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**Gabriel A. Bernardo, A Memoir**

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# Gabriel A. Bernardo, A Memoir

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NATIVIDAD P. VERZOSA

**"T**HE choice of how to make one's living is crucial, for the work a man does makes him what he will become. The blacksmith pounds the anvil, but the anvil also pounds the blacksmith. The clam's shell turns golden in the brown depths of the ocean, and in far more subtle ways is a man's mind colored by the course of his life. So when a man chooses his labor he chooses his future self." This passage from Robert Russel's *To Catch an Angel* reminds me of Gabriel A. Bernardo. Books were his anvil. He spent his life among them; they shaped him and through them, in turn, he came to understand humanity and God. As teacher, librarian and bibliographer, many will remember him.

Born in the last decade of the Spanish regime (Barasoain, Malolos, 14 March 1891), the young Bernardo felt the impact of the transition from one regime to another and the consequent reverses of fortune that some families had to go through. After finishing his elementary and secondary education in the public schools, he worked his way through college. In 1918, he was sent to the University of Wisconsin as a government scholar in library science and bibliography, and was awarded a Certificate in General Library Services in 1920. Upon his return to the Philippines he enrolled for graduate studies in the state university and obtained his Master's degree in English and Bibliography in 1923.

In 1929, he left for Germany as University of the Philippines fellow in advanced library science. He was guest lib-

rarian at Leipzig University and at the Prussian State Library in Berlin. While in Leipzig, he worked in different departments of the university library and at the same time observed administrative and technical services at the Deutsch Bucherei. In the University of Berlin, he took up advanced library science courses.

His increasing knowledge of the various phases of library administration, together with his observations at the Prussian State Library Union Catalog and Information Bureau, led to his determination to undertake a union catalog for the Philippines, a project for which he worked and planned up to the time of his death.

No one realized better than himself that if he was to realize his plan he needed to equip himself by constant and relentless formal training. He returned to his country fired with a generous ambition to use his talents and training in the service not only of the particular library in which he was employed but also of all the libraries of the Philippines. His dedication was real, but many of his contemporaries could not understand his vision. He became, in many ways, "the voice of one crying in the wilderness."

#### THE LIBRARIAN

In an extemporaneous talk to the students and faculty members of the U.P. Institute of Library Science on March 19, 1963, Dr. Lester Asheim, Chairman of the International Relations Board of the American Library Association, said that usually an institution was the lengthened shadow of the man who had planned its growth. He was speaking in general, but I was forcibly reminded of Professor Bernardo, who had spent more than three decades of his life in the service of the Library of the University of the Philippines. He began in 1924, when he succeeded Miss Mary Polk as Librarian and Head of the Department of Library Science, and stayed up to his retirement in 1957, one year beyond the compulsory retirement date, at the request of the institution which he served.

During this period the Library of the University of the Philippines went through several stages of development. Be-

tween 1924 and 1929, Professor Bernardo's preoccupation was the acquisition of a permanent building for the Library and the expansion of its staff so as to include professionals capable of handling the courses offered by the Department of Library Science. This Department as developed by Bernardo can justly claim that it has supplied the country with most of its trained librarians.

From 1929 to the outbreak of World War II Bernardo was to a large extent engaged in putting the Library in order after its transfer to new quarters. Many will still remember the new building at the old university site on Padre Faura, with its high-ceilinged reading room and inviting reading tables. This reading room had two mezzanines on its north and south ends. One was a browsing room and the other held the collection of Spanish books and El Greco reproductions donated by the Spanish government. For the students, there were the five decks of stack area with glass floors and carrels. Space was provided for a Filipiniana Room which contained a carefully selected collection planned for the use of researchers.

Pleasant surroundings are important to libraries, but even more important are their resources—financial, material, and human. Budgets for libraries are never adequate, and so one test of a librarian's greatness is his ability to use funds to the greatest advantage. Before the war, the university's collection, although not too large, was of very high quality. It was fully adequate to meet the needs for instruction and research at the time. Professor Bernardo spent much time going over the catalogs of well-known dealers in the United States and in Europe, comparing prices before making his purchases. His favorite motto, *Festina lente*, served as guide to many of his decisions.

But Professor Bernardo did not allow books to assume greater importance than people. He paid much attention and care to those who worked with him. He had a deep understanding of human nature and an all-embracing compassion for people. His broad-minded outlook kept him open to suggestions. Cognizant of each one's ability and weaknesses, he

was always ready to give the individual the opportunity to better himself or the chance to retrieve his failures.

The notes which he prepared for an address to the Chinese Library Association in October 12, 1962, delivered two months before he died, contain some of his ideas on what a professional librarian should be. "The true professional librarian must have all his being properly disciplined." He mentions the three H's—the Hand, the Head and the Heart: "the hand representing technical skill; the head representing the 'well ordered mind, the thinker who plans, organizes and administers the proper utilization of materials and human resources of his library'", and the heart, which he equates to "his humaneness, his ethical relations not only with his public but with his superiors, equals and subordinates."

The Japanese Occupation, 1942-1945, was a particularly difficult time for the University Library. However, in spite of privations of all kinds, the Library, under Professor Bernardo and a skeleton staff, resumed its services as soon as the University opened in October 1942. (Professor Bernardo had to be forcibly recalled, for he refused to serve at the beginning of the Japanese occupation.) It is disheartening to recall all the efforts he expended to save the collection, storing it in such a way to prevent its being either censored and burned, and then to find it in ashes after the Battle of Manila.

Soon after the War, even before the streets were cleared of mines and booby traps, Professor Bernardo began his work for the rehabilitation of the libraries and archives in the Philippines. Prof. Joseph Ralston Hayden, then Civilian Adviser and Consultant on Philippine Affairs to General MacArthur and Chief of the Philippine Research and Information Section, GHQ, AFWESPAC, encouraged Prof. Bernardo to proceed with his plans and provided space for the initial work on the University of the Philippines Library. At the death of Dr. Hayden, the collection which he had gathered at the Philippine Research and Information Section was officially designated as a memorial to this great man. The bulk of the collection was transferred to the University of the Philippines and it formed the nucleus of what was to be the Hayden

Memorial Library. Among the materials included in this collection was the Hester Collection.

In 1946, Prof. Bernardo left for the United States, detailed by the University of the Philippines as technical adviser to the Philippine Foundation of America. As a result of his sojourn in the United States, the University Library received donations from the University of Michigan, the University of Minnesota, the State Department, the Rockefeller Foundation, the American Library Association, the American Book Center, and many others.

Referring to Prof. Bernardo's work at this time, Lee Ash, then Secretary of the Foundation and later Librarian of the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, said:

Many of us recall the inspired and inexhaustible U.P. director of libraries and director of the Library School, Prof. Gabriel A. Bernardo, who visited the United States just after the war. We can easily remember his devotion to the library buildings and book collections he had seen the Japanese destroy before his eyes, and we often think about his almost unbelievable personal suffering during the war. We remember also his years of labor for the cause of library development and education in his homeland, his burning passion for the ideals and accomplishments of scholarship, his own contributions to Philippine literary and humanistic studies, his drive for the re-establishment of library resources in the Islands, and his desire, in turn, to be as helpful as he could to American librarians.<sup>1</sup>

It was in recognition of his work that the Rockefeller Foundation in 1947 awarded him a grant-in-aid for library service and education for librarianship.

Prof. Bernardo's unpublished writings and letters from 1945 on give but a faint idea of his incessant activities in trying to put the University Library on its feet again. He realized that the greatest drawback was the lack of means to make the collection fully available to both students and faculty members. Availability in library terminology meaning accessibility of its materials through its catalog, its serial indexes and its

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<sup>1</sup> Lee Ash, "Review of Reynald Swank's "The Libraries of the University of the Philippines; a survey report with recommendations 1954' ". *Library Journal*, v. 80, no. 1, Sept. 15, 1955. p. 1888.

bibliographies. One of the recommendations of the Swank *Report* was that the existing collection be catalogued. This bolstered the oft repeated request of Prof. Bernardo for additional personnel to cope with the expanding technical services of the Library.

The cataloging project was eventually staffed with the help of Philcusa, the Mutual Security Agency and Stanford University. The long hours spent on getting the project started weighed heavily on the shoulders of the librarian. I remember the afternoon when, at a staff meeting specially called by Prof. Bernardo, he announced that Dr. Lewis F. Steig had been cleared by Washington to come and direct the cataloging project. This was such a significant step that Prof. Bernardo spoke of it with tears of happiness.

He was a firm believer in the value of professional associations and took active part in the Philippine Library Association, the Unesco, the Philippine Numismatic and Antiquarian Society, the Asia Federation of Library Associations (Tokyo), the Philippine Accrediting Association of Schools, Colleges and Universities, the Catholic Educational Association of the Philippines, and the Bibliographical Society of the Philippines.

He was co-founder of the Philippine Library Association (1923), and served as President in 1927-31, 1933-34, 1949-53, and 1957 to the time of his death. One of his last contributions to the P.L.A. was to sponsor an amendment, which was approved, abolishing voting by proxy. This will go far toward making the P.L.A. a truly professional association. In 1930, the P.L.A. became a member of the International Federation of Library Associations, but this membership was later allowed to lapse. Prof. Bernardo felt this very much and he often urged the P.L.A. board to do something about it. Now, all this has been straightened out and the P.L.A. has reactivated its membership to the I.F.L.A.

#### THE BIBLIOGRAPHER

Prof. Bernardo emphasized the importance of bibliographies for any type of research work. He deplored the fact

that no one was undertaking the up-dating of the already published (but imperfect) bibliographies on the Philippines, and that there was no means of knowing where certain works could be found even in our own country. But he did not just talk about this. He undertook the job himself. His earlier bibliographical works consist of exhaustive studies of individual titles and of subject bibliographies ranging through folklore, language and literature, history, and anthropology. Some of these have been published. Unfortunately, his critical bibliography on Philippine linguistics, and that on *awits* and *corridos*, were destroyed during the Battle of Manila. With these, he also lost his personal copy of the Master's thesis he presented for graduation in the University of the Philippines in 1923: *A critical and annotated bibliography of Indonesian and other Malayan folklore*. Fortunately, he was able to retrieve a copy of this bibliography after the War. He continued to add to the entries and to revise them, but death prevented his publishing the revised work.

Prof. Bernardo was never satisfied with less than complete accuracy in his entries and notes. Publishing to him was to be approached with extreme caution, and many blamed him for being such a perfectionist. In the following passage which I quote from a letter he addressed to Mr. Clark H. Milam, Secretary of the American Library Association, dated October 8, 1952, he outlines his method of work:

Fearing that some important phase of the subject might be omitted, we made an exhaustive compilation of data before I began writing the narrative. Then, I selected the materials so that only primary sources having direct bearing on the subject could be used. The selection was very discriminate, but when I finished the original draft, it reached nearly one hundred typewritten pages. Of this, I have made five successive revisions, but as you see, I have succeeded in shortening the article only to 45 typewritten pages. Excluding the footnotes, of course, the paper is much shorter than it looks; but then the bibliography (which is also selective) has to be added, and that makes the paper longer again.

All of which has convinced me that I have attempted to undertake the task "only to be crushed by the mass and weight of materials too vast for the hands that had tried to grasp them" as Edward Edwards so appropriately puts it.



Long before the outbreak of the War he began work on the analysis and comparison of existing bibliographies with the result that after the War he was prepared to propose a project to compile a retrospective Philippine bibliography which would supersede the existing comprehensive bibliographies. He also proposed the publication of a current bibliography as a complement to the retrospective.

In 1949, at the first meeting of the Committee on Bibliography of the P.L.A., of which he was Chairman, he proposed these projects and they were fully discussed. After several meetings, the plans were embodied in a report sent to the Unesco Library of Congress Bibliographical Survey.<sup>2</sup> The proposed program of action (p. 266-67) is as valid today as when published, if only the government or some foundation can be persuaded to endow a national bibliographic center.

In 1950, the members of the P.L.A. Committee on Bibliography together with others interested in bibliographic work formed the Bibliographical Society of the Philippines. Prof. Bernardo was its first President. Under his guidance, several bibliographies were produced, some as contributions of individuals, others of institutions like the University of the Philippines, the Ateneo de Manila, and Far Eastern University, to mention but a few.

After his retirement from the University of the Philippines, Prof. Bernardo accepted an appointment as Rizal Professor of History at the Ateneo de Manila which enabled him to devote himself to his retrospective bibliography. His careful comparison of entries in the different bibliographies—Retana, Medina, Pardo de Tavera, Griffin, Pérez y Güemes, Robertson, and others had been typed and he had completed the first part of this project at the time of his death.

In his address to the Rizal Centennial Conference of Librarians, Archivists, Bibliographers and Book Collectors, June 9-11, 1961, of which Prof. Bernardo was Chairman, Father de la Costa said:

<sup>2</sup> "Present bibliographical services in the Philippines," 1950. *Philippine Social Science and Humanities Review*, XV, 3, S 1950, p. 257-272.

This brings me to my first point, namely the need for a national retrospective bibliography of the Philippines which would list not only the authors and titles of all Filipiniana items of any importance, but also indicate the location, whether here or abroad, of those of which only one or a few copies are extant. How immensely would such a research tool lighten the labors of those engaged in a study of our history! How much time it would save which is at present lost in random and fruitless inquiry and how tremendously it would improve the standard of scholarship! I believe we have all known for some time that Professor Bernardo is at present engaged in preparing for publication precisely such a bibliography, the result of many years of patient and painstaking labor; and I am sure you will all join me in expressing the hope that this Rizal Centennial Year will see the publication of the first volume or volumes of this *magnum opus*.

The present writer cannot presume to say that Prof. Bernardo inspired or initiated most of the bibliographical activities now in progress in the Philippines. But this at least can be said, that if anyone understood bibliography and bibliographical services, Gabriel A. Bernardo did.

We may fittingly end this memoir with the following bibliography of Prof. Bernardo's published and unpublished writings.

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