

Translating the Nation: Rizal, the Novel and Philippine Literatures in the Regions¹

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Abstract

Legislated as the official national myth in the Philippines, the revolutionary novels of the foremost Filipino hero, Jose Rizal, continue to be taught across the secondary and tertiary levels in the Tagalog-based language of Filipino. Together with English, Filipino enjoys a distinct advantage as a fully developed literary language in the country, even as the many other languages of the archipelago are slowly and inexorably sliding into desuetude and neglect. Arguing that translation is at once a metaphorical and appropriative act, the author proposes that Rizal's already inescapably translational texts be made available to Filipino students in their own mother tongues, in recognition of their evocative power (that includes rather than excludes) on one hand, and in order to more fully realize Rizal's vision of an emancipated national body, on the other.

Abstract in Malay

Novel-novel yang bersifat revolusioner yang dikarang oleh hero terkenal Filipina, Jose Rizal, digubal sebagai mitos rasmi nasional dan novel-novel ini terus diajar di peringkat sekolah dan universiti di dalam Bahasa Tagalog. Bersama Bahasa Inggeris, Bahasa Filipino juga mempunyai kedudukan yang tinggi dan selesa sebagai salah sebuah bahasa sastera yang mantap di Filipina. Hal ini berlawanan dengan nasib bahasa-bahasa yang lain di Kepulauan Filipina di mana mereka kian terbiar dan luput. Penulis makalah mengusulkan perlunya karya-karya Rizal diterjemahkan ke dalam pelbagai bahasa ibunda rakyat Filipina kerana kebangkitan kuasa yang membabitkan (dan bukan meminggirkan) pembaca-pembaca ini. Ini perlu agar visi Rizal untuk mewujudkan satu badan nasional yang lebih bebas, dapat difahami.

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Keywords in Malay

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Introduction

The Taboan International Writers Festival, held in Davao City in February of this year, proved true to its name: for three days, writers and their readers trafficked in cornucopias of literary goods – in a veritable marketplace of ideas.³ The convener, former Chancellor of the University of the Philippines-Mindanao, Professor Ricardo de Ungria, assisted by his team, pulled all stops in making the event a productive and memorable one for both delegates and participants, who came from all over the Philippines (and in the case of three of them, from other parts of Asia).

This essay is not so much a review of this event as a “position paper” that was occasioned (and inspired) by a particular panel discussion that I had the good fortune of attending on the last day of the festival. The panel I am referring to had the most promising title, “Voices for the Future,” and its members were three up-and-coming writers from Pangasinan, the Ilocos and Cebu, who each discussed the situations they and their contemporaries from their respective regions were facing.

Many of the problems they identified were easy enough to anticipate and understand, for they are the dilemmas that most beginning writers elsewhere in the Philippines, nowadays, are needing to confront: the desolation of artistic creativity, the anxiety of influence and sense of belatedness that typically afflict the young, the profound realisation of the lifelong impracticality of this career, the ever-rarefying venues for traditional publication, and of course, given the lack of a vital critical tradition in our literature as a whole, the paucity of reliable and objective feedback.

They also discussed the simultaneously exciting and daunting effects of the continuing onslaught of global information technology, which has made available so many interesting “possibilities” – from online publishing opportunities, to newly discovered audiences, to the cross-pollination of compositional techniques and strategies that the dizzying hyperlinks of cyberspace urge upon one and all. On the downside, they also brought up the difficult questions of personal and collective identity, which they agree, in this day and age, can no longer be simplistically answered, precisely as a result of the

³ Taboan is the Visayan word for “marketplace.” According to its website, the Taboan Writers Festival was first organised in 2009. See <http://taboan2011.kom.ph/index.php/Taboan/HomePage> for details.

multiple “confounding” pressures that these restively globalising mediums and forms bring to bear on all of us.

In a way, these things were only to be expected, and I for one was not surprised to hear these eloquent and wonderful young writers based in communities outside the national capital broaching them. What I was not quite prepared to hear, however, was the “lament” they variously voiced, and this was in regard to the increasingly beleaguered states of their respective regional languages. According to them, this may be best evidenced in the fact that their own supposedly friendly and sympathetic readers in the regions – their own contemporaries and “peers,” as it were – seem less and less inclined to read their works, which are now being audibly dismissed as outmoded and backward, couched in a language that is deemed to be much too parochial, unprofitable and impractical to bother writing, or even reading, in.

Let me interrupt myself by emphasising this point: to me, what proved particularly shocking about this revelation was not what it was saying (namely, the endangerment of regional languages), but the fact that this clarion call was being made not by writers in the admittedly “less established” minority languages in the country, but rather, by writers in Ilocano and Cebuano – needless to say, powerful and institutionally viable regional languages that a Tagalog writer like myself wouldn’t have ever thought were beleaguered in the Philippines at the least. If this claim is accurate, and if even the future of Ilocano literature (with its hundred-year-old literary magazine, *Bannawag*, its vaunted writers union, GUMIL, and its massive diasporic readership) is now effectively imperilled, then how much more dire and distressing must the situation be for the less visible and demographically shrinking Kapampangan, Kiniray-a, and Tagbanua?

The discussion that ensued during the open forum brought to light, soon enough, the likely reason for this implacably worsening situation. Needless to say, it became the consensus of practically everybody in that session that the blame, to a great extent, lies in the present pedagogical bias that is immovably in place in our country’s national system of education – a bias that guiltlessly privileges the mediums of English and Tagalog, and that in effect raises them up in the hearts and minds of Filipino students, installing them as the only legitimate literary languages. The consequence of this, of course, is the progressive debasement and abjection of the Philippine’s many other native languages – their relegation to mere *lingua franca*, their *de-intellectualisation*.

Immediately, it occurred to me that literary artists from the national capital most probably cannot even begin to understand the unique and painful difficulty being experienced by our fellow writers and friends working in their own native mediums elsewhere. In the first place, as native Tagalog speakers, our bilingual education in the primary and secondary levels did not impinge upon our “authentic sense of self,” did not amount to any additional splits in

our consciousness, since the mother tongue that we heard from our earliest memories, and that we still use to express deep and unbridled emotions with – indeed, the idiom that we still dream in – was practically the same Filipino that was taught to us, and that we were taught in, in school. That some of us in the national capital would later on turn to Filipino (or for that matter, English) as a literary language – which is to say, as a medium for our artistic expression – is simply a testament to the effectiveness of this policy, and to the success of the Philippine nation-state’s bilingual pedagogy, and is therefore only to be expected.

But in the absence of the same institutional reinforcement in the crucial years of primary and secondary education, how indeed can we expect our country’s many regional languages to survive, let alone flourish, as literary and/or artistic mediums of expression? As things stand, the general situation is that little or no cultural affirmation for these languages ever takes place inside the typical classroom in the Philippines. It is therefore almost miraculous that regional writings, regional writers, even exist, given this decades-long neglect – which is to say, given the slow and systematic “extermination” by the Philippine nation-state of these non-hegemonic languages and cultures.

I am sure that those courageous young writers, those “culture heroes” who spoke at Taboan (who are now also friends and companion spirits) would persist to write in and to champion their native languages, despite or precisely because of this sorry state of affairs. Needless to say, while they and others like them have and will always have my unqualified admiration and support, I do also feel that a definite position regarding this very urgent issue now needs to be articulated and staked.

Therefore, in the spirit of mutual national responsibility and literary fellowship – two of the many luminous lessons that I can say I took from Taboan – I am hereby taking a stand and making my opinion known regarding this burningly vital issue: whatever else takes place in the proposed linguistic revision of the grade school curriculum, at the very least the national government must act with dispatch to arrest the impending slide of our country’s regional languages into desuetude and decay; my considered suggestion, in this regard, is to institute, as soon as possible, the reading, as well as the teaching, of Jose Rizal’s *Noli Me Tangere* and *El Filibusterismo*, in our country’s various regional languages.

While the Tagalog masterpiece, Balagtas’s *Florante at Laura*,⁴ should undoubtedly still be taught in the way it is currently being taught, during the junior and senior years in high school Rizal’s novels – texts that together

⁴ According to the critic Bienvenido Lumbera, Francisco Baltazar’s metrical romance, *Florante at Laura*, can be said to be one of the Philippines’s first nationalist texts, because its nineteenth-century audiences, from one generation to next, saw in it “a reflection of their misery and outrage under the oppressive rule of foreign tyrants.” See Bienvenido Lumbera.

constitute the de facto national narrative, the Philippines's own "national myth," as it were – should now begin to be read, appreciated and understood in the Philippines's many native languages, which are the languages Filipino students are naturally most at home in. And let us all recognise the paradoxical import of this statement: while we are *notionally* all supposed to be Filipinos – and, as such, we are all supposed to call this one country our home – the fact is that we actually have many different cultural and linguistic "homes."

By teaching these novels in their already existing competent translations – into Ilocano, Cebuano, Bicolano and the Philippines's handful of other major languages in the beginning, and our many other languages later on – we are in fact making room for all our countrymen and women, inside Rizal's all-embracing "national vision." After all, this is a narrative vision that all Filipinos in their linguistic and cultural diversity are meant to at once recognise and feel at home in. And yes, this will include even those Filipinos that Rizal did not actually represent in his novels, which are powerful "myth-making" fictions, after all.

What we must never forget, in regard to this realisation, is the fact that these novels were written by Rizal, the greatest of our nation's heroes, not in his own native Tagalog, but rather in the Spanish of the colonial centre. To translate Rizal's novels into our native languages therefore means, among other things, to recognise their original *translatedness*, their original figurative rather than purely literal nature. We must remember that in Latin, to translate means "to carry across." In this sense, it means the same thing as metaphor, a word whose Greek origin means "to carry across," as well. This etymological congruence between the translated and the metaphorical text bears a special significance in the case of Rizal's anticolonialist discourse – the novels and the expository discourses, both. Judging by these writings, we can say that Rizal clearly understood that the colonial project was always about translating, about metaphor-making, right from the very beginning.

Rizal knew that the Spanish who annexed and subjugated his beloved country did so not only by force of arms, but by translating its realities into a variety of texts, which constructed its peoples into inferior versions of themselves. This was precisely why he decided not only to write these novels, but also to produce and propagate a more "objective" knowledge about the Philippines, by annotating Antonio de Morga's important book, *Sucesos de las Islas Filipinas*, and by enmeshing himself in the sticky coils of political journalism while he was in Spain. He did this to correct all the self-serving European mistranslations of the Philippines and its people – primarily by offering what he believed to be his fairer and more genuine translations of their "truth."

Rizal understood that translation fictionalises and transforms not just textual meanings but also realities. In particular, he recognised that colonial translation had the power to reduce downtrodden peoples into forms of

knowledge, which colonial authority thereafter wielded in order to more thoroughly control them.⁵ Examining his annotated Morga, we can say that Rizal celebrated the fact that so many aspects and “corners” of the Philippines’s many indigenous cultures were never successfully translated – were never even noticed – by the colonising Spanish.

Rizal would also appear to have intimately known that translation is never neutral, and that because it is ever about power, translation necessarily takes place in an interested relationship between unequal parties. Someone translates; someone is translated. (In other words, someone is the subject, while someone else is the object, of the translation.) This is even more visibly the case when we consider the hierarchical positioning of languages and cultures, as the brute enforcements of domination decree it. Adopting the perspective of the postcolonial historian, Robert J.C. Young, we may, for instance, conclude that when Spanish colonialism translated the Philippines’s various “oralities” into written discourses, it transformed and immured them, sequestering them from the vast majority of the archipelago’s many inhabitants, who had little or no access to these new forms of knowledge. This process simply reinforced the domination by the coloniser of the colonised, who were translated and displaced from their original contexts, and thereby effectively disempowered.

Rizal’s novelistic translations of Philippine realities were, in effect, therefore the metaphorical transfer of local meanings and realities from the Tagalog language and the Philippines’s Hispanised culture to the idioms of the Spanish cosmopolitan tongue in particular, and to nineteenth-century European culture in general. Because a translation is essentially the same thing as a metaphor, like a metaphor we may describe it as a literal falsehood, for a metaphor is the description of what one thing is in terms of what it is actually not; which is to say, it is nothing if not a paradoxical resemblance that is established between the otherwise discrepant vehicle and tenor, which are a metaphor’s subsidiary and principal terms, that together comprise it.

For instance, when we say, reading the *Noli*, that the town of San Diego is the Philippines, we are proposing a generative lie regarding this fictional place and the empirical reality of the Philippines, all at once. As against the thrust of our country’s prevailing educational paradigm, in examining the texts of the *Noli* and the *Fili*, we may choose to talk about their displacements and transfers of meaning – their creative disjunctures and “lies” – rather than just the easily recognisable truth of anticolonial nationalism that these allegorical works proffer. After all, this is a truth that we, by virtue of the nationalist pedagogy that has come to subsume and require these texts, already readily identify and resonate with.

⁵ The salience of metaphorical logic in the question of cross-cultural encounter constitutes one of the primary arguments of Jahan Ramazani in his book-length study of postcolonial anglophone poetry. See Jahan Ramazani.

This is another way of saying that – as their multiple translations into Filipino clearly demonstrate – it is not so much the language of these novels as their particular stories about colonial oppression, anticolonial resistance and the dream of national solidarity and redemption that, to a large extent, constitute their “Filipinoness.” Proliferating various versions, various metaphorical renderings, of these texts across our national education system is certainly one way we can carry out this crucial and urgent reorientation – away from simplistic notions of identity, and towards a complex appreciation of the differences that constitute both these texts and the national community that has come to cherish them.

In the first place, by mandating the translation of Rizal’s novels into Tagalog or Filipino, the Philippine nation-state’s nationalist dispensation may be said to have already rectified a most fundamental discrepancy or “defect,” in Rizal’s original texts themselves: strange as it may now sound, and despite their status as privileged national narratives, these novels were addressed not so much to any Philippine readership as to the Spanish and European audiences of Rizal’s own time,⁶ with whom Rizal – we must remember – wished to make a special “reformist” pleading. In fact, reading these books more closely, we can see that the chatty and omniscient narrator – Rizal’s fictional stand-in – presents himself as a “native informant” and a cultural go-between (a kind of “tour guide,” as it were), so that the European reader can understand more keenly the horrendous realities that were presently obtaining in this remote and Godforsaken corner of the increasingly decrepit Spanish empire.

We may see in Rizal, therefore, evidence of colonial translation as a process in which the colonised also fully and willingly participated. This is something that postcolonial critics like Edward Said and Homi Bhabha have already memorably noted. Indeed, in Europe’s different colonial archives, much of the “travel writing” (chronicles and relations) during the age of imperialism relied on the critical help of “linguistic arbiters,” like Rizal. As we can imagine, quite often, what emerged from this “détente” were instances of inaccurate or plainly spurious translation, a very good example of which would be the many colonial stereotypes (fetishistic simplifications of the untranslatable natives, really) that postcolonialism has been busily critiquing all these years (Bhabha 45). And yet, these false translations were oftentimes intentional, on the part of the translators themselves, who thereby exercised a form of duplicity – an instance of “sly civility” (in Bhabha’s words) or strategic accommodation, to the demands of colonial power. And yet, by the same token, they may be said to have enacted a kind of resistance, too, for by wilfully distorting his mimicry of colonial norms in his translation projects, the duplicitous translator produced

⁶ Elaborating on the linguistic intricacies of Rizal’s novelistic decisions – for example, focalisation – is one of the tasks Benedict Anderson carries out in his *Why Counting Counts: A Study of Forms of Consciousness and Problems of Language in Noli Me Tangere and El Filibusterismo*.

generative anticolonial “fictions” or myths, that could later on inspire radical change (as Rizal’s translational writings admirably did).

We may see that Rizal as a “duplicious translator” was indeed both a procurer (or *comprador*) and a “traitor” – for his failure in producing a seamless and accurate translation of his society was precisely his way of resisting his overlord’s mandate. Simply put: Rizal, as an exile in Europe, wrote in the European language of Spanish in order to translate himself and his own culture and society, which he could only have betrayed, because, well, he himself didn’t know – indeed, during his time, he couldn’t have known – the diversity of his country well, deeply and completely enough. There are no Moros in these iconic texts; no lumads, no Cordillerans, pretty much no non-Tagalogs, for that matter. His female characters are either much too fragile or much too frivolous – fainting and ineffectual on one hand, shrilly hysterical on the other – and in the end, the solution to the “colonial contagion” or malaise that his satire of nineteenth-century Philippine colonial society has so painstakingly diagnosed is nothing if not a form of self-immolation or “mercy-killing.”

But we must remember that this very act of betrayal, this failure to successfully translate his society and people, as well as his own life, into the cosmopolitan language to which he addressed himself and his works, doesn’t diminish his importance to our national life in the present. On the contrary, from our present-day perspective, his double-dealing translations present us important and incontrovertible historical evidence of a uniquely artful and imaginative mode of anticolonial agency.

Finally, we need to underscore the important role that imaginative writing, like novels, plays in the formation of our national culture. As the great champion of anticolonial nationalism, Franz Fanon, once memorably defined it, national culture:

... is not a folklore, not an abstract populism that believes it can discover the people’s true nature. It is not made up of the inert dregs of gratuitous actions, that is to say actions which are less and less attached to the ever-present reality of the people. A national culture is the whole body of efforts made by a people in the sphere of thought to describe, justify, and praise the action through which that people has created itself and keeps itself in existence. (154)

Teaching Rizal to our youth is obviously part of this “whole body of efforts... to keep our people in existence,” but heeding Fanon’s words, we need to make sure that it is not merely an effete form of folkloric education that we are imparting to them, but rather a conceptually robust, historically grounded and culturally responsive one. To my mind, this commitment to the Fanonian ideal of the “ever-present reality” of the Filipino people should bid us to make these works truly relevant, and conversant with the times, and one of the most

effective ways to do this is precisely by translating them into the immediate languages – the “mother tongues” – of our students, who have most need of these texts.

In other words, since these novels were, after all, from the very beginning, translational (which is to say, metaphorical), then our duty will always be to continue to read more urgent and germane “tenors” from these excellent “vehicles.” In a manner of speaking, this means we need to continue to read deeply into the figure, into the poem, that is Rizal’s novels. We need to continue to read deeply into the figure, into the poem that is, in a very important sense, the Filipino nation itself. What all this tells us is that, at the very least, the task of nationalist education must be, at heart, not only an intensely interpretive but also always a deeply intellectualising one.

Needless to say, intellectualisation cannot even happen without creative writing, if only for the simple reason that the reflexivity of critical thinking presupposes expressivity in the most practical sense. In our country, English and Filipino are ahead in the intellectualisation game because they are, at present, powerful colonial languages (the former is neocolonial and global; the latter is the medium of a Manila-centred internal colonisation of the rest of the country). Of course, I need to state, without equivocation, that all our native languages are, to be sure, intellectual or reflexive in their most basic character. The intellectualisation I am referring to here is simply the institutional recognition and cultivation of this aptitude – in other words, its *governmentalisation*. Moreover, my suggestion to teach Rizal’s important novels in the mother tongues of Filipino students is really just a small gesture, and I am the first to acknowledge that it’s hardly sufficient in addressing the grave need for a sustained institutional support of our native languages. I must insist that it is, however, at this desperate point, a good enough start. It will, for once, allow the regional schools to legitimate the use of their respective languages in the appreciation, comprehension and analysis of our country’s de facto national myth.

We can only imagine how profound the epistemological break(through) this pedagogical change will effect in the minds of the young living in the regions. Because of this legitimation, this cultural affirmation, they will never be able to dismiss their own languages as entry-points and conditionalities of creative expression, as well as its accompanying critical reflection. A comparable form of legitimation is one I have already tried to perform in regard to the situation of Filipino sexual minorities (lesbians, bisexuals, transgenders and gays) trying to locate images – or at least “insinuations” – of themselves in these foundational stories of Filipino nationhood. For instance I have, in this regard, already proposed a kind of “queer reading” of Rizal’s *Noli* (“Was Rizal Gay” 167-99), and it has to do with the romantic and sacrificial “homosocial” friendship that exists between this novel’s primary male characters, the urbane

Crisostomo Ibarra and the enigmatic Elias, who take turns saving each other's lives, and who actually exclusively enjoy one of this interesting novel's most romantic tableaux (out on the lake, in a rickety *banca*, one serenely breezy and moonlit night). Needless to say, this reading is just one example of how we can translate Rizal's opus into "lessons" that can attempt to accommodate our people's beautifully dappled variety. In this case, it's indeed possible to see, in Rizal's novelistic vision, glimmerings of the lives and interests of Filipino LGBTs who – given the intolerance and downright hatred all around – understandably have a great and grave need for this kind of historical "welcome."

While a century of historical passages has instated Rizal's novels as our primary national texts, it is easily clear that they are far from universally satisfying or perfect as works of literature (for starters, they were limited by the circumstances in which they were written). But at this point in our history we can also already easily understand that their enduring relevance emerges not only out of the significant role they have played in the narrative of our people's anticolonial nationalism, but also out of their plenitude of literary merits, chiefest of which would be their resonant or evocative power. Like the enduring works of imaginative virtuosity that they are, these texts offer so many suggestive spaces and gaps, so much "interstitial connotativeness," so much interpretive room to locate one's own (and one's own people's) interest in. In other words, they are eminently available for translation in any number of ways, and yet their nationally "binding" quality remains, for their deepest national value is not so much located in their language (which, as we have already mentioned, was originally Spanish, after all) but rather in the allegorical story they memorably offer – of our people's suffering and unfinished struggle for self-possession.

We cannot underestimate the power of literature to shape national consciousness, and to create national values. Postcolonial studies reminds us that the novel is a form of imaginative writing that, in the modern history of Europe, abetted the myth-making project of its nations by literalising the metaphorical "one yet many" of these nation's lives, and by mimicking the plurality of their tongues and traditions. Nations are mythic in the sense that they transcendentalise their origins through the use of invented symbols and stories that serve to locate in an eternal present what is obviously merely a temporal political formation.⁷

As the critic and historian Timothy Brennan explains it, the relationship between nation-formation and literary production, as the example of Europe would seem to show, is mutually constitutive: on one hand, the development of

⁷ This, of course, is the genealogy of nationalism offered by the historian Benedict Anderson in his famous work, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*.

national discourses determine to a great extent the quality of modern nations' literatures, their choice of national languages and their respective folk characters; on the other, imaginative and narrative literature, like other forms of print media, in fact help form these selfsame nations ("The National Longing for Form," 44-70). As the anthropologist Ernest Gellner once put it, nationalism is not the coming into consciousness of a preexistent and essential national "unconscious"; rather, nationalism is the invention of a nation that had not in fact existed until this discourse summoned it into being (*Nations and Nationalism* 5). And we must remember that literacy in the imaginative forms of literature – which is to say, fluency in the language of powerful metaphorical fictions or myths – is a key element in this invention. Nationalism, on the other hand, is the mythic (that is to say, at once narrative and symbolic) discourse upon which this invention is premised.

At bottom, according to Brennan, the similarity between nations and novels is that they are both works of imagination. This is simply another way of saying that there is something comparably fictive about the nation, a notion of community that was abetted by the existence of "cultural fictions" to which the novel had certainly been a remarkable addition. This is because novels became popular in Europe at the same time that nations were being formed, and like the nation the novel represented "the one yet many of national life." It did this by clearly emulating or "resonating" the national goal of linguistic and stylistic variety within a defined or bordered space (which for the novel is, of course, its narrative).

Moreover, novels, like newspapers, served as a major vehicle for the national print media, propagating national literacy and facilitating mutual understanding, which meant minimizing "mutual incomprehensibility" among its national readership. And then, as a mode of representation, the novel was a form of cultural fiction, providing the national subjects a means of imagining the special communal fantasy that was the nation. In the modern age, therefore, the extended narrative form – in other words, the novel – embodies the nation's "longing for form."

In our case, the tremendous significance the hegemonic nationalist discourse continues to attach to Rizal's two-part opus as well as the oft-expressed wish of many Filipino intellectuals for the arrival of the next "great Filipino novel" indicates that this particular kind of narrativistic, "formal longing" is central to the formation of the Filipino nation, as well. None of this necessarily means that the Filipino nation is simply and purely fictive – even though on a certain level of analysis, it operates that way. What it does mean is that this nation's very "fictiveness" implies that it admits to the possibility of identification across diversity – of formally "binding" the necessarily incongruous qualities, elements and styles, which for the nation are the pluralities of cultural, racial, political and other social differences it seeks to

encompass and summarise. It is this “homogenising” act of the poetic “imagi/nation” that simultaneously enables the national project and threatens it, inasmuch as it seeks to absorb into an abstraction the intractably plural and demonically specific bodies of all the “Filipinos” it assumes to represent and indeed, exercises very real historical power over.

Conclusion

In conclusion, therefore, other than just a simple translated figure, we may also speak of the nation as being like a novel of many characters, too; its setting is the state, its plot its collectively suffered history. And yet, as any reader of fiction knows, this same novel can only privilege certain points of view, can only tell the story of a select number of people, thereby relegating to a “wordless powerlessness” all manner of beings and peoples and subjects whose lives it can only incidentally represent and thus determines by default. To my mind, translating our national novels, the *Noli* and the *Fili*, into our country’s many languages, gestures towards a possible negation of this silencing, a possible correction of this fascistic tendency, that is unfortunately inherent in the national project itself. At the very least, it will hopefully give poignant voice to Rizal’s mythic aspiration towards an inclusive, fully self-possessed, and emancipated Filipino nation.

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