

## **Literary Contact Zones and Transnational Poetic Space in the Philippine Commonwealth Era: The Poetry of Rafael Zulueta da Costa and José Garcia Villa**

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### **ABSTRACT**

This paper seeks to examine poetic-narrative spaces as contact zones, illuminating the Spanish cultural and linguistic element as it manifests in the literary practices of two major Commonwealth poets in English—Rafael Zulueta da Costa and José Garcia Villa. My objective is twofold, namely, to expand upon the Philippine Commonwealth era as a distinct period in Philippine literary culture marked by a contested globalized aesthetics and politics, and to examine the complex Anglo-Hispanic transcultural and translational processes involved in the literary practices of early writers of Philippine poetry in English who were influenced by their historical milieu.

*Keywords:* Rafael Zulueta da Costa, José Garcia Villa, Philippine literature in English, Fil-Hispanic Literature, Philippine Commonwealth literature, literary contact zone, transnational Philippine poetics, Philippine literary history

## Historical Liminality, the Temporal Borderland, and Transnational Linguistic Space in Early Twentieth Century Philippines

One way to apprehend the state of colonial languages and literatures in the Philippines during the early twentieth century is to visualize two photographs of the same landscape superimposed, both images taken during the liminal, golden hours of the day—one at dawn, the other at dusk. In synchronous arcs, the language of a new global power rises as the language of the Old World falls into disuse. Such a transition, of course, additionally mirrors the geopolitical flux pulsing through the archipelago in the intervening years between 1896 and the cataclysmic events of the Second World War.

Indeed, even the decade spanning the last years of the nineteenth century and the first years of the twentieth had proven to be nothing less than a tumultuous struggle with external powers. With the revolution against Spain lasting from 1896 to 1898 and the declaration of the First Philippine Republic, over three hundred years of Spanish colonial rule would come to an end. Yet the victory was to be a brief one. American occupation then followed in the wake of the Spanish-American War. The Treaty of Paris, which was signed on December 10, 1898, enumerated the U.S. acquisition of Spanish territories in the Western Pacific and Latin America—among them Cuba, Puerto Rico, Guam, and the Philippines.

Following a renewed wave of Filipino resistance against imperialistic domain, or what the *Encyclopedia Britannica* suggests as “a continuation of the Philippine Revolution against Spanish rule,” albeit against a new opponent, the Philippine-American War would erupt in 1899, only to sputter out in 1902. From this point onwards, U.S. control over the islands was sealed. A new system of rule was instituted: first military, and then civilian. The latter was established “to strengthen the impression that Americans were welcome in the Philippines” (Torres 33).

The new century in the Philippines thus began with its Americanization, both systemic and aesthetic—a process that would bring the U.S. colonial administration into a reckoning with the sociocultural artifacts of the previous regime. These artifacts were material, in the way that architecture and food are material, and immaterial, in the way that language carries signifying weight but without physical substance. As Cristina Evangelista Torres writes in *The Americanization of Manila: 1898-1921*: “When the Americans arrived in Manila in 1898, they found a Spanish city with a strong European influence as manifested, for example, in the Walled City of Intramuros ... an enclave for the Spaniards who tried to make its landscape comparable, if not similar to, that of their native Spain” (56). Intramuros, whose

name means “within the walls,” was nestled in a system of medieval ramparts and fortifications. It was considered to be the nexus of Spanish imperial power in Asia, and situated within the grounds of the Walled City were the Palace of the Governor-General, the Ayuntamiento (Seat of City Council), the Manila Cathedral, and a plethora of universities and colleges—the earliest of them having been founded by Spanish Catholic missionaries (Intramuros Administration).

Now confronted by the unmistakable structural vestiges of the first colonizer, the U.S. government immediately set about redeveloping Manila in such a way that it would acquire a certain American character—one designed to meet lifestyle expectations of American nationals seeking to pursue business and career ventures in the Philippines. This palimpsestic compulsion came in the form of wide-scale initiatives such as building projects, real estate and transportation development, mass media, technological and cultural imports, and the provision of familiar amenities:

Escolta became a classy shopping district where an American who just landed in the city could savor ice cream soda while reading one or all three English newspapers bannered the latest news from the US. American cars found their way into the colony and there were around 1,700 automobiles in Manila in 1914. American sports like lawn tennis, polo, baseball, and basketball became popular and motion pictures as well as light opera from England became part of the entertainment fare. (Torres 70)

Furthermore, educational reform as a key element in “benevolent assimilation” would bring about a decisive shift in language use. On January 21, 1901, the Philippine Commission passed Act No. 74, which became the basis for the public school system of the Philippines and mandated that English be both the official language and medium of instruction (Torres 138). Spanish further slid into displacement, “spoken and read by only 10% of the population at the close of Spanish rule, [then] quickly declined, though the Spanish cultural legacy remained an important constituent of Filipino culture” (Mojares, “Panitikan” 4).

If Spanish was the language of an Old World upper class, then English was the language of upward mobility. Its establishment was an act of domination over a prior world order, and furthermore operated as both marker and gateway to social privilege, incorporating the new colonial subjects into an emergent sphere of American authority and its accompanying sociocultural hierarchies. “Alongside a Spanish-speaking elite,” writes Vicente Rafael in *Motherless Tongues: The Insurgency of Language amid Wars of Translation*, “[t]here arose an English-speaking minority

who achieved fluency and with its greater economic wealth and social influence” (45). By the 1930s, that minority comprised 35 percent of the population, a statistic which linguistically situated the Philippines as the most literate in any Western language in all of colonial Southeast Asia.

Philippine vernaculars, in the meantime, both resisted self-erasure and interrupted the collective mastery of and by a new foreign language imposed through American educational policy. As Rafael points out, “Submission to the rigors of English ... was deemed a way of eventually mastering it. Confronting the other’s speech, one was trained to conquer it, to possess it and make it an integral part of oneself. The goal of mastery, however, proved elusive” (52) as English fell headlong into Filipinization, that is, the “dressing [of] English in the clothes of Malay sound patterns...[which] readily recognize the vernacular shaping the materiality of foreign words” (55). Hierarchical subversion, in this sense, manifested as language in drag—as the linguistic-carnavalesque transforming the relationship between imperial and subaltern tongues, equal parts acquisition, performance, and transformation within which transpired the clearing of space for un-subjugated selfhood. The ironic correlation between colonial *submission* and the linguistic *mastering* of English was thus disrupted by vernacular resilience. As Gémino Abad notes: “Indeed, our own various languages had also in their own way indigenized the alien grammars so that, over time, the native Indio freed himself through a kind of spiritual homesteading in the imperial backcountry” (328).

The result was a vigorous linguistic hybridity that continues to persist and evolve even in the present day. This became particularly true in the use of slang, as opposed to formalized and systemized modes of language. In *The Language of the Street and Other Essays*, Nick Joaquin (under the nom de plume, Quijano de Manila) writes of the different terms used to represent the image of the “bum” or “idler”:

The 1920s popularized *stamby* (from *stand-by*) and the word has become a fixture in our speech, generating another popular noun: *istambayan*, meaning hangout. The *stamby* became a *cowboy* just before the war, a *kanto boy* after the Liberation. The deadlier kind was called *maton* in the 1920s, *sanggano* and *butangero* in the 1930s, *teksas* (from Texas) in the 1940s, and *dorobo* or *bakero* during the Occupation. (6)

It would be appropriate to note here that the Spanish cognate of *maton*—written almost identically as *matón*—is defined as “bully” or “thug.” The cognate for *bakero*—*vaquero*—is the Spanish word for “cowherd” or “cowboy.” *Dorobo* is Japanese, originally meaning “thief” or “robber.”

While perhaps not a borderland in the geographic sense, the consecutive occupancy of the Philippine archipelago by three imperial powers—two Western and one Asiatic—within a tight span of fifty years before finally being granted full independence in 1946, establishes the first half of the century as something akin to a *temporal* borderland atop fixed terrain wherein historical lines are drawn by the fluctuating territorial assignments among the order of nation-states. As illustrated by Joaquin above, the Philippine archipelago as a highly liminal spatiotemporality bears the linguistic tags of its colonizers.

Considering this, one calls to mind Mary Louise Pratt's theory of the "contact zone" which "refer[s] to social spaces where cultures meet, clash, and grapple with each other, often in contexts of highly asymmetrical relations of power, such as colonialism, slavery, or their aftermaths as they are lived out in many parts of the world today" (34). In "Arts of the Contact Zone," originally presented during a 1990 keynote address at the Responsibilities for Literacy conference in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, Pratt gestures to the contact zone as a point of contrast with how the academy—at least at that moment in time—conceptualized ideas of community, which in turn shaped much of the dialogue surrounding language, communication, and culture (37).

One such idea was the organization of language into speech communities, which "tended to be theorized as discrete, self-defined, coherent entities, held together by a homogenous competence or grammar shared identically and equally among all the members" (37). The discourse, utopian in nature and socially monolithic and homogenous in its assumptions, appeared to directly reflect what Benedict Anderson coined as "imagined communities" when describing the way modern nations conceive of themselves, for "regardless of the actual inequality and exploitation that may prevail in each, the nation is always conceived as a deep, horizontal comradeship" (7).

Paul Jay states, however, in *Global Matters: The Transnational Turn in Literary Studies*, "as a particular type of location, Pratt's contact zones are based, not on the kind of imagined coherence characteristic of a cohesive community or nation-state, but on attention to cross-border flows of information, commodities, and experiences" (76-77). These flows coincide with transnational frameworks linked to the history of globalization which in the long view dates back to the sixteenth century and beyond, and these routes of passage, it must be remembered, are not all Western in origin.

Now in the interest of literary history we must scrutinize what happens when we move beyond the organizing framework of the nation-state and—in a bold

act of (re)vision—begin to interrogate narratives, both past and present, in light of transnational dialectical patterns. For one, the transnational critical lens has the potential to bring visibility and heightened signification to specific collective experiences which otherwise would be erased, forgotten, or simply overlooked when managing public memory along configurations rooted in nation building.

The concern with literature, therefore, is also entangled in cultural memory and (recursively) internal modes of creative production which may or may not be externalized into the public sphere. From this perspective, it is possible to consider the transnational lens turned towards literary history as a way to further illuminate authorial processes. An observer gains, at the very least, a more nuanced understanding of the factors influencing the author as both historical subject and agent in the production of a heterogenous cultural legacy. In particular, a greater apprehension of these heterogenous elements in colonial and postcolonial literary space highlights the critical imperative of recovering, conserving, and returning to circulation significant works which may have fallen into obscurity.

Furthermore, the transnational shift from *roots* to *routes* carries with it a certain exilic sensibility—a pathos not limited to matters of physical displacement but is also inclusive of *figurative* exile embodied by conditions of marginality. Edward Said, in writing about V.S. Naipaul’s novel *A Bend in the River*, which takes place in a new state modeled on Mobutu Sese Seko’s Zaire, observes that “even the natives have become exiles in their own country, so preposterous and erratic are the whims of the ruler, Big Man, who is intended by Naipaul to be a symbol of all postcolonial regimes” (115). Yet exile, Said argues, also functions advantageously as a mode of vision.

Because the exile sees things in terms both of what has been left behind and what is actual here and now, he or she has a double perspective, never seeing things in isolation. Every scene or situation in the new country necessarily draws on its counterpart in the old country. Intellectually this means that an idea or experience is always counterposed with another, sometimes making them both appear in a new and unpredictable light. (121-122)

The exilic mode of double perspective is thus a specific modulation of the transnational lens, and can function as a method well-calibrated towards the querying, destabilization, and decentralization of monolithic and homogenizing national narratives.

Azade Seyhan, in *Writing Outside the Nation*, echoes this sentiment as she interrogates Anderson’s “imagined communities” as artifices of force and contradiction, proposing

instead the crucial acknowledgement of human flux as the norm rather than the exception:

Once we accept the loss of stable communities and the inevitability of exile, then the interdependency of linguistic and cultural experiences both at the local and the global level becomes self-evident. Thus, despite coercively manufactured and enforced national antinomies and fortified borders, history and geography are transfigured in new maps and new types of dialogic links. (Chapter 1)

In the case of the Philippines, the argument can be made that the geopolitical shift in ruling empire from Spain to the United States had likened the condition of the twice-over colonial subject to that of an exile suspended between two continents of time. These new exiles, living through the early years of the American period, would find themselves bound within a time-space of interrupted historical-narrative continuity upon whose cracks the Philippine Revolution and the Philippine-American War precariously (and perhaps eternally) must reside. It is a time-space of compromised memory. Gina Apostol, in her foreword to the Penguin Classics edition of Nick Joaquin's *The Woman Who Had Two Navels and Tales of the Tropical Gothic*, calls this interruption a "historical ellipsis."

For the Philippines, an archipelago geographically fragmented, linguistically fissured, occupied by not one but two invaders heralding a fierce but frayed republic dominated by the oligarchic spoils of our split, postcolonial selves—in a land tectonically and climactically doomed to dissolution—for the Philippines, perhaps it is only through its fictions that it can conceive itself a unity. (ix)

Yet we need not place the whole burden of generating historical unity on Philippine fiction alone—for this "exilic condition," despite its instability, demonstrated not only a remarkable narrative fertility across the literary spectrum, but also an innate linguistic capacity to embed within its enunciations the unique imprint of subjectivities engaging with the ellipses of geopolitical fracture. Thus, the author-as-exile was put upon to internally mediate an inescapable liminality, and in the process generated a complex dialectical space to bridge the chasm. The transnational turn in literary analysis, as I hope to demonstrate here, can readily carry this space into the realm of visibility and in so doing present an option for (re)conceptualizing and (re)imagining critical through lines with which to address issues of historical rift and integration.

Let us consider the archipelago as it existed in 1934, when the Tydings-McDuffie Act established the Commonwealth of the Philippines as a transitional entity that

would come into existence in 1935 and passage into a full independence in 1946. The interpretive framework of “nation” and “nation-building” when applied to this era would necessarily focus on the bilateral relationship between the present colonizer of that time and its colony—the United States and the Philippines.

It would focus on the sociocultural landscape (particularly that of Manila) as an era of pre-war Americanization while tending to obscure, for instance, the coinciding decline of Spanish language and literary culture which, as Adam Lishfey remarks in “Allegory and Archipelago,” corresponded to the gradual extinction of the plutocratic class that sustained them. The aftermath of this obfuscation is a definitive break from collective memory, with Fil-Hispanic literature being swiftly and invisibly absorbed into exilic time-space. As for Philippine literature written in English, scholarly emphasis would be more frequently placed on the writers’ Anglo-American influences in dialogue with what Abad calls the “Filipino matter”—our mythology or imagination of ourselves” (327) while falling short in considering other cultural sources or factoring in their triangulating effect upon specific poetics. More often than not, this is indeed the case.

Nevertheless, one may argue that Commonwealth Filipino writers themselves already possessed a keen understanding of their syncretic cultural-historical patrimony. In “Our Literary Heritage,” a lecture delivered before the First Filipino Writers Conference on Modern Literary Objectives in 1940, Arturo B. Rotor claimed that

as to the material we have, it certainly is significant enough, for we have a culture that bears the impress of two civilizations and three religions. Our shores are the meeting place of a dozen peoples; all around us, so near that we cannot help but feel their influence, are a dozen others with distinct governments, traditions and conventions. The synthesis of apparently heterogenous elements is going on a scale and under conditions that probably cannot be repeated anywhere. (qtd. in Arguilla et al. 17)

Looking further back in Philippine history, as Bienvenido Lumbera presents in *Tagalog Poetry 1570-1898: Tradition and Influences in its Development*, one can ascertain from folkloric literary customs the absorption and syncretic transformation of Spanish poetic forms. The Spanish ballad, for example, had often been adapted into native plays and it was from these medieval ballads and hagiographical tales that the material for the *awit* and *corrido* Tagalog metrical romances eventually evolved (52). In a nod to transcolonial influence, Lumbera further attributes the Spanish ballad’s original dissemination to the soldiers and sailors of the Manila-Acapulco trade



route “who, by intermarriage, became part of the native populace, and Hispanic elements filtered through Mexican sensibility took roots in Tagalog popular arts” (53-54).

Although there exists a multitude of access points into the exploration of Philippine literary transnationality, this paper seeks in particular to examine poetic-narrative spaces as contact zones, illuminating the Spanish cultural and linguistic element as it manifests in the literary practices of two major Commonwealth poets in English—Rafael Zulueta da Costa and José Garcia Villa. My objective is twofold, namely, (1) to expand upon the Philippine Commonwealth era as a distinct period in Philippine literary culture, marked by a contested globalized aesthetics and politics, and (2) to examine the complex Anglo-Hispanic transcultural and translational processes involved in the literary practices of early writers of Philippine poetry in English who were influenced by their historical milieu.

### **The Political-Aesthetic Discourse of the Philippine Commonwealth Era as Literary Contact Zone**

By the 1930s, barely more than three decades under American rule, the literary scene of the Philippines had transformed into a fraught social space of conflicting aesthetic, cultural, and political dispositions. On March 25, 1939 the Commonwealth Literary Award was instituted by President Manuel L. Quezon in collaboration with the newly formed Philippine Writers' League towards the objective of “realiz[ing] the provision of the Constitution with respect to the state encouragement of letters” (Arguilla et al. v) and providing a platform through which Filipino writers must redefine their role in a society lurching through a period of acute historical transition—the critical imperative being to grow a national repository of artistic achievements as a hedge against foreign cultural hegemony.

Indeed, the Commonwealth was preparing for its long-awaited independence—but the world stage had already grown perilous as young democracies in Europe collapsed, giving way to the military ambitions of totalitarian dictatorships. Adolf Hitler would rise to power in Germany, and Benito Mussolini in Italy. The Spanish Civil War (1936-1939) ended in victory for the Nationalists under General Francisco Franco, who had overthrown the Spanish democratic republic. Closer to home, a militarized Japan had invaded China. By 1932 Manchuria was fully occupied and the puppet state of Manchukuo was established. In September 1939, Hitler invaded Poland and the Second World War began.

The anxiety of once more confronting the dangers of burgeoning foreign powers manifested in the rhetoric of the Philippine Writers' League. In their introduction

to *Literature under the Commonwealth*—a compilation which includes the speeches given during the First Filipino Writer’s Conference on Modern Literary Objectives which was held on February 25, 1940—the editors do not allude directly to the eruption of conflict, yet pointedly remark that “[t]he League was born of an age instinct with menace to the free expression of the creative human spirit” (Arguilla et al. v). The nurturing of Philippine letters, therefore, stood as a mark of resistance against the ideologies of oppression which threatened individual human freedom. The fifth objective of the League states this position more explicitly:

5. To defend the political and social institutions that make for peace and encourage a healthy culture—and specifically to defend the democratic rights to education, to freedom of thought and expression. (Arguilla et al. 56)

As an instrument of social development, the Commonwealth Literary Award became, in its own way, an institutional embodiment of Pratt’s contact zone. The contest actively sought and “encourage[d] creative works that record or interpret the contemporary scene, or that deal with the social and economic problems of the individual and of society” (Arguilla et al. 62). Under this general theme, the Award was arranged into several categories: novel, short story, drama, poetry, and the essay, including history and biography. Moreover, it was divided into three languages—Tagalog, English, and Spanish, with separate panels of judges under each language chosen according to genre. The contest rules and thematic directives applied identically to all three. Nevertheless, given that these languages carried the narrative influences and various interpretive modes of their respective traditions—furthermore evolving due to transcultural and translinguistic processes—the contest space emerged as an intrinsically heterogenous one.

At the same time, one quickly notices the manner in which the Award’s egalitarian structure operated contrary to underlying sociolinguistic realities. The prioritization of Tagalog over the other Philippine languages gestures to a regional and linguistic privileging of the former while subordinating the latter. Spanish, despite its state of decline during the American period, nevertheless remained on equal footing with English, whose own condition only grew more robust as the population began to achieve increasing levels of mastery. In his report as Chairman of the Board of Judges for English, Carlos P. Romulo voices his keen satisfaction with the fruits of American educational policy in the Philippines:

From the evidence of the various entries and the results of these Contests, we may safely formulate this general pronouncement: Filipino literature in English stands upon a solid and substantial base of achievement, and its future, barring a sudden and total reversal of policy with regard to

the teaching of English in the Philippines, is assured. The high quality of the winning entries is merely a foreshadowing of what is yet to be. With these works, the Filipino people may proudly take their place side by side with any other people that have sought to express themselves through the medium of English. (qtd. in Arguilla et al. 78)

When viewed in the light of consolidating and strengthening intangible national resources, the Award's focus on this triumvirate of languages is unsurprising. In his essay titled, "In the Beginning," League president Federico Mangahas warns against surrendering the nation's collective literary development to "chance social evolution" which he deems not only risky, but furthermore costly, and instead presses for the active fostering of an environment crucial to the production of a vigorous and self-perpetuating literary culture. Mangahas moreover asserts that the "distinction conferred by culture and civilization" would prove inaccessible to the Filipino people otherwise:

To take our rightful place by the side of the highly developed nations of the world today, we have to achieve within a much shorter time what it has taken others centuries to develop out of their trial-and-error method along with such handicaps as inertia and ignorance. (qtd. in Arguilla et al. viii)

In a self-instigated though highly ambivalent act of colonial worlding, the Commonwealth Literary Award was thus designed as a sociocultural incubator that would earn Philippine letters a definite and unassailable space among so-called "modern" cultural systems.

In "Notes on a Literary Anniversary," published in *Philippine Magazine* in April 1939, the stance of the Philippine Writers' League on language further reflected this progress-driven outlook:

The Philippines is in this world and of this world and can ill afford to neglect English and Spanish as the means of keeping and promoting its contacts with the rest of the world... In perspective, the future of Philippine literature must remain problematical because of the rival claims of English, Spanish, and Tagalog. (qtd. in Arguilla et al. 4)

Here, the League refers back to President Quezon's call for not only a national language based on Tagalog, but also for the perpetuation of the colonial languages as assets in global connectivity and the building of geopolitical relations. At the same time, they warn of amateurism brought about by the inability to deftly navigate hybrid aesthetics.

A Filipino writer who attempts to be passing good in any or all of these tongues will be a divided and scattered spirit. His primary virtue may be eclecticism, but in less practiced hands it may not be distinguishable from something that is at once fish and fowl and is neither. (qtd. in Arguilla et al. 4)

Abad, writing over a half century later about Filipino poetry in English and operating at a historical remove, situates the League's ambivalence. He suggests that the creative struggle of the writer hinged upon an interior dialectic between the new language and the poet's subject: "the native or Filipino matter, both sense and sensibility, that is to be expressed in and through that language" (327). The integration of separate elements had yet to emerge. Nevertheless, the mere fact that Commonwealth writers identified the need to re-interrogate the approach to craft in the face of changing geopolitical circumstances spoke of a fervent impulse towards mining authentic voice out of hegemonic territory while at the same time establishing one's ground. As Abad claims:

If language fixes the forms of the world we inhabit and forges there our sense of our own native reality, then it can be said that through Spanish and English, as we had adopted them to our image and purposes, we have in fact shaped our Filipino consciousness with much the same force (if not more potent) as through our own native tongues. (328)

At this point, and although precarious, the fate of Filipino literature in Spanish had not yet been sealed. As such, the "rival claim" of the language—as the Philippine Writers' League called it—was neither bureaucratic courtesy nor a nod to an extinct tradition, but rather a recognition of past and contemporaneous Fil-Hispanic accomplishment. "Filipino literature in Spanish is almost exclusively associated with a single figure, José Rizal, a man of letters who was executed by Spain in 1896 as a supposed subversive," Lishfey writes. "Nevertheless, and despite the imposition after 1898 of English as a common language in the archipelago, Filipinos who wrote in Spanish continued to produce compelling prose and poetry for many decades" ("Allegory and Archipelago" 6).

Resil Mojares notes in a similar vein that although the early 1900s and American rule brought about an "early withering" of Fil-Hispanic literary culture—an artifact slowly ripened under the auspices of an older but now absent colonial order—it had touched upon something of a golden age with generations of poets, novelists, essayists, and dramatists carrying Filipino literature in Spanish to high levels of refinement and mastery in a testament to "how well the early Filipino writers had made Spanish their own" ("Panitikan" 6).

In “Revisiting the Golden Age of Fil-Hispanic Literature (1898-1941),” Wylan De la Peña offers a survey of writers producing works in Spanish during the early and late American colonial period. Among members of the former group, including leading writers of the revolution who were born when the Philippines was still part of the Spanish empire, De la Peña names Fernando Ma. Guerrero (poet, 1878-1929), Cecilio Apóstol (poet, 1877-1938), Jesús Balmori (poet and novelist, 1887-1948), Manuel Bernabe (poet, 1890-1960), and Claro Recto (poet, dramatist, and essayist, 1890-1960) (119).

In 1898, Apóstol had penned “Al Heroe Nacional” (“To the National Hero”), a poem in Spanish within the literary tradition of the Propaganda Movement and Philippine Revolution. The poem is a tribute to Rizal’s patriotism and a lament that his death had not won the Philippines its freedom. Perhaps from Spain it did, but not from the United States. Torres describes this reversion to old forms as an anti-American gesture of nostalgia in the face of deep political disappointment.

*...Y al vago anhelo nacional sentido  
vierte tu llanto, oh pueblo redimido,  
por el amargo fin del gran Patriota  
Y hoy que en los aires la tormenta zumba,  
¡no salga ni un quejido de su tumba,  
al verte, oh pueblo, nuevamente ilota!*

(Apóstol 49)

...And the vague national longing experienced,  
shed, oh people redeemed, your tears  
over the great patriot’s bitter end.  
And now that in the winds the tempest rushes,  
Let not a sob emanate from his tomb,  
Upon seeing you, oh people, enslaved anew.

(qtd. in Torres 202)

It would be useful here, before returning to the Commonwealth writers, to briefly examine the positional dynamics of a colonial language vis-à-vis the colonial subject—or even a former subject. In “Public and Private Discourse and *Loob/Labas* as Paradigms of a Colonial Relationship,” Torres examines the fissured communication patterns and structures which materialized between American colonizers and Filipinos due to the inherently hierarchical social structure which at once separated and enmeshed the dominant and the subject. “From the point of view of the Filipino,” Torres states, “the American was tagalabas (outsider) encroaching on the territory of the tagaloob (insider)” (185).

That Filipino private discourse in the late nineteenth century could be executed not only in the native language, but also in the tongue of an old colonizer as a mode of resistance and critique against the new one, presages a critical transformation of linguistic ownership that would unfold decades later with Filipino writers in English. If the territory of the tagaloob is the realm of the private, the intimate, and also the poetic, then it would only be a matter of time before English, too, shifted its positionality inwards.

The emergence of Philippine literature in English would coincide with the oeuvre of a younger group of Fil-Hispanic writers, this new generational cohort born and raised under American rule and which included Antonio Abad (novelist, 1899-1970), Enrique Fernandez Lumba (essayist and poet, 1899-1990), and Evangelina Guerrero Zacarias (poet and fictionist, 1904-1949) though Hispanophone writers from the earlier years would still remain active through the Commonwealth era and beyond (De la Peña 119). Maria Paz Zamora, with *Mi obolo (My Contribution)* published in 1924, would become the first Asian woman to produce a short story collection in Spanish and is the only Filipina known to have published a World War II memoir in that language (Lishfey, "Recipes for Revision" 5).

Jesús Balmori, one of the most renowned and prolific of the Fil-Hispanic writers, would pen his final novel during the Japanese occupation. Despite the initial disappearance of the manuscript and a long-delayed publishing, *Los pájaros de fuego (The Birds of Fire)* is a landmark of world literature, Lishfey contends, "[b]y virtue of its composition in the tongue of an old European empire, under the duress of an East Asian empire, and during the colonization of a North American empire" ("Allegory and Archipelago" 6). Yet the novel is also among the last of its kind, as the Philippine Commonwealth era had come to signal Fil-Hispanic literature's twilight age. By the end of the century, and with the absence of a Spanish-speaking public, it will have slipped into obscurity.

The literary activity of Filipino writers in English, on the other hand, would continue to evolve and grow—even beyond national borders as an outcome of modern diaspora. Nevertheless, the heterogenous socio-historical milieu in which the Commonwealth writers were steeped calls to attention how the Spanish element may have influenced Anglophone literary output and artistic process. We now turn our attention to these writers: the poets Rafael Zulueta da Costa and José Garcia Villa, who were among the first batch of winners of the Commonwealth Literary Awards in 1940 for works produced in English.

### **Rafael Zulueta da Costa and José Garcia Villa: Navigating Language and the Anglo-Hispanic Literary Interface**

One telling signal of the Anglophone Commonwealth writers' interface with Iberian influence is a dialogical link to the Spanish poet Federico García Lorca (1898-1936)—both his works and his persona. By the time of his death in 1936 by a Nationalist firing squad, Lorca was an acclaimed poet and dramatist, both abroad and in his own country. Manuel Duran remarks that Lorca was hailed as the embodiment of the Spanish spirit and yet "he nevertheless could state a few days before his death that he was 'a brother of all men' and that he detested the Spaniard who was only a Spaniard" (1). Accounts of Lorca by his contemporaries illuminate

him as a consummate artist with a white-knuckled grip on the past who worked to gain purchase in modern aesthetic forms:

Lorca was a bridge suspended between two distant shores, between, let us say, the obscure, traditional myths of his province and the international dream worlds of French Surrealism. His work touches now one shore, now another, and the abyss between them trembles in the feverish lines of his poetry. (2)

One can easily imagine that it was this cocktail of cosmopolitanism and loyalty to a distinct cultural heritage which made an attractive figure of Lorca, particularly to the poets of the Philippine Commonwealth who carried within their literary practice the responsibility of generating a form of historical continuum. Zulueta, Villa, and Lorca had all come of age not long after the Spanish-American War. They were part of a new world order. Binding the three poets was a shared historical past under the same royal crown and to various degrees a shared language. They all operated within a globalized context which called for the integration of old and new modes, homegrown and foreign.

The degree of Lorca's influence on Zulueta's and Villa's original literary output is uncertain, but the two Filipino poets are known to have translated his poems from Spanish into English. Villa's translations appeared in the October 1951 issue of *Kirgo's: A Catalogue of Modern Literature 1850-1951*. Zulueta's translations, although the precise context of their creation is unspecified, can be found in *The Works of R. Zulueta da Costa: A Critical Edition* edited by Lourdes Gatmaitan Bañez. Included in this volume are his first attempts at verse writing, *Like the Molave & Other Poems*, collected and uncollected poetry, Spanish to English translations, and various essays and nonfiction works.

The appendices also contain the reproduction of a letter sent from Zulueta to Bañez dated January 17, 1990 in which he answers a number of her earlier queries and provides the original Spanish versions of his translations: "Enclosed the Lorca poems in Spanish, Aguilar edition, 12th printing, 1966 (Madrid, Spain). (I believe Garcia Villa and possibly Nick Joaquin have translations of the same poems.)" (429). This final parenthetical remark suggests that translating Lorca's poetry was not an uncommon practice and perhaps even functioned as a method of poetic study.

Zulueta in particular was straightforward in his adoration of Lorca, which seemed to rival only his fondness for the poetry of Whitman. Such is evidenced by his summer reading list published on April 1, 1941 under his "Notations" column in the *Philippine Women's Journal*. In the poetry section of this list, Zulueta provides only two names in repetition: "Walt Whitman, Federico García Lorca, Walt Whitman and

Federico García Lorca” (qtd. in Bañez 147), the juxtaposition attributing to each poet an equal import. In his March 19, 1941 column, Zulueta summons Lorca further in answer to the question “But what is a poem?”:

*See I have the fire in my hands. I understood it and work with it perfectly. But one cannot speak of it without literature. Thus spoke Federico García Lorca of poetry. And more: If it be true that I am a poet by the grace of God –or the devil’s– it is also because I am a poet by the grace of technique and effort, and because of being absolutely aware of what a poem is.*

That was in 1932. He was enamoured with the sights and sounds under the Spanish blue; thrilled to the music of women’s voices, motions, lips; laughed to the laughter of children; found in the lives of the people all the profound truths of oneness in love. And the people loved him. He was acknowledged *poeta del pueblo*. (143)

A Filipino *mestizo* raised in pre-war Manila, Zulueta experienced a highly European upbringing. “He spoke Spanish at home and read widely in Spanish” (6), becoming fluent in all three tongues highlighted by President Quezon as integral to the future of the nation. One must also note that within the Zulueta household, a Hispanic cultural continuity seemed to have remained intact throughout the country’s transitions of power. Perhaps this may be credited to the family’s Basque lineage, with the Basques constituting “the oldest ethnic group in Europe with a distinct culture and a passionate adherence to nationalism... An anti-royalist, Zulueta’s grandfather was exiled to the Philippines in 1857 for political reasons” (5). A generation later, Zulueta’s father Antonio was exiled to the Caroline Islands by the Spanish government in Manila for refusing to serve military duty, which would have required him to raise arms against the *indio insurrectos* whom he considered fellow Filipinos (6).

The break between the Philippines and the Spanish crown at the turn of the century, therefore, might have very well served as further affirmation of a political stance long held—one which would not have contradicted the Zulueta family’s lingering affinity to peninsular roots. Born under American rule on September 27, 1915 and raised with a clear sense of Filipino identity that would have commingled with Spanish heritage and Basque nationalism, Zulueta enjoyed the privilege of both linguistic and cultural access to the identities he claimed and the languages he spoke.

While not all writers of the era shared the full range of such characteristics, as will be observed in the case of José Garcia Villa, one can view Zulueta and his work as



one portrait among many within a new generation of writers for whom the Spanish past still possessed historical immediacy. And while individual sociolinguistic identities may have fed into the art produced by those born in the Commonwealth era, it is the self-curation and expression of these distinct yet intertwined identities which become revealing of the processes by which these writers responded to the period's literary zeitgeist and the introduction of the American element into their culture of letters—a zeitgeist, one might add, already propelled strongly by notions of self-definition at a national level.

For Zulueta, that American element was keenly represented by the works of Walt Whitman and the notably strong impact of *Leaves of Grass*, which came into his possession in 1935. In his "Notations" dated July 23, 1941, he writes:

I can now claim a friendship with the book that dates back to no particular time, a friendship that has distilled into kinship throughout these years. For when Whitman says: "I hear and behold God in every object, yet understand God not in the least," he is giving tongue to my inarticulate thoughts of a long ago reaching far back to the time when fishes flew; and when he asserts that "The smallest sprout shows there is really no death" he intones accompaniment to the words of a chorus I have long forgotten. (qtd. in Bañez 176)

This intimate kinship with Whitman's use of language and expressive sensibilities, along with the influence of other English-language writers such as Thomas Wolfe, Aldous Huxley, D.H. Lawrence, Ernest Hemingway, and James Joyce, whom Zulueta would have on his 1941 reading list, can hardly be ignored by any reader of his poetry. One could even assert that despite the Spanish influences in his early life, it was the Anglophone sound—coupled with a predilection for the declamatory—which Zulueta had chosen to give shape to his thoughts and poetic operations.

In no place is this partiality more apparent than in Zulueta's translation of Federico García Lorca's poetry. Take, for instance, his rendition of "Dos Marinos en la Orilla" compared alongside Lorca's original Spanish text and an alternative translation by poet Donald Jenks, published in the 1955 *New Directions* edition of *The Selected Poems of Federico García Lorca*. Excerpts from the poem's first and second sections are below:

<b>Dos Marineros en la Orilla</b> (original Spanish text)	<b>Two Sailors on the Beach</b> (trans. Donald Jenks)	<b>Two Sailors at the Seaside</b> (trans. R. Zulueta da Costa)
1	1	1
Se trajo en el corazón un pez del Mar de la China.	He wears in his heart a fish from the China Sea.	In his heart he brought home a fish from China Sea.
A veces se ve cruzar diminuto por sus ojos [...]	At times one sees it crossing, diminished, in his eyes [...]	At times, diminutive, you see it flit across his eyes [...]
2	2	2
[...] Vió los balcones del Papa y los pechos dorados de las cubanas.	[...] He saw the balconies of the Pope and the golden breasts of the Cuban girls.	[...] He saw the Pope's balconies And the gilded breasts of Cuban girls.
Mira al agua.	He looks at the water.	He looks at the sea.
(Lorca 58)	(Lorca 59)	(Bañez 127)

The two parts of the poem depict sailors who are both on unspecified shores looking out across unidentified bodies of water. The first sailor is a man whose memories, desires, and subjectivity are so governed by the ocean that he forgets the enticements of land. His heart carries the image of a fish from the China Sea—a creature, perhaps, that he had one day failed to apprehend as may be inferred by the words “crossing” and “diminished” in the Jenks translation. The direction of his longing is out in the water, below its surface, following the unrealized prize catch.

The second sailor, however, is a man who considers the ocean to be a passage to places of desire rather than the place of desire itself. He exudes the aura of a mercenary or ruffian tamed by the many hard years endured at sea, even as he retains his old worldly hungers.

In the Zulueta translation, one takes notice of a particularly Anglicized tilt; if not from an upward shift in linguistic register, then in the sounds and words to which Zulueta gives preference. All this in contrast to the more casual and, for the most part, more literal translation rendered by Jenks. Rather than “cross” (the most literal way to translate “cruzar”), Zulueta opts for “flit.” He substitutes “water” with “sea,” the latter term carrying with it a romantic grandeur absent in the former, which as “agua” Lorca applies tersely, hermetically. Minor key as opposed to Zulueta’s major.

Along the same lines of translational embellishment, “the golden breasts of the Cuban girls” (Jenks’s version) under Zulueta’s pen stroke become suddenly “gilded.” Furthermore, the differently inflected o’s of “golden” and “cross” in the Jenks translation sit closer to the corresponding Spanish vowels, as opposed to the English vowel sound “IH” (in “gilded” and “flits”) of Zulueta’s version. Whether intentional or not, the resulting translation manifests as a simultaneous exhibition of Zulueta’s comprehension of Spanish, his affection for Lorca, and his elevated mastery of the English language, if not a certain creative enthrallment with its usage.

Yet the eccentricity of Zulueta’s translation can also be found in his acts of deliberate *mistranslation*. In the first stanza, Zulueta includes the word “home,” its equivalent not present in the original Spanish though he is faithful to the translation of “se trajo,” meaning “he brought” or alternatively, “he carried.” The inclusion makes for a plumper narrative, while acknowledgement of the sailor’s “home” adds a sentimental strain where there had not been one before.

Oddly enough, here is where we might detect Zulueta’s subtle engagement with the elusive “Filipino matter” mentioned by Abad. The use of the word “home” reaches into the ambiguous racial and national identities of the sailors, transforming the first from “possibly Spanish” to “possibly Filipino” for a local readership, there being a geographical feasibility in the Zulueta translation for the Filipino sailor to bring home his catch from the China Sea. Not so feasible for a sailor hailing from, for example, Andalusia or Madrid.

It is a word that summons the image of family and community, resulting in a drastic shift of the first sailor’s portrayal. From being a subjectivity bonded to the water, he becomes one linked always to homeland. At the same time, the opposing juxtaposition of portrayals is no longer between the first sailor desiring a life at sea and the second sailor desiring the pleasures of land, but between one bonded to home and the other to the far-flung and foreign. This duality may very well reflect Zulueta himself as both translator and poet.

It is debatable what Zulueta had intended in producing a translation that so boldly reinterprets the original and allows a certain collective breadth to infiltrate the text, thus transforming its hermeticism into a social portrait in miniature. Nevertheless, the fact that he had translated the poem in 1934—when he was nineteen years old and Lorca himself was still alive—highlights the historical immediacy with which Zulueta interacted with the works of the Spanish poet during his own formative years as a writer.

Additionally, this boldness strongly presents itself as a subjectivity inhabiting two colonial linguistic realms simultaneously, symmetrically, with ease and a posture of sovereignty. In what way, then, are we to historically grasp Zulueta's double performance in "Two Sailors at the Seaside"? In his essay titled, "The Hermeneutic Motion," George Steiner elucidates on the act of translation as an act of aggression, for in "the event of interlingual translation this manoeuvre of comprehension is explicitly invasive and exhaustive" (187). In conducting a decipherment, the translator drills into and strips the source language of its otherness in pursuit of transferrable meaning. Once found, he "extracts, and brings [it] home" (187) to the target language.

The act of translation is thus a colonial act in the abstract. In this light, we may view Zulueta's (re)translation and anglicization of Lorcan verse as an ironic form of mastery. A reversal in which the Filipino subject has gained the aptitude, by harnessing the innate qualities of translation, to semiotically position two imperial masters in colonial relation with each other (or maybe *to* each other, *against* each other), and in direct service of the subject's aesthetic and epistemological undertaking.

In an article for *World Literature Today*, Abad asserts that "before [José Garcia] Villa, our poets wrote in English, but after Villa, our poets wrought from English" (328). According to Abad, Villa's poetics signaled a shift in Philippine literary theory, attesting to the poet's transformative and experimental treatment of language which departs from the tradition followed by poets like Zulueta. While the latter emphasized the notion of linguistic mastery, Villa's poetics gestured toward the notion of linguistic ownership, thereby demonstrating a more radical disruption of the sociopolitical hierarchies embedded in the Filipino poet's use of English as an expressive medium.

Born in Manila in 1908 during the American period, Villa would emigrate to the United States in 1930. His inclusion among the Commonwealth writers occurs, therefore, transnationally and in the context of the early Filipino diaspora. After publishing a story collection titled *Footnote to Youth* while abroad, Villa dedicated himself exclusively to poetry "and its experimental possibilities" (Tabios 137). And indeed, while he may have been born in the Philippines, it was a home he eventually left behind as he came of age, immersing himself in American literary culture as he continued his studies abroad—first at the University of New Mexico, then later on at Columbia University in New York.

Nevertheless, one cannot discount Villa's early experiences during a time of national transition as they would inevitably manifest in the more private spaces of his literary

practice. In “Viva Villa,” Joaquin depicts the Villa household as two separate islands of history in which lived two generations split apart by the collapse of an empire:

The inevitable clash between these fathers and their alien sons would be enacted all over the country during the 1920s, but nowhere, perhaps, more bitterly, than at the Villa home in Ermita, by Don Simeón, the colonel of the Revolution, and his eldest son, José ... the basic cause was the hostility between two rival cultures; the battle between Villa and his father dramatizes the alienation of two Philippine generations from each other. One world was struggling to survive; another world was struggling to be born. (qtd. in Tabios 157)

In sharp contrast to Zulueta, whose home environs appeared to maintain a sense of cultural continuity due to the family’s strong identification with the Spanish and Basque elements of their heritage, what would have been Villa’s direct access to the past was inaccessible. “Don Simeón spoke no English; the young José spoke no Spanish,” Joaquin writes. “Besides, says Villa: ‘You couldn’t talk to the fathers of those times’” (159).

As such, and given the linguistic and relational barriers presented by his father, the near absence of an overt Spanish influence in Villa’s writing should not come as a surprise. Perhaps the most direct treatment of it can be found in a collage poem depicting the scene of a bullfight. Villa explains that these collage poems are “adaptations where the sequence of the original text has been disturbed, where there has been, more or less, a pasting together” (69). The new order then results in a sequence of lines made subservient to the ends of the poem.

In the bullfight poem, the original text is taken from the captions which accompany a 1957 photographic essay in *Life Magazine* titled, “Beauty in a Brutal Art.” The first stanza reads:

The bullfight is pure art: the perfect  
Bullfighter is fragile: man  
Before brute, relying  
On his skill, heart and  
Courage... (qtd. in Tabios 77)

The disruption and realignment of text, along with the dividing punctuations, produces constellations of meaning by generating relationships between horizontally, vertically, and diagonally proximate words. These constellations then transcend the descriptive literalness which dominates the original captions, while at the same time acknowledging them.

For example, the first two lines offer the speaker's aesthetic postulation on the Spanish bullfight as "pure art," and the "perfect" bullfighter as a "fragile man." The mathematical gesture of the colon, however, suggests further reading into the relationship between pure art and perfection, fragility and man, purity and fragility, and perfection and humanity. The third line introduces the "brute" as not only a point of contrast but as a manner of execution: the element of brutality as a way for art, perfection, fragility, and humanity to indirectly channel themselves into the world.

There is a repeated emphasis of the visually and figurative oblique. Mathematical distillations further highlight the perspective of a speaker twice removed from the brutal act. This poetic collage is, after all, adapted from captioned photographs in a magazine. Also, if we are to evaluate the subject position of the speaker—presumably Villa himself, as a Filipino migrant to the United States—in relation to the poetic object (i.e., the bullfight as artifact of Spanish cultural legacy), then this, too, is one of oblique removal. Here, the interface between Filipino subject and Spanish poetic object is structurally imbued with layers of distance, and mediated purely through the intervention of an American instrument of communication—*Life Magazine*.

An examination of Villa's oeuvre reveals this adaptation as rather singular in its approach to a Spanish subject matter, scarcely repeated elsewhere. Still, the claim that Villa did not speak his father's language does not preclude him from having possessed a significant literacy in it. His Lorca translations are a testament to this, and he would moreover employ this linguistic knowledge privately, within the quiet confines of prewriting spaces.

Citing Villa's notebooks archived in Harvard University's Houghton Library, Paula Park points out that "[in] 1940, Villa eventually began writing poetry entirely in Spanish. These drafts, which were never published, reveal that he struggled with the written conventions of Spanish; however, they still produce a distinct poetic mood" (132). One such poem retells the story of the Garden of Eden and begins:

En el alto cielo grita  
El espíritu santo  
Porque Eva refusa  
Comer la manzana.

Pajaritos verdes  
La golpean  
Pero Eva simplemente  
Las mira con desdén. (qtd. in Park 133)

In the retelling, the Holy Spirit shouts from the sky because Eve refuses to eat the apple. Green birds strike at her, but Eve simply looks at them with scorn. The birds flee, and eventually it is the Holy Spirit Himself who eats the apple. Eve remains immaculate and pure, though the Bible tells otherwise.

Combined with its early Lorcan simplicity, the grammatical tentativeness of the poem calls attention to the sound, a meditative assonance and rhythm reminiscent of the opening lines of a fable (“Once upon a time, in a land far, far away”). Breaks which divide single sentences into multiple constricted lines relay the imperative to read slowly. A successful transfer of meaning is accomplished and, arguably, an effective communication of mood. Even so, one can glean Villa’s asymmetrical competency with respect to the English and Spanish languages, which readily differs from Zulueta’s aggressive management of them.

Yet Villa’s explorations of the Spanish sound can be more satisfyingly witnessed in his unpublished poem titled, “Absolute untranslatable sonnet: A poet’s sonnet,” written on August 26, 1939. Park describes the poem as “splendid pseudo-Spanish jargon ... characterized by a sonic profusion ... based on the alliterated recombination and linguistic modulation of similar sounding consonants” and which “hints fairly intelligibly at the use of the Spanish imperative mode” (130).

Yncantaress meresvel celest estel  
 Estellarama llarama lorame laura  
 Laurame tu dulce dulzura dulce mora  
 Morame muero morel immorel...

(qtd. in Park 130)

As one may observe in the passage above, the emotive haze and sexual overtones of the sonnet express themselves not only through semi-intelligible fragments, but also through the mystery of the poem’s invented words whose rhythms, sounds, and physical adjacency to stretches of deducible parts allow the reader to supply their own understanding without fixating upon a stable meaning. Although written in neither Spanish nor English, Park concludes that the verses were animated by the Spanish language—written or wrought *from* Spanish and carried into a liminal semiotic state. In this manner, the poet’s mode of linguistic interrogation in the “Yncantaress” sonnet provides further proof of an operative relationship between Villa and the old colonial tongue. Additionally, Villa’s experiments with the language situate Spanish within his realm of private, individual discourse.

Another remarkable quality of “Yncantaress” is that one cannot readily decide whether its language is an act of estrangement or familiarization, disintegration

or creation. As a poet, Villa was in a position to implement either or even both. Yet due to this indeterminacy, his “Absolute untranslatable sonnet”—precisely because it cannot be deciphered—dodges the evisceration of its meaning. As Steiner points out with reference to the process of translation, “We ‘break’ a code: decipherment is dissective, leaving the shell smashed and the vital layers stripped” (187). By maintaining otherness, “Yncantaress” emerges whole and uncolonized, sensual and utopian in the abstract, drawing vitality from a shifting proximity to meaning yet never submitting to it.

Unlike Zulueta in his English translation of Lorca’s “Dos Marinos en la Orilla,” Villa exercises linguistic command precisely by relinquishing control over meaning. There exists neither shore nor home, neither source language nor target language, in “Yncantaress.” The poem refuses to dictate clear intentions or set directions, yet nevertheless persists in the communicative act. Villa as (non)translator, therefore, embarks upon the first move of hermeneutic motion, ontological belief, without pressing on to the violent appropriative move which marks comprehension. Ultimately, his is a gesture of faith in structures and symbolic plentitude, yet he distrusts them enough to not commit.

Perhaps this says something of Villa’s positionality as a Commonwealth writer operating in America and within the diaspora. Towards this end, Joaquin summarizes the historical dislocations which frame the seminal chronologies of Villa’s life:

That young man was running away from a father who represented the end of one culture, as Villa himself represents the beginning of another. The name he bears is rooted in the central event of our history, though the poetry he has produced may have no roots in our history. (qtd. in Tabios 157)

While colonialism imposes on its subjects an inevitable breakage, the ones who have permanently left the homeland must continually encounter and reckon with their own otherness—oftentimes in contexts of hostility and acculturation. On the one hand, to translate the self is an act of violence. On the other hand, to take on the mantle of exile, of untranslatability “beset with half involvements and half detachments, nostalgic and sentimental on one level, an adept mimic or a secret outcast on another” (Said 114) is to deny the self a true and embodied equivalence in the world of systems. It may be a loss either way. And perhaps, effectively, it is the same path until a clearing is reached and made fertile for new ways of being.



## CONCLUSION

Interrogation is a form of creative vision, and can act as a vehicle for reimagining the spaces we inhabit and the events which bring meaning and identity to collective experience. In studying Philippine literature produced during the American period and in particular the Commonwealth era through a transnational critical lens, we illuminate a vast tapestry of cultural histories which would have otherwise been obscured.

The Philippines in the first half of the twentieth century was a temporal borderland, a point of historical breakage and convergence characterized by an intensified contact zone where competing social, political, and cultural forces vied to gain foothold. Within this borderland a prolific Fil-Hispanic literary culture, in the midst of its twilight years under American rule, would produce some of its most brilliant writers in Spanish. Here in this borderland, moreover, Filipino writers in English would acquire artistic mastery over a second colonial tongue, often associated with “modern” writing, and begin developing a literary oeuvre in this new medium.

“Even a passing survey of the [Commonwealth] period confirms the facts of ferment,” states Mojares. “There was among writers a heightened self-consciousness and growing concern for defining their role and function” (*Origins and Rise of the Filipino Novel* 303). That Spanish and Anglo-American literary elements would influence each other within this narrow isthmus of Philippine history should come as little surprise.

As intertwined global encounters, Fil-Hispanic and Philippine literatures in English are both products of local and transnational forces. And yet the dialectical relationship between them is often overlooked, which constitutes an argument for a revived attention to the Commonwealth era and its multilingual, polyphonic literary output. Texts generated within the liminal space of historical rupture are a crucial artifact of public memory, for ruptures are often (if not always) revelatory of the enmeshed social relationalities which underpin the very narratives that had concealed them. To study the Commonwealth texts inter-lingually, as constellations in a heterogenous framework, presents a rich opportunity for new readings and the restoration of valuable cultural patrimony.

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