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Editor's Introduction

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In *Imagined Communities*, Benedict Anderson advanced the argument that the novel refracted the nation—both operated along similar coordinates of time and space—and held up Rizal's *Noli me tangere* as an exemplar. But, in this issue of *Philippine Studies*, Anderson reexamines the *Noli* and questions its status as a sacralized text, read as if it were a source of eternal verities of nationhood. In a pioneering endeavor, he enumerates the use of key words that may harbor “political” and “racial” concepts, and demonstrates the mistake of imposing upon the *Noli* our present-day notions and categories of Filipinoness and “national consciousness.” Even more interesting is the absence of certain words that provide clues to categories of people history tells us existed, but which Rizal excluded from the *Noli*'s imagined community. He also points us to how Tagalog words are deployed in the novel. Anderson's quantification of the *Noli*'s semantic richness and fluidities provokes us to reexamine our assumptions about Rizal; the *Noli*, its characters, and intended readers; and the formation of Filipino nationhood. This revision must necessarily be done in relation to colonialism, migration to the metropole, and the world system as the defining contexts of the first sparks of nationhood.

Anderson's dissection of the *Noli* suggests that the interpretation of texts has a history, which can be seen as an integral part of the history of the book that Patricia May Jurilla discusses in her essay. As an introduction to a freshly demarcated field of study, Jurilla's article alerts us to the materiality of textual production that often goes unnoticed in literary studies. She stimulates us to think about the history of publishing and printing in the Philippines, the changing physical forms and contents of texts, the industrial complex of text production and distribution, the relations of texts to markets and the state, the different

social actors involved in textual production, and the social ramifications of published works. Literary criticism has much to gain from an engagement with the historical sociology of the text, and vice-versa.

In considering the history of the book, Luciano Santiago's research on women writers and publishers during the Spanish period signifies a crucial intervention. His article rectifies the view that, except for the token nod to "the women of Malolos," generally disregards the role of women in textual production during that era. This male dominance, which is inevitably linked to the towering figure of Rizal and other male textual producers of the period ("heroes of the nation"), must now be put in proper perspective—even as it compels us to analyze the relationship between gender and nationhood. Although admittedly preliminary, Santiago's survey adequately calls attention to the women writers and publishers who trekked the course from religious tracts in the seventeenth century to secular themes during the second half of the nineteenth. The context of this transformation and the impact of specific works need an elaboration that others can pursue.

The history of the book takes an intriguing turn in the state-sponsored Centennial Literary Contest of 1998, the winners of which have profited from the money prize, the publication of their works, and the prestige and other immeasurable aspects of winning in a society enamored with all sorts of gambles and contests. Robby Kwan Laurel courageously confronts the literary establishment that produced this textual game. Kwan Laurel's spirited critique takes three winning novels as a set, and exposes the various aspects of literary (mal)production. A key issue he considers is the writers' inability to represent Philippine colonial and postcolonial histories in a way that does them justice, raising the question of why indeed these novels won. The search for an explanation impels Kwan Laurel to revisit the 1940 Commonwealth Literary Contest and to explore commodity relations and the cultural logic of contemporary capitalism. In combining literary criticism and the sociology of the text, Kwan Laurel's essay points to real gains in a serious pursuit of the history of the book. But other questions arise. What should be literature's relationship to nationhood and the state, especially in a nation peopled by countless non-readers? Must we now leave behind the shadow of Rizal's *Noli*? Can we?