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José Rizal and Benito Pérez Galdós: Writing Spanish Identity in Pascale Casanova's *World Republic of Letters*

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Abstract: This article will examine the relationship between Casanova's *World Republic of Letters* and its critical importance, demonstrating the false dilemma of anti-colonial resistance as either a nationalist or cosmopolitan phenomenon. Her contribution to the field gives scholars a tool for theorizing anti-colonial literature thus paving the way for a new conceptualization of the 'nation' itself. As a case study, we will look at the novels of the Filipino writer José Rizal and the Spanish novelist Benito Pérez Galdós.

Keywords: Spain – Philippines – José Rizal – Benito Pérez Galdós – World Literature – Pascale Casanova.

A dialectical history of Pascale Casanova's ideas could look something like this: Her *World Republic of Letters* tries to reconcile the contradiction between 'historical' (i.e. Post-colonial) reading of literature with the 'internal' or purely literary reading by positing 'world literary space' as the resolution. However, the very act of reflecting and speaking of the heterogeneity that is 'world' literature (now under the aegis of modernity, whose azimuth is Paris) creates a new gravitational orbit. This synthesis of 'difference' into 'identity' reveals further contradictions of power and access, which in turn demand further analysis. Is the new paradigm truly better than the old? Or perhaps a better question would be: what are the liberatory possibilities contained within the new paradigm that could not have previously been expressed in the old?

The following attempt to answer that question will be divided into three parts: first we will look at Rizal's novel, *Noli me tângere*, and examine the uneasiness with which the protagonist approached Europe and modernity itself. The second part will look at

Rizal's second novel *El filibusterismo* to show the author's use of world literary space as a means of escaping the cultural domination of Spain. The third section is dedicated to Benito Pérez Galdós, the great Spanish realist writer, and the role of colonialism in his narrative. The perspectives of the two writers will show us the structure of Casanova's 'republic,' reflecting a hierarchy that was constantly making and unmaking itself, creating new and relative possibilities of subjectivity.

José Rizal was a Filipino writer and polymath whose novels *Noli me tângere* (1887) and *El filibusterismo* (1891) are considered to be the great foundational texts of Philippine literature and Philippine national consciousness. Rizal and his work can be seen as the site of struggle in which two seemingly opposing forces that Casanova, amongst others, has pointed out: on one hand he is intrinsically linked to the nation through his staunch defense of the rights of Filipinos there at the end of the Spanish Empire. On the other, he was a polyglot cosmopolitan who spent an enormous portion of his adult life in Europe (Spain, Germany, Belgium, France, and England) and left behind an enormous quantity of correspondence in several languages (notably Spanish, French, German, and English amongst others, in addition to his native Tagalog). Perhaps unsurprisingly, his novels also bear the marks of this apparent conflict: although written in Europe and published in Berlin and Ghent, respectively, the plots of both novels take place solely in the Philippines. Even the language of the novels themselves is revelatory: although they were written in Spanish, only a small portion of the population could speak it, let alone read it¹. Moreover, given that most who read Rizal nowadays do so in English, there are now even more layers of linguistic mediation between text and reader. Thus, the international and cosmopolitan networks of translation, publication, consecration and consumption are again inextricably linked to so-called 'nationalist' writers. With a few notable exceptions², the relative dearth of critical attention to Rizal from the Spanish perspective is perhaps explained by this process, which seems to have circumvented the channels by which Spanish-language literature is produced and disseminated. "Despite being canonical authors of Philippine literature in Spanish," writes Rocío Ortuño Casanova, Rizal and other Filipino writers of the late Spanish and early American period are "distant from the literary canon in the Spanish language" (58).

Rizal's novels were considered to be one of the catalysts for the Philippine revolution, and his execution in 1896 for sedition was due in no small part to the scathing critique of the colonial apparatus contained therein. However, it would be a mistake to claim Rizal as an unambiguous revolutionary; on the contrary, his novels actually demonstrate a certain skepticism towards the most violent responses to colonial

¹ The precise number of Spanish-speakers in the Philippines is a source of contention. Anderson claims that "Till the very end of the Spanish regime no more than 5 percent of the local population had any facility with the colonial language" (195). Nonetheless, others have claimed the number could have been as high as 60 or 70% in cities like Manila by the end of the nineteenth century. See Rodríguez-Ponga 47.

² For a more extensive list of those exceptions, see Ortuño Casanova.

rule. Yet, this ambiguity is what powers the narrative; in identifying the contradictions in himself and of his time and place, he understands the contradictions of Philippine identity.

In Rizal's *Noli me tângere*, the protagonist, Crisóstomo Ibarra, returns from Europe with the intention of establishing a school in his hometown. We see Ibarra as he walks alone through Manila and is haunted by the "demonio de las comparaciones:" Manila, Madrid, and other European locales meld together in his walking reverie. The sensory experience of Manila is distorted by the mental presence of the "beyond," and he cannot disentangle the "here" from the "there." He looks to the sea and says:

¡A la otra ribera está Europa! Pensaba el joven: ¡Europa con sus hermosas naciones agitándose continuamente, buscando la felicidad, soñando todas las mañanas y desengañándose al ocultarse el sol... feliz en medio de sus catástrofes! Sí, á la otra orilla del infinito mar están las naciones espirituales, sin embargo de que no condenan la materia, más espirituales aún que las que se precian de adorar el espíritu...! (*Noli Me Tângere* 43).

Though he is physically in the Philippines, his thoughts are in Europe. Those recollections offer him an interesting bit of solace: Europe, as defined by Ibarra, is characterized by struggle. Yet, it is a struggle disembodied and detached from any specific national space. He understands them because of their abstract nature. They are 'spiritual nations' not concrete ones, and he is not concerned with any individual country as much as his own conception of their shared struggle. He again is lost in the abstract cosmopolitan space of modernity. Moreover, despite the materialism that such a modernity would entail, it is, almost paradoxically to Ibarra, a 'spiritual' materialism. It elevates the material to the realm of the spiritual, contrary to the hypocrisy of the friars who use the façade of spirituality itself to further their own material needs, thus denigrating it.

The move can be seen as a deconstruction of the word *geist* (Keep in mind that Rizal wrote most of the novel while in Germany and was fluent in the language): 'mind,' 'spirit,' 'ghost?' He could then be seen to be contrasting the European *geist* (read 'mind') with the Spanish/Philippine *geist* ('spirit,' in the religious sense). There are those nations that adore the spirit ('religion,' also 'ghosts of the past,' etc.) and there are those that are even more spiritual (united by ideas, the mind, etc.) despite their refusal to condemn the 'la materia.' The 'spiritual nations' do not condemn 'la materia,' (the concrete, matter, material, etc.), but its substance is precisely what Ibarra cannot comprehend in the Philippines. He is trapped between languages, unable to assert a fixed meaning to an otherwise polysemous 'ghost' that haunts his thoughts.

The narrator reminds the reader of that concrete reality. A few pages earlier in his walk through Manila, Ibarra takes pleasure in the fact that almost nothing has

changed in his absence. “¡Es maravilloso” he exclaims, “Diríase que esta noche he soñado en siete años por Europa! ...y ¡Santo Dios! continúa aún desarreglada la Piedra como cuando la dejé!” (*Noli Me Tángere* 18). The narrator then speaks up to confirm Ibarra’s observation, locating it in concrete terms: “En efecto estaba aún desprendida la piedra de la acera, que forma la esquina de la calle de S. Jacinto con la de la Sacristía” (*Noli Me Tángere* 18). Ibarra is pleased to be home and that everything is how he left it, the irony of course being that in seven years no one has bothered to repair the broken pavement stone. That irony, however, is lost on Ibarra. The narrator again chimes in, this time sarcastically, calling the scene a “maravilla de la estabilidad urbana en el país de lo inestable” (*Noli Me Tángere* 18). In a dialectical turn, stability and instability converge to signify for Ibarra the quaint nostalgia of his homeland, far from the centers of European modernity. But modernity itself is also a source of instability, and this recognition is only possible through its lack.

Ibarra, a mestizo of Spanish and Filipino ancestry, is the site of confluence between Europe and Asia in body and mind. However, in an instant his thoughts change. Immediately after Ibarra’s speech on the ‘spiritual nations’ of Europe, the novel continues: “Pero estos pensamientos huyen de su imaginación á la vista de la pequeña colina en el campo de Bagumbayan. El montecillo, aislado, al lado del paseo de la Luneta, llamaba ahora su atención y le ponía meditabundo” (*Noli Me Tángere* 43).

At once, the reverie ends as soon as Bagumbayan enters his field of vision. Just beyond the walls of Spanish Manila, Bagumbayan was the location of public executions, and it is no small irony that Rizal himself would be executed there just a few years later. It was also where three priests (Mariano Gómez, José Burgos, and Jacinto Zamora, collectively referred to as *Gomburza*) were garroted in 1872 under false accusations of inciting the Cavite mutiny, a native uprising in which Rizal’s brother, Paciano, was implicated (Rizal himself would dedicate his second novel to the priests’ memory). It is at this moment that the Philippines becomes real for Ibarra; it is no longer a disembodied concept but the location of actual struggle. Bagumbayan concretizes that struggle in a specific time and place, and Ibarra has no choice but to confront the image.

Upon seeing the execution site, he can sense the struggle, but it remains for him ineffable. Despite his eloquence and education, his only response is silence. Colonialism, as a signifying system, becomes embedded in the thoughts of its subjects. Ibarra cannot bring himself to fully de-link from the colonial order. A few sentences later, after contemplating his father’s ignominious end and his own European education, Ibarra whispers to himself: “No, a pesar de todo, primero la Patria, primero Filipinas, hija de España, primero la patria Española! No, eso que es fatalidad no empaña á la Patria, no!” (*Noli Me Tángere* 43). Ibarra almost reveals to himself his own ambiguous attitude towards Spanish colonialism; it is as if he catches himself. He says “first the Philippines” but then corrects himself: “first the Spanish homeland.” If the *patria* is the Philippines, it is practically a Freudian slip. The true *patria* is the “patria española.” Yet, the third mention of *patria* is unmarked, leaving ambiguous exactly which one is not besmirched

by misfortune. It is an illuminating ambiguity. For Ibarra, there is an ineluctable foreignness at the heart of his experience of the homeland. As Vicente Rafael has pointed out “In the Philippine case, the experience of nationhood was - and arguably continues to be - inseparable from the hosting of a foreign presence to which one invariably finds oneself hostage” (xviii). Ibarra’s third *patria* is that space.

It is tempting to draw some connections to Rizal himself here. Anderson writes of the seemingly inescapable “demonio de las comparaciones:”

Rizal used the phrase to describe the young Ibarra’s eerie experience on seeing again the seedy Jardín botánico de Manila, and perversely finding himself helplessly imagining in his mind’s eye the grand botanical gardens he often visited in Europe. It is as if he can no longer see what is in front of him simply as a familiar object. But the *demonio* also works on the author himself, who is writing in Paris and Berlin about a young man *allá* (“yonder, yes yonder, yonder, yonder”) in Manila, who is thinking about...*allá*, that is, Berlin and Paris (*Under Three Flags* 32).

Whereas Ibarra’s experience in Europe distorts his perception of Manila, it is not quite the same case with Rizal. In a letter to his friend Ferdinand Blumentritt, Rizal admits his own *wanderungslust* which immediately brings Ibarra to mind. He writes:

¡Aquí tiene Vd. Á su amigo muy lejos de su amada Europa! Mañana saldremos del Mediterráneo y pasaremos por el Canal. ¡Adiós, Europa!
 ¡Cuando me embarqué en Marsella y el buque abandonó el puerto, tuve unos pensamientos tan tristes que sentí lágrimas en mis ojos! [...] ví lentamente desaparecer las orillas y el bello país de mi libertad se alejó como envuelto en una neblina. Cuando quise sacar mis anteojos de campana para acortar la distancia, me encontré con que me los habían robado. [...] ¡Vea Vd. cómo puede un dolor pecuniario relegar á segundo término el dolor sentimental! Estoy seguro de que si á María Stuart se le hubiera quemado su más bello vestido en el momento de salir de Francia, en aquel momento ella se hubiese olvidado de la bella Francia (*Cartas de Rizal a Blumentritt* 189-190).

Rizal’s Europe is almost oneiric as it disappears into the mist. Like Ibarra, he is possessed by an overwhelming melancholy as the distance between he and his spiritual *patria* (“el país de mi libertad”) grows. Yet, as he attempts to steal a fading glimpse, he realizes his binoculars have been stolen. It is a bittersweet yet humorous end to his letter, but it is telling nonetheless. Unlike Ibarra, Rizal’s reverie ends upon his inability to actually *see*. The loss of his binoculars is a good metaphor here as Rizal, the trained ophthalmologist, refuses to lose himself in fantasy or romantic idealism: “Trataré de

reproducir fielmente tu estado sin contemplaciones; levantaré parte del velo que encubre el mal, sacrificando á la verdad todo, hasta el mismo amor propio, pues, como hijo tuyo, adolezco también de tus defectos y flaquezas” (*Noli Me Tángere* frontispiece).

Rizal’s explicit purpose for writing the novel is to reveal what is hidden. But as we have seen, the capacity to do this is dependent on his ability to see almost stereoscopically, to keep one eye on Europe and the other on the Philippines. The novel is born of that tension, which ultimately, according to Franco Moretti, is “a compromise between a western formal influence (usually French or English) and local materials” (50). But it is also more than that. To truly *see* the Philippines meant having to look beyond its borders, for its existence as a colony meant that a significant portion of its political and economic structure existed in the imperial metropolis. Yet the Spanish empire at the end of the nineteenth century was already nearing the end of its long decline. As such, it too was subjected to the whims of greater forces, which we will examine shortly.

Rizal’s second novel *El filibusterismo* (1891) is even more marked by this foreign reality. A sequel to the *Noli*, its intricate plot centers on Simoun, a wealthy foreign jeweler who serves as an *éminence grise* to the Governor General. It is later revealed that Simoun is actually a disguised Ibarra, whose secret machinations for revenge involve fomenting revolution and the destruction of the colonial order.

The question of Language itself is one of the principal subplots, as a group of university students (*insulares* from the Philippines as well as *peninsulares* from Spain) attempt to organize a school dedicated to the teaching of the Spanish language. In one of the most famous scenes of the novel, Simoun chastises one of the students:

¡Queréis añadir un idioma más á los cuarenta y tantos que se hablan en las islas para entenderos cada vez menos!... El español nunca será lenguaje general en el país, el pueblo nunca lo hablará porque para las concepciones de su cerebro y los sentimientos de su corazón no tiene frases ese idioma: cada pueblo tiene el suyo, como tiene su manera de sentir. ¿Qué vais á conseguir con el castellano, los pocos que lo habéis de hablar? ¡Matar vuestra originalidad, subordinar vuestros pensamientos á otros cerebros y en vez de haceros libres haceros verdaderamente esclavos! Nueve por diez de los que os presumís de ilustrados, sois renegados de vuestra patria. El que de entre vosotros habla ese idioma, descuida de tal manera el suyo que ni lo escribe ni lo entiende y ¡cuántos he visto yo que afectan no saber de ello una sola palabra! (*El filibusterismo* 47-48).

For Simoun, Spanish is, at best, a source of confusion in an already cacophonous linguistic landscape. At worst, it is the sign of a pretentiousness bordering on treason, an alien presence which endangers the very possibility of an authentic Philippine identity. Rizal, the polyglot, certainly would not agree with Simoun's essentialist diatribe (he did write the novel in Spanish, after all). On the contrary, Rizal's preternatural linguistic abilities granted him a unique position within world literary space. While the prestige language in the colonial Philippines was Spanish, that was not the case in the greater sphere of international literary space. Rather, it was the language of Rizal's 'país de mi libertad' seen in his letter to Blumentritt: French. Casanova writes:

French came to be generally established, without the assistance or cooperation of any political authority, as a common language – the language of cultivated and refined conversation exercising a sort of jurisdiction that extended to all of Europe. Its cosmopolitan character is evidence of this curious “denationalization” of French, whose dominance, never recognized as national, was accepted instead as international (Casanova 68).

Rizal certainly understood this linguistic hierarchy. Anderson notes that Rizal (who had studied in Paris) even considered writing the *Fili* in French in order to reach a wider, more international audience (*Under Three Flags* 44-45). The French language (and Rizal's command of it) opens up a space for his subtle critique and satirization of the hypocrisies of Philippine high society. In the chapters “Tipos manilenses” and “La función,” a French operetta company comes to Manila to put on a production of *Les Cloches de Corneville*, immediately starting a sort of French ‘mania’ in the colony for a few days. Immediately, oppositions are drawn: the friars are opposed to the performance on account of its “obscenity,” which in reality was attributed merely to its French origin (*El filibusterismo* 157). Meanwhile, the proponents of the show are the secular and ‘liberal’ leadership of Manila, “los que viajaron por las M. M.³. y chapurrearon un poco de francés durante el viaje, los que visitaron París y todos aquellos que querían echárselos de ilustrados” (*El filibusterismo* 158). The French language itself becomes the site of contention between the two parties. Yet few actually seem to know how to speak the language with any real proficiency. Sandoval, a liberal Spaniard and ally of the Filipino students “se les daba de saber francés” and “se había convertido en una especie de intérprete para sus amigos” (*El filibusterismo* 169). However, the narrator is quick to point out the hypocrisy of his pretensions; Sandoval only knows what is happening because “se ayudaba del argumento publicado por los periódicos y lo demás se lo suplía su fantasía” (*El filibusterismo* 169). It is important to give the impression of being able to understand and respond appropriately to the performance in order to appear cultured.

³ “Mensajerías Marítimas, una compañía Naviera francesa” (footnote in original).

In another hilarious instance, the narrator describes a conversation between Juanito Peláez, the hunchbacked son of a creole merchant, and Dona Victorina de Espadaña, an older native woman married to a phony Spanish doctor who tries to pass as a *peninsular*.

Juanito desempeñaba bien su papel: á veces movía la cabeza en señal de disgusto y entonces se oían toses, murmullos en algunas partes; á veces sonreía, aprobaba y un segundo después resonaban aplausos. Doña Victorina estaba encantada y hasta concibió vagos deseos de casarse con el joven el día que don Tiburcio se muriera. Juanito sabía francés y de Espadaña no! ¡Y empezó á hacerle zalamerías! Pero Juanito no se apercibía del cambio de táctica, atento como estaba en observar á un comerciante catalán que estaba junto al cónsul suizo: Juanito que los había visto hablando en francés, se inspiraba en sus fisonomías y daba soberanamente el pego (*El filibusterismo* 172).

The narrator shows us very little of the performance itself, focusing rather on the audience's reactions and interactions, a ridiculous scene given that almost no one speaks French.

However, the friars have a somewhat different relationship to the language. Their curiosity about the show is camouflaged as an attempt to root out any obscene or otherwise offensive material (*El filibusterismo* 170). Their representative, Father Irene, manages to gain access backstage, speaking “un francés de necesidad, un francés de *tienda*, idioma que es muy comprensible para la vendedora cuando el parroquiano parece dispuesto á pagar bien” (*El filibusterismo* 170). Nonetheless, it is more than sufficient to be able to communicate with *La Serpolette*, a dancer in the show whom he knew in Paris before professing his religious vows.

- Mais, comment ! Toi ici, grosse bête ! Et moi qui t’croyais...
- ‘Fais pas d’tapage, Lily ! Il faut m’respecter ! ‘suis ici l’Pape!’⁴ (*El filibusterismo* 170).

Father Irene is the only Spaniard (besides the previously mentioned Catalan businessman) who is actually able to speak French with even a modicum of fluency. The secular audience, like Sandoval, is far more impressed with the *idea* of French rather than its actual materiality, while the religious authorities (or at least, this friar) actually demonstrate some command of the language while simultaneously denouncing all that it would seem to represent. The language serves as a metaphor for each side's relationship to the Philippines: the liberals, heirs to the French revolutionary tradition, believe they

⁴ - But, How? You here, you big beast! And here I thought...

- Hush up, Lily. One must respect me! Here, I am like the Pope! (my translation)

are the champions of the Filipinos, yet their pretention to universalism does not allow them to actually understand the concrete needs and desires of the Filipino people. Conversely, the friars do seem to possess a real understanding of the concrete realities of life in the Philippines; however, this understanding only helps them to further their own power and interests in the country, rather than the edification of the people.

That being said, Father Irene's French is characterized as being merely 'un francés de *tienda*.' For the reader who has no French, it is evident that he is fluent enough to communicate comfortably. Nonetheless, the narrator is suggesting that Irene's is imperfect, *vulgar* compared to the narrator's own ability. Interestingly enough, it is important to note that Rizal does not translate the French phrases peppered throughout the chapter. Given that command of that language is one of the primary themes of the chapter, Rizal both demonstrates his own proficiency in the language as well as that of his readers (notably, educated Filipino *ilustrados*, members of the native elite class who themselves had been largely educated in Europe). Although he is a colonial subject, he and his fellow *ilustrados* are more cultured, more modern, and, even in a sense, more 'European,' than those Spaniards who would purport to rule over the Philippines (Anderson, *The Spectre of Comparisons* 229). Thus, international literary space gives Rizal the opportunity to circumvent the alleged cultural superiority of the imperial metropole, nullifying any arguments that justified colonial rule. Between the ineffectual Spanish liberals and the reactionary, oppressive clergy, the Filipino *ilustrado* makes up for what each side lacks, possessing the experiential knowledge of the country as well as a personal and existential commitment towards its improvement. International literary space was one of the domains in which Rizal and his fellow *ilustrados* could actually resist colonial rule. In other words, literary skill served as an analogy for actual political potentialities: literary emancipation is political emancipation. As Vicente Rafael points out: "unlike the colony, the novel conjures a world where characters are free to behave in ways appropriate to their background and circumstances" (99).

Casanova traces back the origins of international literary space to the Romans and the Latin language, which eventually gave way to the major literary languages of Europe. After the fall of Rome, Latin, now intimately associated with the Church, would be challenged by the "humanist secularization" of language itself (Casanova 49). The first vernacular to challenge the hegemony of Latin was Tuscan, the language of Dante, Petrarch, and Boccaccio (Casanova 49). Next came French, which offered another secular alternative to both the preeminence of Italian humanism as well as the church (Casanova 49). Casanova writes:

To this initial Tuscan-French core were gradually added Spain, and then England, which together formed the first group of major literary powers,

each endowed with a “great language” as well as a sizeable literary patrimony. The highpoint of the Golden Age had passed by the mid-seventeenth century, however, by which point Spain entered upon a period of slow decline that was inseparably literary and political. This “vast collapse, this very slow sinking” created a growing gap between Spanish literary space and that of the French and the English, now poised to assume their place as the leading literary powers in Europe (55).

By the end of the nineteenth century, this decline was approaching its nadir. Spain was also a dominated space in terms of world literary space, and the Philippines was on the periphery of a periphery. Spaniards, no less than the Filipinos like Rizal, were keenly aware of this.

Benito Pérez Galdós, the great nationalist writer, offered one response in his 1870 essay “Observaciones sobre la novela contemporánea en España”: “El gran defecto de la mayor parte de nuestros novelistas, es el haber utilizado elementos extraños, convencionales, impuestos por la moda, prescindiendo por complete de los que la sociedad nacional y coetánea les ofrece con abundancia” (105). Galdós was not necessarily a literary xenophobe, rather he laments: “La sustitución de la novela nacional de pura observación, por esa otra convencional y sin carácter, género que cultiva cualquiera, peste nacida en Francia, y que se ha difundido con la pasmosa rapidez de todos los males contagiosos (“Observaciones sobre la novela contemporánea” 107). The rejection of French influence, a ‘plague’ in his words, implicitly confirms its status in Spain, and Galdós warns his fellow Spanish writers against focusing their energies following foreign models rather than observing the realities of their own country.

We can compare this quote with another passage in *El filibusterismo* where Sandoval, the peninsular student who feigned knowledge of French, criticizes that very language: “La lengua francesa no tiene la rica sonoridad ni la varia y elegante cadencia del idioma castellano. Yo no concibo, yo no me imagino, yo no puedo formarme una idea de los oradores franceses y dudo que los haya habido jamás y los pueda haber en el verdadero sentido de la palabra, en el estricto sentido del concepto oradores” (175).

He asks the Filipino student Pecson: “¿Comprende usted, puede usted figurarse cómo con un idioma tan ingrato y poco cadencioso como es el francés se puedan formar poetas de la talla gigantesca de nuestros Garcilasos, nuestros Herreras, nuestros Esproncedas y Calderones?” (*El filibusterismo* 175).

Sandoval claims Hugo for Spain: “Si Víctor Hugo tiene genio... es porque su niñez la ha pasado en Madrid” (*El filibusterismo* 175-176). Again Rizal turns this on its head later using an especially poignant quote from Hugo’s *Ruy Blas* as an epigraph to chapter 31: “L’Espagne et sa vertu, L’Espagne et sa grandeur, tout s’en va⁵” (*El*

⁵ “Spain and its virtue, Spain and its grandeur, it has all gone away!” (my translation)

filibusterismo 235). Sandoval's perspective is a caricature compared to that of Galdós, yet the two Spanish liberals privilege the specificity of the nation and its history as the unit of aesthetic validity against foreign intrusion, in this case French.

Yet in an imperial system, this foreign intrusion is unavoidable. As was noted above, for the colonized, part of their everyday lived reality is controlled elsewhere, back in the metropolis. In the *Noli*, Tasio the Philosopher describes the situation allegorically; it is "la edad bárbara del hombre:" "para resolver cuestiones de su gobierno interior, tenían todavía que acudir al otro extremo del mundo, que es como si dijéramos un cuerpo que para moverse necesitase consultar su cabeza existente en otra parte del globo" (*Noli Me Tángere* 179).

But it is also true in reverse, and if one thinks of the imperial system as ultimately being one of subject (the metropolis) and object (the colonies), then that subjectivity rests on being able to define itself against its opposite. In other words, a subject needs an object. What does it mean to actually have colonies?

Following that logic, it would be hard to ignore Galdós's prodigious output. If Balzac's *Comédie Humaine* was an attempt to capture the totality of French society, the same could be said of Galdós and Spain. This observation of Spanish society is, for Galdós, the unique ingenuity of the novel.

It makes sense then that we should find references to colonialism in his novels. This is seen as early as 1870 in Galdós's first novel *La fontana de oro*; here Fernando VII himself buys the loyalty of Elías by promising his nephew Lázaro, the novel's protagonist, with a position as "consejero de la Intendencia de Filipinas" (Pérez Galdós, *La fontana de oro* 404). One of the immediate difficulties for Spain's administration of the colonies was the enormous distance involved. The trip from Acapulco to Manila (the final leg of the journey from Spain to the Philippines before the opening of the Suez Canal) took at least four to six months. Henry Kamen, quoting an historian from the seventeenth-century, says the voyage was "enough to destroy a man, or make him unfit for anything as long as he lives" (158). Awaiting them on the other end was the promise of social mobility and the possibility of advancing far beyond what they could otherwise hope to achieve back in Spain (Kamen 96-97). Still, the willingness to endure the hardships of the trip did not necessarily ensure the quality of that colonial administration, something Rizal would later critique in his novels (especially the chapter "El ponente" in *El filibusterismo*). Here too we find Lázaro, who, despite his utter lack of experience, will be responsible for one of the most important civil institutions in the colony, emblematic of the inefficiency of the colonial system (Díaz-Trechuelo 513). Although Lázaro is politically well connected, there were still plenty of opportunities for those who were not. Colonialism still offered a "a unique avenue to freedom for the poor and oppressed of the Old World" (Kamen 97).

In the 1881 novel *La desheredada* the character Joaquín Pez, looks to Cuba to solve his financial ruin: "Sí con un destino en la Aduana, un gran destino. Es el único remedio. Los españoles tenemos esa ventaja sobre los habitantes de otras naciones.

¿Qué país tiene una jauja tal, una isla de Cuba para remediar los desastres de sus hijos?” (304). The colony then is that ‘other’ space that affords those from the metropolis the opportunity to start anew and regain fortune and honor, which we find out is precisely what Joaquín Pez does.

The narrator has no need to fill in the details of what precisely is the advantage of having colonies. Either the narrator assumes that the reader would already know it, or they were too lurid to include. In the case of *La desheredada*, whatever the specifics of Joaquín Pez’s fortune may have been, one should recall the very economic base of the Cuban colony: sugar, coffee, tobacco, all cultivated and produced in a system that relied heavily on slave labor, not abolished until 1886. As with Jane Austen and the Bertram estate in *Mansfield Park*, Galdós manifests an awareness of the sordid activity of empire, hidden in the text yet present in the machinations that make the narrative possible in the first place (Said 89).

But the Spanish empire of Galdós was not the British empire of Austen. This was especially apparent in the Philippines: after the opening of the colonial economy in 1834, Anglo-American and Chinese business interests provided the necessary capital for the creation of the kinds of estates seen in the Caribbean (Anderson, *The Spectre of Comparisons* 197). Rather than modernizing the economy, most Spaniards were content to “live off the government salaries or subsidies, and in the case of the clergy, from tributes rendered by parishioners, rents collected from their estates, and funds from the Crown” (Rafael 7).

One such clergymen appears in Galdós’s 1884 novel *Tormento*, Pedro Polo Cortés. The colonies will be the space where he can recuperate his honor. He wishes to leave behind civilization for the Edenic spaces of the colonies:

Hay tierras hermosas por allá; tierras que son paraísos, donde todo es inocencia de costumbres y verdadera igualdad: tierras sin historia, chica, donde a nadie se le pregunta lo que piensa; campos feraces, donde hay cada cosecha que tiembla el misterio; tierras patriarcales, sociedades que empiezan y que se parecen a las que nos pinta la Biblia (122).

This vision of paradise is similar to Ibarra’s nostalgic daydream of Manila, which Rizal is quick to correct. The description here is not so much of actual colonial space, but of a preconceived fantasy of colonial space. It is reduced to the state of mere object, there is no civilization, but rather the innocence of nature. But this virgin land is not for economic exploitation. Rather, as his brother later mentions: “allá en tierras de salvajes mi hermano volverá en sí... ¿Sabe usted dónde está la isla de Zamboanga?... Pues allí, en aquella dichosa Zamboanga, desembarcará mi hermano dentro de dos meses, y allí tendrá ocasión de cristianar herejes y hacer grandes méritos” (Pérez Galdós, *Tormento* 122).

As a priest, the cure for his malaise would be to re-live and re-enact those medieval crusades against Islam. This, however, is not a 'fantasy.' The Zamboanga peninsula acted as a launching pad for Spanish expeditions against the predominantly Islamic regions of the island of Mindanao and the Sulu archipelago, which existed as independent sultanates until the final decades of the Spanish empire (Majul 897). Cesar Majul writes:

Spanish rule brought with it the disruption of time-honoured Muslim maritime commercial activities; the systematic destruction of Muslim settlements, farms and orchards; depopulation caused by famine, disease and Spanish military expeditions; and isolation from neighbouring Muslim Malays who had fallen under British and Dutch imperialism (897).

And if troubles with the civil authorities were not enough, the Church, the true source of power in the Philippines, had its own designs for the newly incorporated provinces:

Church attitudes towards the Filipino Muslim community went largely unchanged, particularly in regard to the conversion of Muslims. A prominent Spanish Jesuit in Manila was known to have been preparing a sort of 'master plan' for the eventual colonization and Christianisation of the Muslims. Questioning the official 'tolerance' of Islam, the plan emphasized how the Muslims would be better subjects of Spain if they were to become Catholics (Majul 897-898).

The later annexation of the Philippines by the United States changed the terms of 'assimilation' but did not end the conflict. On the contrary, the centuries long struggle of Islam in the Philippines, which pre-dates the Spanish colonial period, has evolved and continued to this day (Majul 922). Father Pedro will regain his lost honor by fighting Islam, that historical nemesis of Catholic Spain, just like in the days of the *Reconquista*, the most fundamental myth of Spanish identity.

Despite *de facto* rule by the pre-Modern 'friarocracy,' there was one area where the Philippines did provide an economic advantage: proximity to China. As Fernand Braudel has claimed, Asia (and the Far East in particular) was the wealthiest region in the world: "The centre of gravity of this huge super-world-economy became stabilized in the East Indies, with their busy ports of Bantam, Atjeh, Malacca and – much later – Batavia and Manila" (486). The Philippines gave Spain a foothold in the region, thus providing access to its immense wealth, the most well-known example of this being, of course, the Manila galleons.

One example of this benefit and its role in the construction of Spanish national identity is found in the novel *Fortunata y Jacinta*, where it is revealed early on that the

wealth that supports the protagonist, Juanito Santa Cruz, is based on his family's involvement in colonial trade, in this case "pañolería de la china" (*Fortunata y Jacinta* 10). The narrator takes his time describing the ironic source of this wealth, the 'mantón de Manila.' We learn that one of the objects that fascinated Jacinto's mother as a child was a portrait of a man named Ayún. The narrator describes it: "A este ilustre chino deben las españolas el hermosísimo y característico chal que tanto favorece la belleza, el mantón de Manila, al mismo tiempo señorial y popular, pues lo han llevado en sus hombros la gran señora y la gitana" (*Fortunata y Jacinta* 10).

The narrator attributes to him the invention of the 'Mantón.' It is this foreign garment, named for Manila despite its Chinese origin, that transcends class boundaries and becomes an object of national significance. The narrator sees the irony in this foreign origin:

Pues esta prenda, esta nacional obra de arte, tan nuestra como las panderetas o los toros, no es nuestra en realidad más que por el uso; se la debemos a un artista nacido a la otra parte del mundo, a un tal Ayún, que consagró a nosotros su vida toda y sus talleres. Y tan agradecido era el buen hombre al comercio español, que enviaba a los de acá su retrato y los de sus catorce mujeres (*Fortunata y Jacinta* 11).

Without explicitly mentioning the Philippines, the narrator, perhaps without even knowing it, has shown the role of the colony in the formation of the Spanish national identity. The colony, like the 'mantón,' "no es nuestra en realidad más que por el uso" (*Fortunata y Jacinta* 11). It unites the people thus diverting attention away from class and regional differences towards a national consciousness, the visible, aesthetic signs of national unity.

The above are just a few of the mentions of the colonies in the novels of Galdós. There are of course many more, and if we extend the search to other authors of the period, we would find more of the same. Although these passages may not necessarily be central to the plot, neither are they gratuitous. One way to think of the internal logic of Galdós's Realism is the elevation of the ordinary to the 'extraordinary.' His characters are "talkers par excellence" who "express themselves volubly on the occasion not merely of every feeling, but of every *acontecimiento*, which is to say that it is their speech that transforms every moment into an event" (Jameson 98).

If we believe Said's model, we can see those casual references as representative of the normalizing force of "domestic imperial culture" (95). By creating an idea of the colonies, Spain had, therefore, also created for itself an identity as colonizer.

That would not last for much longer. By the end of the nineteenth century, Spain would no longer possess these colonies that had for so long supported some idea of a national, an imperial, identity: "The loss of the last relics of the once immense colonial empire produced consternation in the country, but so little reflection as to its

causes and so little change of heart that Silvela, the Conservative Prime Minister, remarked with despair that he 'could scarcely feel the pulse of Spain'" (Brennan 17-18).

Spain lost its empire while other European countries were in the midst of constructing their own (Carr 224). Spain had lost its 'World,' not only the spatial geography of its empire, but also the World as the collection of social practices that the empire had once supported. Despite his protestations against the French aesthetic and foreign dominance, the colonies were also a 'foreign' element, the invisible force of an Otherness that carried some of the narrative weight of Galdós's early novels. World literary space was the arena in which the Philippines was able to begin to throw off the shackles of Spanish political domination. That space represented the possibilities of freedom. However, for Spain, world literary space had the opposite function. Despite its history and accumulation of 'literary capital,' empire was a necessary element for the international intelligibility of the novel during this period. What Casanova's model allows us to do is move beyond merely re-stating the dominance of the center and the oppression of the periphery. That is not to deny the existence of difference and domination, but world literary space problematizes and displaces these hierarchies.

Can we account for all the different literary modalities in the 'world republic of letters?' There is an inherent slipperiness in terms like 'letters' or 'literature,' 'the novel,' etc. What happens to so-called 'genre' fiction? Sci-fi, the historical novel, detective fiction? Or even certain forms of non-fiction: biography, journalism? It is tempting to think of 'nationalist' fiction as its own genre altogether and must therefore be read from a different and unique critical perspective. Take for example the 'philosophical novel:' here we have a literary modality whose foremost aim it is to engage in philosophical inquiry. Writers of this genre would consider themselves philosophers primarily: think of Voltaire's *Candide*, Nietzsche's *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, or Sartre's *Nausea*. This genre, although perhaps not as well-defined as it should be, is judged by different standards. Analogously, the principal task of the nationalist novel is to engage in thinking about the nation and organizing its discursive expression. For writers like Rizal and Galdós, the novel was an important vehicle for the understanding and expression of a society in the throes of creating a national consciousness.

Casanova's conception of world literary space provides a powerful tool in thinking through that problem, for it is the specificity of literature that allows that project to fully develop. The heterogeneous and 'polyphonic' (to borrow Bakhtin's vocabulary) character of Rizal's novels allows him to experiment with the different possibilities that presented themselves: reform, violent revolution, independence, etc. Importantly for the anti-colonial writer, world literary space is in itself another one of those possibilities. The new international and cosmopolitan connections afforded by modernity itself opened up new avenues for those writers from spaces still under the

political and cultural domination of colonial control. For the contemporary critic, this model allows us to see a more complex vision of how these writers negotiated world literary space beyond the paradigm of domination from imperial center to colonial periphery as an almost closed system. On the contrary, as we have seen, in world literary space many times the opposite was true. Thus we have a more dialectical understanding of this relationship: we can reflect upon the radical heterogeneity inherent between an imperial metropole and its colonies without eradicating those differences under one master concept. If metropole and colony were binary opposites, the missing but implied third term was 'the world.' For the colonized, this world is not some mere vaguery but rather an existential assertion of humanity, for they constitute the plurality that makes the concept of the world possible.

This is part of what we must understand as the absolutely utopian thrust of Casanova's work. The *World Republic of Letters* is not just about literature. Rather, it shows us the dynamic possibilities of a kind of international space that capitalism is not quite equipped to explain away. It is, in a sense, an allegory for the imagining of new international political formations, new solidarities that go beyond the nation. By studying the imbalances of world literary space, Casanova has also shown us a means to transcend previous political idealisms, giving us the space to invent new internationalisms.

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