Humor and Satire in Isabelo de los Reyes's El Diablo en Filipinas

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This paper is a preliminary study on humor and satire in Isabelo de los Reyes's text, *Ang Diablo sa Filipinas ayon sa nasasabi sa mga casulatan luma sa Kastila* (The Devil in the Philippines according to Ancient Spanish Documents), published in 1886 as a serialized text in La Oceania Española (De los Reyes, 1886/2014). In Isabelo De los Reyes's efforts to critique the excesses of Spanish rule, he used satire to elicit awareness and laughter, and at the same time, contribute to the creation of an imagined community. The search for the magical librito in a dead man's library is the beginning of a journey of the book as a material object and the exploration of other Spanish historical texts in the library. Unlike Marcelo H. del Pilar's satirical technique of rewriting the Spanish original material in his critique of the excesses of the friars, De los Reyes quotes verbatim (at times in an edited form) from Spanish historical writings. Sharing jokes and laughter towards the Spaniards creates a shared community, increases one's awareness of abuse, and elicits revolutionary action.

Keywords: *satire, humor, el diablo, librito, De los Reyes, Gaspar de San Augustin*

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1. Introduction

Laughter, a facet of our daily lives, keeps us sane as Filipinos, especially while living in the Philippines. It seems that even in a time of natural disaster or personal stress, the Filipino is unique because we still find time to make jokes, just to make ourselves laugh. Laughter saves us, in the worst and best of times. Strangely, it is not a topic that has been extensively studied in Philippine literature or history.

In her study of humor in Filipino popular forms like the *komiks*, popular theatre, and cinema, Maria Rhodora Ancheta (2017, p. xxiii) contends that Filipino humor is "largely incongruity-based, functioning as an apprehension of abnormality, in the subjects as well as the milieu in which we find them, as departure from normalcy, and as valorization of flaw in order to foreground or highlight humor as a subversive response to an oppressive dominant culture." Shared laughter is elicited from the viewer or reader of a comic strip, political joke, or play on words. An inappropriate act in a particular situation, or an unexpected comment can elicit shared laughter. As one of the earliest studies on humor, Mikhail Bakhtin's (1984) work, *Rabelais and His World* argues that during the time of a carnival, laughter can be subversive, as it overturns hierarchy, rules, and overhauls proper decorum.

Ancheta (2017, p. xxvi) argues that humor in popular texts can be "a potent conduit of the deeper tensions within Philippine society, whose comic treatment of national virtues, beliefs, symbols, and sufferings, both homogenize, by virtue of the popular and fracture, by way of humor's liberative impulses, Filipino identities." A shared laughter in a group creates a community of shared codes, as a joke that needs to be explained loses its humor. Laughter can release political tension, and at the same time, subvert the existing power situation.

This paper is a preliminary study of humor and satire in Isabelo De los Reyes's text, *Ang Diablo sa Filipinas ayon sa nasasabi sa mga casulatan luma sa Kastila* (The Devil in the Philippines according to Ancient Spanish Documents), published in 1886 as a serialized text in *La Oceania Española* (De los Reyes, 1886/2014, p. 9). I argue that in Isabelo De los Reyes's efforts to critique the excesses of Spanish rule, he used satire to elicit awareness and laughter, and at the same time, contribute to the creation of an imagined community. Sharing jokes and laughter towards the Spaniards creates a shared community, increases one's awareness of abuse, and elicits revolutionary action. This paper examines three questions:

1. How does the librito as an object exemplify the colonial uncanny?

2. How does Isabelo De los Reyes use counter-reading as a satirical device?

3. How can humor and satire facilitate the creation of an imagined community to move Filipino natives to act against the excesses of the Spanish colonizer?

The paper will cover the following sections: Satire and its Elements; Isabelo de los Reyes and *El Diablo*; The Librito as Text; Counter-reading as Satire, and Laughter in an Imagined Community. As the readers of *El Diablo* laugh together, satire does not end there, since there is always the hope that the reader will act to change the present order that is being critiqued by the writer.

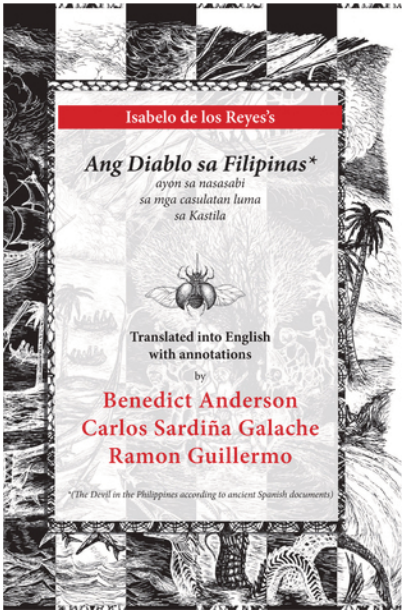

FIG 1. *Book cover, Ang Diablo sa Filipinas ayon sa nasasabi sa mga casulatan luma sa Kastila, translated into English with annotations by Benedict Anderson, Carlos Sardiña Galache and Ramon Guillermo, Manila, Anvil Publishing, Inc., 2014. Photo from https://www.barnesandnoble.com/w/ang-diablo-sa-filipinas-benedict-anderson/1127100324*

2. Satire and its Elements

Satire is "the literary art of diminishing or derogating a subject by making it ridiculous and evoking toward it attitudes of amusement, contempt, scorn, or indignation" (Abrams, 1999, p. 275). Parody is "one of the most calculated and analytic literary techniques: It searches out by means of subversive mimicry any weakness, pretensions, or lack of self-awareness in the original" (Routledge Dictionary, 2006, pp.166-167). There is the intent to call attention to another work, possibly to distort, or exaggerate a section, and to elicit laughter.

Ruben Quintero (2007, p. 1) argues that Juvenal, a Roman writer, and other satirists, write "in winters of discontent," as he describes the "decadence and corruption he sees all around him." The intent of the satirist is not merely to call attention to the situation, but in drawing awareness… he "wishes to arouse [the reader's] energy to action, not purge it in vicarious experience" (Paulson, cited in Quintero, 2007, p. 3). While some satirists would write against an ethical standard, an awareness of a wrongful situation is intended to provoke/move the reader to action.

Satirical writing in the Philippines during the Spanish colonial period would include Jose Rizal's novels and Marcelo H. Del Pilar's satirical works. As educated professionals, it is possible that Isabelo de los Reyes and other writers like Jose Rizal and Marcelo del Pilar were influenced by the Spanish novels, *Lazarillo de Tormes* (1554) and *Don Quijote de la Mancha* (1605/1615). As famous Spanish literary texts, the Lazarillo text presents the adventures of a poor boy trying to survive but who is not bound by societal norms. A significant shift from portraying/casting the aristocracy as lead characters in the text, the Lazarillo text critiques the situation of the poor and the hypocrisy of those more privileged who are outraged at Lazarillo's behavior. This was a significant shift from the traditional choice of lead characters in a novel and a critique of existing power relations in society. Cervantes parodies the ideal knight and virtues of chivalry and heroism prevalent in European literature. The narrative style in both texts critique power and hypocrisy in society.

Satiric literary elements could include "parody, humor, irony, and dialogue." Alberta Gatti argues that in Cervantes's critique of the ideals of chivalry in *Don Quijote*, he used the "ironic voice" of the narrator and "dialogue is made a constitutive part of the action and used… as an exploration of the truth, a process not requiring a definite conclusion" (Gatti, 2007, p. 90). In the case of Jose Rizal using satire to raise political awareness of the abuses of the Spanish friars and

government, C.W. Watson (1998) contends that Rizal used the practice of *costumbrismo*, which entailed detailed descriptions of people, customs, and events. This was coupled with two other practices, one of which was "of writing about characters or types of people to whom one ascribes in exaggerated caricature humorous and ridiculous patterns of behavior (p.10, seen in the representation of Doña Victorina and others). Another technique was "the depiction of typical scenes or situations which take on a representative status as standing for the general unhealthy condition of existing social relations" (Watson, 1998, p.10). Historian Vicente Rafael (1988, pp. 1-3) uses the scene of Fr. Damaso's sermon and disjuncture of native understanding of Fr. Damaso's vitriolic insults in his opening chapter of *Contracting Colonialism*. The classroom scene in the *El Filibusterismo* depicts the reality of a student being humiliated in a class, and at the same time, critiques this situation (Watson, 1998, pp. 10 – 11). Jocelyn Pinzon (2015, p. 426) describes that in Philippine literature, satire uses other "rhetorical devices such as "parody, burlesque, and irony."

Michele Hannoosh (1989, p. 113) writes that "a major aspect of parody to emerge from recent theoretical consideration of the genre is its essential reflexivity, its capacity to reflect critically back upon itself, not merely upon its target." The reference to an earlier text, and the writing and reading of the second text against it, draws the reader to critique the first text via the second. There would be two elements at play here: (1) "reflexivity is inherent in the definition of parody as a comical retelling and transformation of another text," and (2) "it has more radical implications than mere self-reference: the parody actually rebounds upon itself, calling itself into question as it does the parodied work, and suggesting its own potential as a model or target, a work to be rewritten, transformed, even parodied in its turn" (Hannoosh, 1989, pp. 113-114). As De los Reyes cites the writings of the Spanish chroniclers and historians verbatim or in an edited format, the original text is re-presented in a hilarious and critical manner. At the same time, even the text *El Diablo* opens itself to being parodied or retold.

Laughter is elicited from the contemporary reader as the context of the original text changes. De los Reyes uses this technique as he quotes sections from the works of several Spanish chroniclers, but in a different context, the dialogue between Gatmaitan and the "I," to critique and elicit laughter. The continuing discussion of supposed truths about Gatmaitan's beliefs based on his own personal experience, his grandmother's stories, and the written records, indirectly critique the Spanish texts. This is similar to the approach of Spanish critic Luis Galván (2021, p. 33), who describes that "parody and satire are not separate

classes of texts… The notion of parody points, above all, to a high degree of similarity of a text and its model, whatever the function of that similarity may be. Satire, for its part, is best defined in rhetorical terms, as a poetical or in general literary configuration...which censures wicked or shameful actions or characters."

The humor in Isabelo de los Reyes's *Ang Diablo sa Filipinas ayon sa nasasabi sa mga casulatan luma sa Kastila* (The Devil in the Philippines according to Ancient Spanish Documents, 1886) critiques historical writing that presented a biased view of the Filipino natives in the Spanish colonial period. De los Reyes unpacks the superstitions supposedly collected and written by the Spanish chroniclers, and shows that the biases come from the perspective of the chroniclers themselves, who reinterpreted and rewrote local beliefs in accordance with their own Spanish beliefs. Calling the local anitos, diwatas, and places or objects of worship as demons or demon inhabited, Anderson jests that "Satan arrived with the colonial conquest" (in De los Reyes, 1886/2014, p. 9).

By decontextualizing the chronicles and *historias* and reading the texts horizontally - on a level plain with Spanish and Filipino native beliefs - De los Reyes critiques the ridiculousness of Spanish writing on supposedly Indio superstitions and beliefs. It is a brilliant rewriting and critique of the Spanish chronicles and historias, some of which are cited verbatim but carefully edited (because of the length of the text and slant De los Reyes intends to create). Aside from the *Noli me Tangere* and *El Filibusterismo*, other literary texts using satire to critique Spanish excesses and representations include *Fray Botod* (1874) by Graciano Lopez Jaena and Marcelo H. Del Pilar's *Dasalan at Tocsohan* (1888). Jaena's text is a brutal and honest depiction of the excesses of the Spanish friars, while Del Pilar appropriates the *Doctrina Cristiana* (1593), the earliest published book here in the Philippines, and rewrites the prayers and religious teachings to show the abuses of the clergy. He uses the form of the prayers like the Our Father, Hail Mary, and the Ten Commandments, but rewrites and changes the words to critique the religious orders and their hypocrisy. It could also be considered a "sacred parody," as studied by Bakhtin (1984, p. 14). Mojares believes that Del Pilar "has the makings of a fine satirist: purposive irreverence, a feel for the public nerve, a vigorous language, a sense of tradition in his bones. Incomplete though his achievement is, Del Pilar remains a light in Philippine literary tradition" (Mojares, 1983/2020, p. 144). The irony is that Del Pilar uses Catholic prayers and teachings to critique the hypocritical nature of the Spaniards and missionaries. Mojares argues that "in the nineteenth century Del Pilar turned the missionary tactics against the friars – to use old forms to propagate new attitudes.

The use of duplo verse as a mold for subversive subject matter allowed Del Pilar to create political poetry … the poet did not need to start from scratch – he simply took over and renovated what was already available" (Lumbera, cited in Mojares, 1983/2020, p. 143). The historian Teodoro Agoncillo argues that Del Pilar works such as *Dasalan at Tocsohan, Dupluhan, Kadakilaan ng Dios, Caiingat Cayo, Pasiong Dapat Ipag-alab nang Puso ng Taong Babasa*, and *Sagot nang España sa Hibik nang Filipinas* merit further study (1944, p. 15). Del Pilar's parody of the Catholic prayers and teachings in the *Doctrina Christiana* (1593) like the *Ama Namin* (Our Father; entitled Amain Namin) was a "satirical parody the like of which has never been seen before and since" (Agoncillo, 1944, pp. 15-16). Del Pilar's creativity and imagination in these texts need further study.

The source of laughter in the satirical text is another area to consider. For M. P. Mulder (2002), conventional humour theories include: Superiority theory, Relief theory, and Incongruity theory. The "Superiority theory" assumes that as "we laugh about the misfortune of others, it reflects our own superiority" (Mulder & Nijholt, 2002, p. 3). "Relief theory" would seem to be more of a theory of laughter, as laughter "releases tension and psychic energy." It assumes that "energy continuously builds up within the human body" and laughter releases it. The last, "incongruity theory" is "the sudden perception of the incongruity between a concept and the real objects, which have been thought through it in some relation, and the laugh itself is just an expression of this incongruity" (Mulder & Nijholt, 2002, p. 4). The laughter that is elicited in *El Diablo* would seem to be more of incongruity theory since the "concept" of the veracity of the chronicles become incongruous when cited out of context. The idea of superstitious beliefs refers not to that of the Filipino native (as the chronicle supposedly records), but rather to the Spanish writer's own superstitions. Combined with the elements of dialogue, appropriation of Spanish writing verbatim (but in a different context), and the incongruity of the cited texts, all these factors contribute to the laughter elicited by *El Diablo*.

3. Isabelo de los Reyes and *El Diablo*

Resil Mojares (2006, p. 255) describes Isabelo de los Reyes as "the country's most unorthodox intellectual." He was a lawyer and a journalist, wrote articles on folklore, critiques of the Spanish rule in the Philippines, and on the Katipunan. He wrote in Ilocano and Spanish, and was imprisoned in Montjuich castle, where he met Ramon Sempau (who later translated the *Noli*

me Tangere into French) and other anarchists. He established the "fortnightly Spanish-Iloko newspaper *El Ilocano* (1889 – 1896)" and "was the only indio ever licensed to own and operate a paper in the colony" (Mojares, 2006, p. 259). With Gregorio Aglipay, they established the Iglesia Filipina Independiente and the Partido Republicano (Mojares, 2006, p. 277). In 1922, he became a member of the Senate, representing the district "Ilocos Sur, Ilocos Norte, Cagayan, Isabela, Abra, and Batanes" (Mojares, 2006, p. 286). He married three times, and had twenty-seven children (Mojares, 2006, pp. 255-258).

He was educated in Manila, and was not an *ilustrado* like Rizal, but *"an indio and provinciano* working in the race conscious, socially conservative, and politically repressive Manila" (Mojares, 2007, p. 260). Among his many publications, he wrote *El Folk-Lore Filipino* (1889 – 1890), *Historia de Ilocos* (1890), *La Religion del Katipunan* (1899), and *Memoria sobre la revolución filipina* (1899). His book *El Diablo en Filipinas* was first published in 1886, as a series in *La Oceania Española* (De los Reyes, 1886/2014, pp. 9, 11).

William Henry Scott sees the *El Diablo* as a "hilarious piece in which a pious *provinciano* defends his belief in ghosts and evil spirits by quoting examples of Spanish friars who saw and heard apparitions of the Devil, citing volume, chapter, and page numbers from their Orders' (sic) official chronicles as evidence – from which Isabelo wickedly concludes that it must have been the friars who introduced the Devil into the archipelago" (Scott, 1982, pp. 255-256). *El Diablo*, written and published in Spanish and Tagalog, is an interesting sample of Philippine literature, since it made the text more accessible to the Filipino native reader at the time. It was published in a bilingual version (1889) in the newspaper, *La España Oriental* (De los Reyes, 1886/2014, p. 11). The text is a dialogue between "I" and Gatmaitan, as they visit the library of the deceased *directorcillo* (the secretary of the *gobernadorcillo*). Set as a conversation between friends whispering in a library, Gatmaitan justifies his beliefs in spirits, anitos, and demons by citing Spanish sources. Similar to Don Quixote, De los Reyes uses the dialogue format as the narrative style, and in the course of the conversation between the narrator and Gatmaitan, different perspectives are offered on the texts cited, or the beliefs discussed, debated, and debunked.

As Filipino natives reading Spanish sources, the Spanish writers are questioned and ridiculed indirectly. Filipino superstitions and beliefs are supposedly recorded objectively, but Spanish bias comes in. The Catholic faith

has the power ostensibly to heal the sick, protect a person against all evil elements, or expel demons from the natural environment. It justifies the belief in the (one true) Catholic faith. As the sources are re-read in an incongruous context, it elicits laughter in the reader, and at the same critiques the writings and reasons for Spanish rule. The implied hierarchy of Spanish belief and the Catholic faith is called into question as Gatmaitan cites Spanish sources again and again to justify his beliefs and the narrator, "I" ridicules and challenges Gatmaitan's beliefs with use of reason or alternative readings of the situation as a dream, nightmare, or illusion. Mojares (2006, p. 354) argues that De los Reyes "subverts the pretensions to intellectual and moral superiority of the Friars by citing not only analogues between local and European superstitions here, but in his style of radical mischief, posing that some of the local 'barbaric' beliefs (even the Devil himself) may have been invented by the Spaniards themselves." Megan C. Thomas (2012, pp. 115 – 116) agrees with this reading, that for De los Reyes, "the most absurd beliefs were in fashion in the Iberian peninsula, during the first days of Spanish domination," adding that his "long literary sketch, titled, *The Devil*… showed through its readings of early friar accounts that the friars were superstitious and that they were likely the source of many superstitions in the Philippines."

4. The Librito as Text

The book opens with the scene where the narrator "I" and Gatmaitan are interested to see the dead man's library, as Gatmaitan hopes to acquire "a miraculous little book titled *De La Compañía* [of the Company] which conferred on him all the wisdom of Solomon" (*libritong mababalaghin na ang tauag ay sa Compañia, siyang nagbibigay dunong sa caniya huad cay Salomon*) (De los Reyes, 2014, pp. 21-23). Scott believes that this "belief was undoubtedly added to purely Ilocano beliefs by the Spaniards: it is a common belief that the Jesuits possess little miraculous books" (Scott, 1982, pp. 254 – 255; see also in the footnote no. 4 in De los Reyes, 1889/1994, p. 37). But Anderson and Guillermo believe that the "little book" was a "magic tool of local sprites (*sangcabui*)" and not just a Jesuit magical book (see footnote no. 4, De los Reyes, 1886/2014, p. 23). The curious element here is the view of the book as a "talisman" or having the power of mobility that is granted to the owner of the book. The meaning of the book as an object or thing becomes complex as Bill Brown argues that "the thing seems to name the object just as it is even as

it names some thing else" (sic) (Brown, 2001, p. 5). The book may acquire a different meaning aside from its contents, but more so as an object with power. While book and newspaper publishing were already prevalent here in the 19th century, the slippage of meaning as a talisman is a promising area of study as it involves language and the physical character of the book.

It should be interesting to see if any other books with other magical qualities are included in Philippine folklore and the reception of the book as a material object in Philippine history and culture. Perhaps the native perception of the Catholic religious practices that included the act of prayer, administration of sacraments (both while reading from the Holy Book or missal), the procession of the Book/Gospels (carrying the physical object) in the Catholic mass, or raising it above the head of the celebrant during a ceremony imbued the book as a material object with special qualities. The librito as an object or thing is a curious element in the text, because it does not cover the expected areas of the study of the writing, publication, distribution, and reception of a book. Patricia May B. Jurilla (2003, p. 534) examines the history of the book as a "physical object, in the materials and processes used in the manufacture of texts." In a more recent study, Jurilla argues that "the survival of the incunabula of the Philippines can offer much information not only on the publication, manufacture, distribution, and reception of early Philippine imprints… but also on Spanish colonial rule…; Christian missions in Asia during the Counter-Reformation; global trade and travel since the early modern period; and Philippine historiography in general" (Jurilla, 2023, p. 422).

The act of reading and writing in the native context merits further study. Fenella Cannell describes the transactional or reward aspect of reading the Pasyon: "Many, if not all, however, read the *Pasion* in the expectation of healing from sickness for themselves and others, which would be granted by a contract not with a universal Christ, but with a very particular one, the local cult figure of the Amang Hinulid, or "dead Christ" (Cannell, 2006, p. 146). Reading a religious text like the Pasyon could "provide them with shamanistic gifts of healing power" (Cannell, 2006, p. 146). Cannell describes the act of natives taking notes of prayers, novenas, and incantations for protection. "The more prayer spells one has, the more likely one is also to have mastery of a range of other broadly shamanic powers. The greatest adepts collected their many prayer spells together into a volume known as a 'little book' or *librito*" (Cannell, 2006, p. 148). Cannell's study of a Bicolano librito shows the "shamanic repertoire" that covers protection against "snakes, witchcraft, lightning … to become invisible, … to protect against malign and predatory spirits." It also included an "oracion to

travel swiftly by land and water" (Cannell, 2006, pp. 150-151). While the librito in *El Diablo* is a book of spells given by the sangkabagi to their friends, the magical properties in possessing or uttering the prayer spells contained within empowered whoever possessed it.

Language is also a crucial element, since the book is entitled in Spanish, "de la Compañía". Vicente Rafael analyzes the use of Castilian, or the "Colonial Uncanny" in translation and evangelization. Rafael argues that "Filipino nationalism thus did not originate with the discovery of an indigenous identity and his/her subsequent assertion of an essential difference from the colonizer. Rather, its genesis lies in the transmission of messages across social and linguistic borders among all sorts of people whose identities and identifications were far from settled" (Rafael, 2005, p. 5). The colonial uncanny meant that the local language was assimilated into Spanish religious teachings. Rafael describes the "codification of native languages" with the introduction of the Roman alphabet, "using Latin categories to reconstruct native grammars; and the Castilian definitions in constructing dictionaries of the vernaculars." The untranslatability of certain Spanish and Latin words such as "Dios, Espiritu Santo, Virgen" were to keep the "purity of sacred concepts" (Rafael, 2005, p. 2). Since the native language was used by missionaries for Catholic teaching, its appropriation and linkage to Castilian endowed it with "magical" powers:

> Through the translation of God's Work, natives came to see in Spanish missionaries a foreign presence speaking their 'own', that is, the natives,' language. This appearance – as sudden as it was unmotivated from the native's point of view – of the foreign in the familiar and its reverse, the familiar in the foreign, roused native interests and anxieties … Conversion ...was thus a matter of responding to this startling because novel emergence of alien messages from alien speakers from within one's own speech. It was to identify with this uncanny – we might say magical – occurrence and to submit to its attractions which included scenes to an unseen yet omnipresent source of all power (Rafael, 2005, pp. 2-3).

While it would have been interesting if De los Reyes had included more details of the librito in the text, Fennell's study on the Bicol libritos shows that the languages and signs used included Bikol, Pangasinan, Latin, and Castilian. Letters, acronyms, and drawings were used in the oracion or spells in the text, together with instructions like in Catholic prayer books, "Say 3 Pasternosters: Say a credo" (Fennell, 2006, pp. 153-157).

In *El Diablo*, the librito is described as an anting-anting, and the library of the directorcillo is locked in order to secure it, but the book still disappears behind locked doors. "But the first thing my friend Gatmaitan hunted for was the Little Book, because the poor fellow, believing in ancient legends, was trying to inherit, illegally, this anting-anting (amulet)" (*Ngunit, ang unang hinanap ng caibigan cong si Gatmaitan ay ang librito, yayamang and caniyang nais, ay mapasacaniya di man carampatan, ang librito na anting-anting*) (De los Reyes, 1886/2014, p. 22-23). The source of the librito is indefinite, although Guillermo and Anderson believe it is a gift from a native spirit to a human being (see footnote no. 4, De los Reyes, 1886/2014, p. 23).

De los Reyes describes the *katatao-an* or *sangkabagí* in *El Folk-Lore Filipino*:

> […] appear to their chosen in the middle of the night in the window or through holes. They wake their victims with a hardly audible voice, and have them ride on a flying barañgay or airship like those of the katatao-an, flying in space at one o'clock in the morning and going all around the world in half an hour. According to the Ilocano common folk, the sangkabagi approach many people; but some refuse their friendship because these anitos forbid their friends to say the rosary, hear mass, make the sign of the cross, or fulfill their religious obligations as Christians, because the sangkabagi, by their own admission, cannot go near people who practice acts of piety.
>
> The sangkabagi inflicts evil on those who scorn and reject them. They are dragged to the floor when they are asleep and taken to other places. Their livers are snatched and the space filled with grass to make them sick. The sangkabagi have very sharp eyes and they can read the thoughts of men through their faces … *On the other hand, they give those whom they like a book, called libro de la compañia*, and this book can take them in no time to wherever they want to go no matter how far. All they have to do is indicate the place. It is said that an old native of Sarrat, Ilocos Norte was going from his town to Laoag, not very far away, to do some shopping and returned after four minutes with the things he had bought. He did this everyday, morning, noon, and night. According to the people, the sangkabagi teach their friends to make watches and give them roots to cure any sickness by rubbing the roots to the affected body (De los Reyes, 1889/1994, pp. 35-37, emphasis mine).

While the book's title is in Spanish, the librito in De los Reyes's *El Folk-Lore Filipino* is a gift from a native spirit to a human native, giving the new owner the power of mobility. The behavior of the sangkabagi also indicates the irreconcilability of the old beliefs and the new faith. Since the new faith does not allow worship of older gods or spirits, when someone is converted and baptized, the relationship with the older spirits is cut off. *El Diablo* illustrates the dynamics of the relationship between the old spirits and the new Catholic God. Powers and gifts from the old spirits cannot be accepted or used under the new faith. The old *anitos* can punish the Filipino native who does not believe in the power of the spirits. Baptism was also presented as "the best medicine against a demon" (De los Reyes, 1886/2014, p. 69) and inscribing a cross on a tree possibly "inhabited by Divatas; deities of the forests and mountains, whom they venerated in ancient times," made the spirits leave (De los Reyes, 1886/2014, p. 59). The friendship between the native spirit and the Filipino native requires that the native does not practice the new beliefs, Catholic teachings or participate in its rituals.

The curious element of oracles foretelling the arrival of the Spaniards and resulting displacement of the old beliefs was also included in the conversation with Gatmaitan. Gatmaitan gives the example of Apolaqui (the Pangasinan god of war) who tells the Filipino natives that he is leaving because, "I weep to see the completion of what I expected for so many years; namely that you would welcome some foreigners with white teeth and hooded heads, who would implant amidst your houses crossed poles (crosses) to torment me all the more. I am leaving you to seek people who will follow me, for you have abandoned me, your ancient lord, for foreigners (De los Reyes, 1886/2014, p. 29). The character "I' cites the *Conquistas de las Islas Filipinas* by Friar Gaspar de San Augustin, in a *maganito* ceremony three years before the arrival of Legazpi, where the *demon* says "our ancient friendship has come to an end because of the arrival of the fair-headed men with white skins, with great force and valour" (De los Reyes, 1886/2014, p, 31). The effect of reading the so-called oracles would be twofold: read from the perspective of the Spanish chroniclers, their future arrival and the conversion of the natives to the new faith was inevitable because even the old gods had foreseen it and accepted it; while read from the Filipino native perspective, the acceptance of the new faith and displacement of the old beliefs should be questioned, and the reevaluation of the new religion brought by Spanish colonization. Perhaps a revival of the old beliefs was necessary. Could the relationship with the older spirits still prevail or exist alongside the new faith that demanded exclusivity? Can the old beliefs be revived?

De Los Reyes raises this issue in *The Religion of the Katipunan, or the old beliefs*

of the Filipinos, published in 1899:

> the philosopher of the Katipunan should study this thoroughly in order to bring back this religious system back to its pristine purity, by expurgating its historical inaccuracies and superstitious because we should not forget that all kinds of religious superstitions have been introduced at some time or another, mostly by some abusive and deceitful ministers, who have or tried to cheat the believers, like for instance, the friars; they were forced to invent thousands of miracles in order to confirm their idolatrous doctrines (De los Reyes, 1899/2009, p. 26).

With the librito element in the text, we see a hybrid element, as the book is titled in Spanish, but possibly its content is in the vernacular, or a combination of signs and different languages, as Fenell has studied in the Bicolano libritos. We see Rafael's "colonial uncanny," imbuing the librito with its power and elusiveness. But even if the library was locked up to secure the directorcillo's library, the librito manages to escape Gatmaitan and the narrator.

5. Counter-reading as Satire

The humor in Isabelo de los Reyes's *Ang Diablo* critiques historical writing that presented a biased view of the Filipino natives in the Spanish colonial period. De los Reyes unpacks the superstitions supposedly collected and written up by the Spanish chroniclers and shows that their bias and misread meanings come from the perspectives of the chroniclers themselves. Presumably, demons abound in the Philippines and only the one true faith and Catholic God can save the Filipino natives.

Since the librito cannot be found, Gatmaitan and the narrator start to read sections from other books in the dead man's library. These Spanish chroniclers would include: Diego Aduarte, a Dominican; Francisco Colin, a Jesuit; Gaspar de San Augustin, an Augustinian, and Juan Francisco de San Antonio, a Franciscan. Starting with Fr. San Antonio's *Cronicas de la Apostolica Provincia de S, Gregorio de Religioso descalzos de N.S.P. San Francisco en las Islas Philipinas, China, Japon, etc.* (1738), Gatmaitan reads the section describing "two ferocious black demons" with an indio who was damned for imposing a tax on "civet (animal perfume)". After the damned indio gives his shroud (that protected him), he is taken by the two black demons and disappears (De los Reyes, 2014, pp. 25-27). While the charges are ridiculous, it shows that small acts can damn one

immediately with no recourse. In the Aduarte text, *Historia* (1640), the "witches" made another native woman sick, avenging her refusal to give one of the witches a piece of strawberry fruit that the witch supposedly wanted. The old women "with the help of the Devil (*El Diablo*), made themselves owners of the haciendas, food, and personages among all the Indios" (De los Reyes, 2014, pp. 27-29). There are also contradictions cited from the Fr. Aduarte text, wherein a native man was held by five demons who left when he was baptized. But in the same account, "a sick Chinese man" confined in a hospital, must face demons who "threatened to carry him off because he refused to be baptized" (De los Reyes, 2014, p. 35).

For De los Reyes, while quoting verbatim or in an edited form from the Spanish texts, the change of context and incongruity of the situation elicits laughter from the readers of *El Diablo*. The beliefs of the Filipino natives as written by the Spanish writers seem ridiculous in the conversational exchange between the narrator "I" and Gatmaitan. In presenting the humor and unbelievable superstitions, De los Reyes questions the veracity of the writing of the Spanish chronicles and shows that their own biases and superstitions intrude into the writing. De los Reyes's satirical approach to the Spanish shows the ridiculousness of the superstitions and interpretations of events as supernatural, like the souls knocking on the floor, or demons throwing rocks on the roof. Natural phenomena are read as the handiwork of the demons such as the incident of a large number of birds on a tree, as the natives supposedly believed that "the tree was inhabited by Divatas, deities of the forests and mountains, whom they venerated from ancient times." When the sign of the cross was affixed on the tree trunk, the birds "departed forever" (De los Reyes, 2014, pp. 57-59).

Perhaps even a minor eruption of Taal volcano is interpreted as demons leaving the area where Fr. Augustin celebrated mass. Gaspar de San Agustin's original text (cited in *El Diablo*) reads (boldfaced text indicates the words used in *El Diablo*):

> There is a church or hermitage two leagues from Taal containing a miraculous image of Our Lady called Caysasay to which all the natives of the area are greatly devoted. God worked many and wondrous miracles through this image, with which we will deal at the proper time. However, I will narrate one prodigious event that Divine Majesty displayed in the town of Taal through Fray Agustin de Albuquerque, one of His first ministers, who would go many times to teach the natives, even before the convent was built, in the

same way he would go to other neighboring towns.

In the Bombong lagoon, there is a small islet which had a volcano that would sometimes spew numerous large burning rocks, destroying many seedbeds of cotton, sweet potato, and other plants that the Taal natives had planted around the base of the volcano. **It was foretold that whenever three people would reach (three fellow travelers arrived there)** the island, **one would stay and die there without knowing the cause of his death (or the kind of sickness he suffered). (When) Fray Augustin de Albuquerque was (told about all this)** informed of this. After asking God in a very lengthy prayer to have pity on the natives of those towns and remove such fatal luck from them, **he went to the island (islet to say Mass …)** He exorcised and blessed it with the ordinary benedictions of the church, then held a very devout procession. He said Mass full of humility and confidence in God. At the moment he elevated the Sacred Host of that bloodless sacrifice, **(But just as he was raising the Holy Host, everyone there heard horrifying roars,)** a horrendous din was heard **(accompanied by screams, cries, and powerful lamentations. The tip of the volcano caved in on itself (sank into the crater… Later on …)** leaving it with two openings: one of sulphur and the other of green water that is continuously boiling. At present, the latter is often visited by deer that go to the beds of saltpeter around the lake formed by the volcano. The mouth that faces the town of Lipa is about one-fourth of a league in width. After some time, the volcano began smoldering so much at the other mouth, which is smaller, that the natives feared a new disaster. They went to **(when a Mass was said in the same place by) Fray Bartolome de Alcantara** who was the minister of the town. He did a similar procession and once more said Mass. From then on, the volcano never again spewed fire or smoke, although **tremulous voices, cries, and some thunder was heard (groans, fearful voices, and thunderclaps could be heard).** Fray Tomas de Abreu, minister of Taal, had a cross carried to the tip of the volcano borne by more than four hundred men, since it was made of very heavy wood called anivión. After setting it up, not only has the volcano never harmed anyone, but the islet returned to its original fecundity (San Agustin, 1698/1998, pp. 603 – 605; De los Reyes, 1886/2014, pp. 77-79).

In *El Diablo*, Gatmaitan responds that the scene described above was "very horrifying" and narrates another incident. But in comparing San Agustin's text and the edited portion used by De los Reyes (boldfaced section), we find that the main idea represented (and questioned) are the same. The mass and prayers by Fr. Augustin expelled the demons in the Taal volcano. The cross installed in the area keeps the "voices" quiet. Gatmaitan compares this scene in Taal as "not so less than what appears in Aduarte's account where a demon appears as a "deformed and monstrous dog." The demon transforms into the figure of Christ, but when Fr. Luis makes the sign of the Cross, the demon transformed into a "fierce, black, and terrifying cat" (De los Reyes, 1886/2014, p. 79).

The narrator, or I, uses reason to debunk the beliefs of Gatmaitan, as in the case of a sick man who saw demons who wanted to take him, or another man being asked by demons why he wanted to convert to Christianity when it was too late. Three Dominican priests manage to get rid of the demon (De los Reyes, 1886/2014, pp. 59-63). The narrator argues that these are just nightmares or "delirium." Baptism is seen as "the best medicine against a demon" (De los Reyes, 1886/2014, p. 69).

Even the sound of rats running in the room are read as the souls of Purgatory knocking and asking for prayers from believers here. *El Diablo* ends with Gatmaitan knocking his head on the door in his haste to leave the room. He heard the noise of a rat in the room, but thought it was the soul of the deceased directorcillo asking for prayers. The "I" character trips on Gatmaitan and their two heads are almost knocked together.

6. Laughter in an Imagined Community

For Smita Lahiri (2007, p. 243), the "last half century of the Spanish rule in the Philippines was an efflorescence in colonial print culture." There was a huge variety of texts: "bureaucratic reports, political polemics, satirical sketches, poetry, *costumbrista* novels, propaganda tracts, devotional works, and sundry forms of ephemera" (Lahiri, 2007, p. 244). While there have been extensive studies on ilustrado and other nationalist writing, the "colonial public sphere as a nexus of discursive and institutional practice" still needs to be studied fully (Lahiri, 2007, p. 243).

Julian Go assesses the development of anticolonial nationalism in former colonies and argues that theories depend on "whether they emphasize the

cultural, discursive, or cognitive bases of nationalism on the one hand or, on the other hand colonial economy and politics" (Go & Watson, 2019, p. 42). Anderson's theory of "print capitalism" in the creation of *imagined communities* and ilustrado writings contribute to "uniting previously distinct linguistic groups and offering, for the first time, the ability to imagine a larger 'national' community" (Go & Watson, 2019, p. 42). Assessing De los Reyes's *El Diablo* text, published in a bilingual version, we can consider it as one of his attempts to develop a broader view of a national community. The choice of language in the text, and in his other writings, shows that De los Reyes had a careful eye on his readership. De los Reyes writings contribute to the cultural and discursive field of nationalism.

Benedict Anderson (2006, p. 17) cites a moving passage in De los Reyes's introduction to *El Folk-Lore Filipino*, wherein he "described himself as brother of the forest peoples, the Aeta, the Igorots, and the Tinguians." No *ilustrado* writer at the time had written about any notion of solidarity with the non-Hispanized, non-Catholic or rural communities. Perhaps in De los Reyes's "proto-nationalist strivings," his study of folklore led him to realize that perhaps the different ethnolinguistic groups in the country could have certain commonalities of beliefs and a possible shared identity (2005, p. 17). Anderson listed three possible reasons why De los Reyes engaged in the study of Folk-lore: 1) "the possibility – the hope – of local cultural renaissance"; 2) "to subvert the dominance of the Catholic Church in the colony" (and to argue that some common superstitions were introduced by the Spaniards here, both in *El Folk-Lore Filipino* and *El Diablo*); and 3) "political self-criticism" – this would include a "self-critical spirit" in evaluating folk knowledge (Anderson, 2006, pp. 17 – 20). This is a similar argument in De los Reyes's essay, *The Religion of the Katipunan*. In re-assessing the old beliefs, a critical approach was necessary to sift out the superstitious beliefs introduced by the Spaniards here and the inclusion of miracles and expulsion of demons that abound to justify the righteousness of conversion into the Catholic faith. De los Reyes's contribution to Philippine studies and folklore cannot be set aside, since his writings on folklore served to not just recover the past, but to "critique the present" (Thomas, 2016, p. 129).

In using satire as an approach to critique the Spanish chroniclers, De los Reyes elicits laughter in his readers. The shared laughter creates an imagined community of readers (during his time, the Filipino natives) who gain an awareness of the misrepresentation of the Filipino natives in the Spanish texts. It is a view that the different ethnolinguistic groups in the country and with varied religious beliefs could attain a level of friendship and brotherhood. But the

notion of a common nationality and shared identity across all Filipino natives was still a revolutionary project.

De los Reyes's method of reading the Spanish sources and citing it out of context puts it in an incongruous situation that elicits laughter from its readers. A critical stance on reading Spanish texts on Philippine history, culture, and religion to evaluate the bias for the Catholic religion, hierarchy, and dominance is crucial. Highlighting its contradictions, or even ridiculous ideas at times, puts it in a laughable position but also serves as a critique of the original text.

7. Conclusion

Laughter is a tool for subversion. As De los Reyes uses humor and satire in *El Diablo*, we find that he challenges the veracity of Spanish writing on its colony. Nationalist writing in the late nineteenth century, whether from the ilustrados or other writers like De los Reyes, contributed to the creation of a public sphere critical of the excesses of Spanish rule. Another crucial facet of the nation is its archive. Mojares (2013, p. 15) believed that "Isabelo created a raw inchoate archive. By placing at its center, folk-lore, 'the people's knowledge' (instead of the elite's or the official), and by rendering it in a wonderfully imperfect form, he raised the specter of its subsequent institutionalization." The counter-reading of the colonial archive, as Isabelo De los Reyes has done in *El Diablo*, shows how literature can appropriate old texts and literary forms in order to subvert colonial power. Shared laughter is one element in creating the nation as a "deep horizontal comradeship" (Anderson, 1983/1991, p. 7).

This paper is a preliminary attempt to unpack humor and satire in one text by Isabelo de los Reyes, which is merely one sample of the writings of the nationalist and ilustrado writers in the Spanish colonial period. While political critique was very clear in Rizal's novels, De los Reyes use of humor in *El Diablo* shows one method to read and critique the Spanish sources on the Filipino natives. Rewriting these chronicles in a creative manner, but in a different context, allows the space for humor, satire, and laughter to emerge. The dialogue format between the narrator and Gatmaitan allowed the presentation of different perspectives, questions, and reinterpretation. And no, demons do not abound in the Philippines.

While we may not have the data on the reception of *El Diablo* by its readers, we can only hope that in critiquing the Spanish colonial period in its representation of the Philippine colonial past, De los Reyes's text elicited a

response to act on its readers. While recognizing the central and broad expanse of Rizal's writing, further studies on different writing styles and techniques used by Marcelo H. Del Pilar, Graciano Lopez Jaena, and other nationalist writers will broaden the Philippine colonial public sphere in the period.

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