of these letters, the author traces the nurturing of her contemplative spirit.

The narrative is about the moving hand of God in her life. She recounts a particularly memorable and mystical event that occurred during her visit to the Basilica at Montmartre, an account reminiscent of the Trappist Thomas Merton's own epiphany at the Cloisters that is told in *The Seven Storey Mountain* (1948). Sister Teresa recounts how God worked through her father-confessor, Father Moran whom, curiously enough, she would visit at the Carmelite monastery on Gilmore Avenue in Quezon City, where he was detained throughout the Japanese occupation. Little did either of them suspect that this same monastery would become her home many years later. The connection does not end there. For instance, she recounts:

For the day before I enplaned for Cagayan de Oro to enter Carmel . . . I went to him for his final blessing. . . . So he continued to pray over me because I was still on my knees. Then he said, by way of a goodbye: "Go, child, I offer my life for your perseverance!" Those were his last words. He was in Manila and unaware of my entrance hour in Cagayan, the day after, March 25. Then we were told later. His heart attack came at the very hour of my entrance into Carmel's enclosure door. . . . That same day, March 25: Fr. Moran's entry to heaven (life eternal) and my entry (into a living death): into Carmel. (Constantino 1986/2004, 22–23)

The book, in other respects, is every bit about the role of the contemplative in Philippine society. Rather than simply remove one's self to seclusion, the Filipino contemplative plays a vital part in the life of the society around her. It is clear in her account that the 1986 liberation at EDSA was won as much in the convents and monasteries as in the streets of Metro Manila. Following each twist and turn in the EDSA saga, their prayer seemed to guide the career of events outside. In these letters, she relates a number of epiphanies she realizes about her Church and the contemplative life. The first is the realization of how Philippine society evolves as an outcropping of the spiritual life of her Church. EDSA, in her telling, was God's revelation of the power and vitality of the Philippine Church. The Philippine contemplative, moreover, is potentially capable of finding a merger between Western and Eastern spiritualities. The contemplative life does have a place in Filipino society. Remarking again on Juan de la Cruz, she says in her letter to the saint of the same name:

And because as a people, the image of and faith in Jesus crucified had literally been structured into our subconscious, through the inculcated *passion* . . . we can literally take this as a deeply interiorized "given" in the Filipino sensibility. . . . Yes, we can truly say, dear Father, that our people can easily begin knowing your doctrine because the cross is a fact we don't have to labor over or discover. . . . But considering how you can truly link East and West through the discipline of contemplative prayer . . . and parallel-wise, how we as a country do seem to be a most fitting laboratory because we are both of

Asia and the West—indeed it does not seem accidental that we are named after you. . . . (Ibid., 236)

The as yet unrealized union of Western and Eastern spiritualities is a recurring theme in Sister Teresa's work. The second book, *Reaching Out to God in the 21st Century*, takes up Asian spirituality by comparing four traditions of faith in Asia: Taoism, Buddhism, Zen Buddhism, and Catholicism. This book requires some skillful writing and imagines a roundtable discussion among these faiths. Whimsically, the discussion moderated by Mark van Doren, her former teacher and a longtime friend of Thomas Merton.

The discussions are obviously contrived but artfully done. The discussants realize strong commonalities in their faith systems, among which is their common notion that suffering is both a universal condition and the premise for enlightenment through self-negation. The denial or stilling of self is a shared element in all of these traditions. What is most interesting, however, is how they differ. As the Catholic discussant (a Filipina university professor) tells it, Christianity is set apart from the others by the Incarnation. Through this deep mystery, God allows Himself to be known intimately by humankind. This allows the relationship to become a personal one between Lover and Beloved. The force of this union with the absolute is not simply enlightenment or liberation from the false, as in the other faiths, but love. The proper response of the contemplative is not simply abandonment of self or pure experience, but adoration. There is no hiding the fact that the book is written by a Catholic, but the sharing among the four faiths seems genuine.

Her longest book is a two-volume work entitled *Personalizing Russia: Even by those who know her little but love her much*. Formally, the book is a reflective treatise on the unification of Eastern and Western Catholic traditions. It is an odyssey of sorts, as Sister Teresa leaves the cloister for a few months and ventures into a breathtaking, new land on a wing and a prayer. The book revolves around two lectures delivered by Sister Teresa on ecology and spirituality, wrapping diary accounts, correspondence, and literary selections around the lectures. However, the heart of the book is as much about the wonder and sometimes hapless stumbling

around as Sister Teresa takes Russia in, letting herself be guided by the Spirit, bearing witness to God each step of the way.

The first lecture, delivered in Moscow, takes up the theme of ecology and spirituality. It begins with Teilhard de Chardin's notion of the noosphere, the Divine essence of the universe, and the idea of an evolutionary process toward that perfect unity with the Divine. Having identified "ecology" with the Divine milieu, she proceeds to outline a notion of integration that, stated rather matter-of-factly, nevertheless strikes one with its bold and awesome simplicity. As Weber might have put it, civilization has forever struggled with the separation between truth (or reason, as others might put it) and ethical life. This separation melts away not through some Weberian notion of *wertrationalität* but in the concept of Beauty. This Beauty, which amounts to beholding the perfection of Truth, can only be understood as an ineffable reality that cannot be fully spoken of but only experienced.

The book is the personal scrapbook of a contemplative bearing witness to her faith in a strange, new world. The most delightful parts of the book are about her encounters—with drunken passengers on a train, with being utterly lost in a strange city, with the gripping cold of the Russian winter, and with the discovery of God's providence, which always seems to bring a friendly face, a nun's helpful arm, or other serendipitous encounters as helpful strangers never fail to pop up out of the darkness. All this is seen through the eyes of someone who ventures into the unknown with an unfailing faith that, somehow, God will provide. These delightful, literate vignettes, recorded with a journalist's eye, are a swirl with the small epiphanies that accompany this Providence:

I stood at the corner of the road, awaiting whom? I didn't really know. I knew there was no one to meet me. I had made no arrangements. . . . Suddenly, I saw coming my way, God be praised!—A Sister in a black habit, with a white toque. She herself looked anxiously at me and stopped to talk to me. "Have I lost my way?" she asked. . . .
(Constantino 2004, 220)

The second lecture was delivered in a symposium on Science, Religion, and Monastic Culture, a follow-up to the previous one. The author gives

an improvised talk on her own Carmelite contemplative tradition, which I found engrossing. Realizing the need to establish the Carmelite foundation, she introduces the three doctors of the church that figure most prominently in the Carmelite charism: St. Teresa of Avila, St. John of the Cross, and St. Therese of Lisieux. She lays out the Carmelite's horarium, i.e., daily routine. The schedule, which is a surprising retinue of activities, is as follows (*ibid.*, 385-86):

4:45 a.m.	Awakening with a clapper and a call to praise
5 a.m.	Angelus and private prayer
6 a.m.	Divine Office
6:30 a.m.	Mass
7:15 a.m.	Thanksgiving
7:30 a.m.	Divine Office
7:45 a.m.	Breakfast
8 a.m.	Spiritual reading
9 a.m.	Work
11 a.m.	Divine Office
11:30 a.m.	Examination of conscience
11:30 a.m.	Lunch
12 p.m.	Angelus
12:15 p.m.	Recreation
1 p.m.	Silence
2 p.m.	Divine Office
2:30 p.m.	Work or class
4 p.m.	Preparation for vespers
4:30 p.m.	Silent prayer
5:30 p.m.	Vespers
6 p.m.	Angelus
> 6 p.m.	Supper
6:45 p.m.	Recreation
7:30 p.m.	Rosary, examination of conscience, Compline
8:30 p.m.	Divine Office
10 p.m.	Great silence
11 p.m.	Lights out

Evidently, prayer, even contemplative prayer, requires a serious work ethic. The lecture, in fact, is an exposition on prayer. Her point is simple:

the salvation and renewal of Russia, the redemption of Science, and the renaissance of the modern era lie in the rediscovery of the contemplative spirit. It is not hard to recognize that behind each reflection about the Russian soul is the author's evocation of her own Philippine spirituality. There are other bonds between the Russian faith and the author's own—both are unequivocally Marian, which one reads into her reflections on the icon-rich interiors of the Russian churches.

As one reads the loving, faithful account of a Carmelite nun's journey into the Russian soul, one realizes how the book is really about the spiritual union of East and West that began to spring within her own person. At one point in the book, she recounts how she, unsure yet hopeful, took part in the Eastern communion rite:

Then it was I. . . . The priest balked. He stopped and looked at me. . . . I told the priest, with my two palms together pleadingly "Carmelit, Carmelit!" The priest nodded and gave me communion. "Glory to God, Heaven has come! Jesus, my Savior and my King, you are here!" . . . In me at that very moment, our two churches were one! (Constantino 2004, 341–42)

While, on the face of it, *Personalizing Russia* is a dizzy narrative of plain and ordinary things—ice on the sidewalk, strangers on a bus, a biscuit and a cup of tea—it is distinctive when seen through the eyes of one who takes it all in borne entirely by faith. It is engrossing to read the sometimes breathless account of events as they unfold in the immediate and tactile surface of things while, at the same time, hinting at movements deep beneath in a reality that cannot completely be spoken of but only lived.

And there are other books: *On Faith and Holiness*, a collection of her old columns from the *Manila Chronicle* (soon to be reprinted), a tribute to Elizabeth of the Cross, and others. In them, there is always the lively intellect and literary gifts of their writer, but also always that transcendent element. It is both ironic and fitting that these works come from an oasis (or is it a desert) in the middle of a city reeling from its congestion.

But, returning to our original question, what do these works say about the Filipino as contemplative? Perhaps, that she is ever discovering the

Incarnation in her being and in the unfolding society around her (because Philippine society is always unfolding, never defined, as is the ever-evolving yet never-realized union of East and West). Maybe her identity can only be expressed as dialectic (or *advaita*), but the Filipino realizes, in her faith, a coming together of modernity and tradition, and it is always a challenging union. Perhaps, more than in other cultures, the Filipino is free to realize this integration as, simply, Beauty to be adored, never needing to be verbalized. As Sister Teresa points out, the archetypal Filipino is, after all, named after Juan de la Cruz, Spanish mystic and doctor of the Church. The Filipino has her deepest, perhaps forgotten, roots in contemplation that we see in the rich, sometimes mystifying, ways we live out the Incarnation. We might do better by more deeply understanding our contemplative dimension. In this light, the Filipino Church is East and West, modern and nonmodern, and the Filipino diaspora has in some sense a missionary vocation. This dimension must exist, since in the maelstrom of Philippine society, with its upheavals and contradictions, the Filipino maintains traces of the wholeness of that center. In Sister Teresa's words (here I quote an unpublished poem):

This pulchritude of being
This fleeting still point . . .
In the quiet still forever
Moving silence of all meaning.

In a society that is beleaguered by all that have been corrupted, it is, as she says, the "pulchritude of being" that we seek as source of our longed-for integrity.

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BOOK REVIEWS

Karl M. Gaspar. **Mystic Wanderers in the Land of Perpetual Departures.** Foreword by Fr. Esmeraldo A. Reforeal, O. Carm. Quezon City: Institute of Spirituality in Asia Inc., 2005. 381 pages.

Pierre Bourdieu's theory is perhaps not as commonly applied to the study of Philippine culture as those of Derrida, Althusser, Jameson, and other poststructuralist thinkers. However, Karl Gaspar is rare in his attempt to apply Bourdieu's theory in the Philippine context. Through him emerging Mindanawon authors are now beginning to be acquainted with this theory.

This book can be read from two perspectives: from outside-in and from inside-out.

First, the challenge that the author poses to himself is to examine spirituality not only normatively but also descriptively, not only as lived experience but also as academic discipline. Here, Bourdieu's theory of the "habitus and capital" comes in handy. Gaspar's work is pioneering in the application of Bourdieu to spirituality studies. Most books on spirituality remain on the level of idealist discourses, of visions and values, of love and generosity, of oblation and kenosis. Karl Gaspar tells us that it is also playing with capital present in one's habitus and against other players, also spiritual people, in the same field called the church. Such a premise can draw out novel insights on spirituality.

Gustavo Gutierrez's *Drinking from our Own Wells* (*Beber en su Propio Pozo*, 1983) took great pains to assert that liberation theology was not only

political but also theological. Gaspar's work argues for the opposite view: that spirituality is not only theological but also political. In a highly euphemistic universe (e.g., we always warn people to refrain from asking "*magkano ang bayad sa binyag; magkano kung magpa-misa*" because the sacraments can't be bought; we don't call the *kolekta* as monetary contributions but "love offering"), Gaspar—by his use of Bourdieu's framework—does not hesitate to call spirituality the practice of asserting or mobilizing one's capital. In a world where human practice is seen as an expression of utter generosity to God and others (as shown in related spirituality terms like "oblation," "self-emptying," "dedication"), this book does not hesitate to analyze the stance of practitioners of spirituality in relation to other actors in the so-called ecclesial or religious field, unconscious they may be.

While spirituality and religious life have always been viewed as a divine calling, Gaspar invites us to see it more as realistic and human, as historical practice, as a game, in fact. If spirituality were a game, the players would be his nine religious informants who have a "feel" for such a religious game even from childhood (*habitus*), with differing trump cards or chips (Gaspar, following Bourdieu, calls this *capital*), and whose manner of playing is determined by other players within the *field* called Mindanao Church. To understand such practice is to understand the game and its dynamics.

If the nine informants have a feel for this game today (that is, a spiritual life nourished by their work with Indigenous Peoples or IPs), it is because their *habitus* from childhood already led them to this: the rosaries of their grandmothers, the priests who frequented and ate in their homes, the Basic Ecclesiastical Communities (BECs) organized in their localities, the religious schools they attended, their being settlers themselves or their affiliations to *lumad* (ethnic) communities, and so on. These exposures, which sociology calls "primary socialization," already predisposed our players to this game with ease and gusto. Such analysis of spirituality has already been done in previous studies on the psychological, social, and cultural background of religious vocations. What Gaspar has achieved is to make these researches (most of them pietistic) resonate in sociological language to be consistent with scientific discourse.

What is original in Gaspar's work, however, is that he sees these personal predispositions as forms of capital, and the practice of spirituality as engagement with other players that also possess other quantities and forms of capital. This may seem to be irreverent and blasphemous, for who would ever think that when we wept as we uttered our vows, or when we walk miles to reach an IP community, or when we live without urban comforts, we were or are gaining some form of capital? We think we are giving up all that we possess "for the greater glory of God" and "for the sake of the kingdom," only to be informed by this book that we have, in fact, gained. But Gaspar challenges us to give ourselves that hard look.

This challenge is best shown in his excellent analysis of the Mindanao church, in which Gaspar has been a key player for a long time. In the positioning of the Mindanao-Sulu Pastoral Conference (MSPC) vis-à-vis the repressive Marcos regime, all the social and cultural capital of the church were marshaled to protect grassroots communities. The progressive MSPC position was also a game (a critique or reproach) against the dominance of more established churches in Luzon and Mindanao. Even the so-called rupture within the Mindanao church itself was a game of capital between the dominant (mostly traditional) hierarchy and its progressive elements, mostly from lay movements. What are crucial in this game are the positions practitioners take. In other words, the Mindanao church can take such a progressive option because it was in a dominated position vis-à-vis more powerful forces in the economic, political, and ecclesiastical establishment. In the process, it won for itself some "marks of distinction" (a gain of capital), which the more dominant and traditional powers envied and later adopted (or, shall I say, coopted) into its own framework: the BECs, the option for the poor, lay empowerment, spirituality for social transformation, and so on. These were parts of the game of the Mindanawon church long before they were enshrined in the texts of the Second Plenary Council of the Philippines (PCP II).

Gaspar's study opens many other avenues to further investigations, which limitations of time and resources prevented him from pursuing. The logic applied by Gaspar to the politics of the Mindanao churches is the same logic he used to analyze his nine religious informants and the type of spirituality they practice. These informants pursue the direction

of negotiating their dominated capital in the field of dominant forces, be it in their own families, in the localities where they came from, within the congregations they joined, and even in the context of the IP communities with whom they worked. For, as Gaspar also acknowledges in the spirit of reflexivity, even as these religious work among the dominated of society, respecting their way of life without taints of condescension, they in fact exercise some form of power by their mere presence, and by the force of the cultural and social capital they carry with them in their language, minds, and bodies. This is the same kind of power that their congregations carried with them when they opted to work among the marginalized communities in a situation where there were dominant religious communities working in Mindanao and in the whole country. Further research along these lines can help us understand the realistic human dynamics involved in our spiritual and religious options—and the spirituality of the religious working among indigenous peoples.

However, lest he be misunderstood as positing sacrilegious ideas, Gaspar also adds that, beyond being a human engagement, spirituality is a personal-communal relationship with the divine. Gaspar's study asserts that within human practice—within all its political struggles for capital mobilization—springs forth the feel for the beyond, the urge to wander, to be “wildmen and wildwomen” for the Other. Here, Michel de Certeau is his guide—that man who was a wanderer all throughout his life, both internally and externally, in response to the promptings of the Other beyond him.

Gaspar diligently and meticulously tallied his nine religious informants' responses to questions of spirituality that he posed to them. All the responses revealed that their experiences of God irrupt from within the monotony of the everyday—experiences of exile and loneliness, moments of need and limits, the times when they were free to cry, and so on. These liminal spaces, where the play of capital is most intense (e.g., of being pulled to the poor and the perceived lack of support from the companions of their own community; of being in love and not wanting to possess; of being called to pray in the midst of Muslim chants or indigenous rituals), become the horizons where the “God of surprises” reveals Himself or Herself. Gaspar's study alerts us that historical practice in all its humanness (i.e., the play of capital and its politics from

which spirituality is never exempt) is always characterized by uncertainty, unevenness, and ambiguities. But it is precisely this uncertainty that provides the space in which the irruption of meaning, of life, of God may occur.

With Bourdieu, Gaspar's study looks at spirituality from outside-in. With de Certeau, it invites us to view it from inside-out. Ironically, in his works, de Certeau is in polemics with Bourdieu, just as phenomenology can never sit well with structuralism. But Gaspar has made these two great authors and philosophical traditions to sit down and dialogue with each other in order to put forward a view of spirituality for our times.

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Ligaya Fernando-Amilbangsa. **Ukkil: Visual Arts of the Sulu Archipelago.** Quezon City: Ateneo de Manila University Press, 2005. 296 pages.

The author, an artist and a former teacher in Tawitawi, has regaled us here with a coffee table book that follows and surpasses her earlier *Pangalay* illustrated presentation of folk dances and other related artistic expressions in Sulu (Filipinas Foundation, 1983). This new volume is a feast for the eyes, with abundant and beautiful color photographs and exquisite drawings. It covers a wide range of artistic genres found in the Sulu Archipelago: basketry, cloth weaving, embroidery, appliqué and cutwork, pottery, carving, blacksmithing and casting, and gold- and silversmithing. Of great importance to the researcher are comprehensive classification tables that follow some of the chapters, the most notable being those of the various decorative designs, the designs in mat weaving, embroidery, grave markers, and selected blacksmithing products.

The graphics of this book, at least most of the photographs and all the drawings, are of high quality. In themselves, they bear a well-deserved testimony to the diverse richness of Sulu's visual arts across the years and until now. For me, most stunning is the cover itself that reproduces

a Burrak picture made of shells, mounted and painted on a board around 1975 by Jaiyan Kara, a young Sama artist from Sibutu, Sitangkai, TawiTawi. Another contemporary Tausug sculptor, National Artist Abdulmari Imao, gave the final touch to the cover, and contributed many photographs and drawings to this volume.

Visually, this book does justice to the little-known (and often misunderstood) cultures of the Sama and the Tausug peoples. Further, it illustrates in vivid colors the research work that was started forty years ago by David Szanton, which was published by the Institute of Philippine Culture (1963) and revised for *Sulu Studies* 2 (1973). Ms. Amilbangsa dutifully acknowledges this pioneering work. However, the absence of any reference to Harry Nimmo's *Magosaha* (Ateneo Press, 2001), where the Sama Dilaut boatbuilding in TawiTawi takes a whole chapter, is regrettable.

Not being a social scientist, the artist-author approaches her subject in a very descriptive way that is often uncritical. For instance, she presents a map supposedly of the "Muslim areas in the Philippines . . . in 1521" (p. 10), but the map is of recent political vintage and has no significance to her study. Moreover, this map ignores completely the existence of the indigenous peoples who dwelled in those very areas since long before the coming of Islam. Elsewhere, the discussion of the versatile wood carving adze, the *patuk*, on page 174, would have benefited from some of its pictures relegated to pages 234–35. This amazing tool is at the center of Sama boatbuilding and other forms of carving, especially in Sibutu.

These criticisms notwithstanding, this lavishly illustrated volume is an important and unique artistic contribution that ought to trigger a renewed interest in Sulu's traditional arts, visual and others, as well as in their revival. It ought to be used by educational institutions in Mindanao and elsewhere in the Philippines. This visual documentation is all the more timely these days because of the threats, on one hand, of modernization and, on the other, of fundamentalist condemnations from radical Muslim quarters.

To paraphrase a recent and felicitous assessment of classic books, I dare say that the great merit of Amilbangsa's *Ukkil* is that of a thoughtfully designed book that makes "nearly as important a statement to the

reader as thoughtfully written books.” (A. Rawsthorn, *International Herald Tribune*, 19 June 2006, p. 7). The author and her publisher are commended for regaling the reading public with this beautiful publication.

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Cirilo F. Bautista. **Bullets and Roses: The Poetry of Amado V. Hernandez, a Bilingual Edition.** Manila: De La Salle University Press, Inc., 2003. 165 pages.

It is said that so much is lost in translation. No matter how masterful the translator is in the receptor language, the translation always falls short of capturing a poem, especially its musicality. Such is not the case, however, of most of Cirilo Bautista's rendering into English of some of the poems of Amado V. Hernandez, one of the Philippines' most prominent Tagalog poets, who in 1973 was proclaimed National Artist in Literature.

Take, for example, the following stanzas from “An Armstretch of Sky,” a translation of “Isang Dipang Langit,” one of Hernandez's most popular poems:

From the narrow window all I can see
Is an armstretch of sky full of tears,
a meager cover to a wounded heart,
a ghastly emblem of my falls and fears.

Sharp as lightning are the eyes of the guard,
nobody dares approach the padlocked door;
the prisoner's cry in the nearby cell
sounds like an animal's desperate roar.

The whole day is like a heavy chain
dragged by a pair of bloody feet,

the whole night is a mournful veil
on the prisoner's sepulchral retreat. (140)

People familiar with the prosody of traditional Tagalog poetry, which Amado Hernandez followed in almost all of his poetic works, will see that Bautista's translation read aloud is close to the way the original Tagalog sounds. One can readily attribute such an achievement to the fact that Bautista is poet par excellence in both English and Tagalog. The following stanza from "Tranquility" ("Tining") is another example:

the father forgot he was a prisoner,
the mother forgot that she was not well,
and the young child forgot her tattered clothes;
amidst the thorns the rose is beautiful . . .
for a few moments the three together
felt that not all in the world was bitter. (81)

Though Tagalog is syllabic and English is accentual, Bautista succeeds in making Amado Hernandez "speak" in English while retaining typical Tagalog melody and sentiment. If readers familiar only with modern English poetry find the translations wanting in metaphorical sophistication and subtlety of expression, it is because Bautista is being faithful to the original.

It may be noted that, while Amado Hernandez was familiar with modern world literature, he followed the movement identified by poet-critic Virgilio S. Almario as *Balagtasismo*. Poets who followed this movement, which dominated Tagalog poetry in the first four decades of the twentieth century, were modern in thought but oral/traditional in style. They made use of familiar or stereotypical images, and they were direct, even redundant, in presenting their insights, the better to connect with their listeners or readers majority of whom belonged to the lower classes. And so the concept of organic unity, the objective correlative, was learned and adopted by a later generation of poets in Tagalog.

Where one may critique the book is, first, its selection of poems. Bautista asserts that Hernandez ranks first in the hierarchy of Philippine poets, "a Filipino of the first magnitude" (42). It is surprising, then, that of the forty-six poems of Hernandez that Bautista translated, more than

half are arguably his minor poems, such as “Dalangin ng Manlalaro” (Athlete’s Prayer), which Hernandez dedicated to the Filipino team that participated in the Olympic games in Rome. “Saturday” (61), “Paradox” (67), “Carats” (69), “Black and White” (71), “Short Story” (76), and “Queen” (101) are poems brief and almost prosaic. Length, of course, is never a criterion for a good poetry, but, if the intention is to introduce a Tagalog poet of “first magnitude” to non-Tagalog readers, then more poems the equal in length and depth of “An Armstretch of Sky” (111), “A Vow for Freedom” (147), and “Motherlanguage” (163) should have been included. Bautista should not have limited his choices to the poems that appeared in Hernandez’s collection *Isang Dipang Langit* (1961). An epic poet himself, Bautista could have translated instead a part or the whole of Hernandez’s epic poem, “Bayang Malaya” (Free Country), published in 1969. For this reader, Hernandez’s popular poems, such as “Kung Tuyo na ang Luha Mo Aking Bayan” (If Your Tears Have Dried Up My Mother Land), “Bayani” (Hero), and “Ang Panday” (The Blacksmith), belonging to earlier collection of poems, better manifest the poet’s “socially realistic romanticism,” which Bautista proclaims is the mark of Hernandez’s genius and “the source of his permanence as an artist” (42).

The second weakness is what seems to be the inadequate documentation in Bautista’s forty-two-page introduction, in which he identifies the stages of development of Tagalog poetry as “Period of Religious Songs,” “Period of Change,” and “Period of Popularization.” It may be purely coincidental, but such a periodization is found in Julian Cruz Balmaseda’s lecture entitled “Ang Tatlong Panahon ng Tulang Tagalog: Pag-aaral sa Kasaysayan at Pagkaunlad ng Tulang Tagalog” (The Three Periods of Tagalog Poetry: A Study on the History and Development of Tagalog Poetry). The lecture was delivered on 28 July 1938 at the Villamor Hall of the University of the Philippines as part of a series of lectures on “Tagalog Language and Literature” sponsored by the Surian ng Wikang Pambansa (Institute of National Language). It was later published as a monograph under the same title in August 1938 (reprinted in 1947 and in 1974). It is now considered a canonical study of Tagalog poetry, a required reading for graduate and undergraduate students of Filipino/Tagalog literature. Great minds may think alike, but one could not help

but wish that Bautista had acknowledged Balmaseda as a matter of scholarly deference.

Finally, there are a few debatable renderings. The phrase “bigat ng taon” (46), for example, which expresses the idea of the hardships of aging (*taon* means year), is translated as “burden of strife” (47). The Tagalog idiom “buhay-alamang” (48) is more appropriately “senseless life” rather than “difficult life” (49).

Notwithstanding these shortcomings, the translation project is a laudable effort, a great service to Tagalog poetry in general and to the memory of Amado V. Hernandez in particular.

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