Abstract

Francisco Sionil José, a National Artist for Literature and once the most translated Filipino author alive, served as a representative of the Philippines in the literary world. Through translation, José's Rosales Saga came to represent the nationalist's oeuvre on an international scale. This study analyzes the place of both José and his Rosales Saga in the world of letters.

Keywords

World literature, Rosales Saga, F. Sionil Jose

FORMING A WORLD LITERATURE: *F. Sionil José and the Rosales Saga*

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FRANCISCO SIONIL JOSÉ, once the most translated Filipino author alive, was recognized both nationally and internationally for his works and constant use of nationalistic themes in his depiction of Philippine life in fiction. In 2001, the Philippine government conferred upon him the National Artist award for Literature—further boosting his credibility as representative of the Philippines in the literary world. According to the *Official Gazette of the Republic of the Philippines*, aside from having to have "created a substantial and significant body of work" and enjoyed "respect and esteem from peers," a prospective National Artist must also, "through the content and form of their works, have contributed in building a Filipino sense of nationhood."

José's background indeed contributed to his being considered a Filipino nationalist—based in the Philippines and yet thriving on the appeal of his works abroad, thus building that Filipino sense of nationhood the government so desired. Born in Rosales, Pangasinan, in 1924, he founded the Philippine branch of PEN (Poets, Playwrights, Editors, Essayists, Novelists) International in 1958 and established his bookstore, publishing house, and writers' hub called Solidaridad in 1965. He received the Republic Heritage Cultural Award for Literature from the City of Manila in 1979, the Ramon Magsaysay Award for Journalism, Literature, and Creative Communication Arts in 1980, and the Pablo Neruda Centennial Award in 2004. Apart from his being a prolific Filipino writer with at least twelve novels, seven short story collections, a book of verse, and five books of essays to his name, José also had his works translated into every major language and more—estimated at a total of twenty-eight languages. This made him the most translated and, as he is often regarded, the most widely read Filipino author in English alive, at least before his death at age ninety-seven on January 6, 2022.

José's novels explore themes such as colonialism, revolution, poverty, diaspora, and the disparate inequality between the rich and poor—all of which are rooted in a distinctly Filipino context. What are perhaps José's most popular works, however, are the five novels collectively referred to as his Rosales Saga, namely, *Po-on*, *Tree*, *My Brother, My Executioner*, *The Pretenders*, and *Mass*. The five novels span a century of Philippine history. In "A Modern National Epic," Shirley Geok-Lin Lim (1989) posits that the Rosales Saga constitutes "a twentieth-century version of a national epic" (71). Like many others, Geok-Lin Lim compares José to national hero José Rizal and writes that, although Rizal's and José's works bear many similarities in terms of narrative and style, the difference is that Rizal's works are "ilustrado-centered" while José "asserts the central place of the Filipino 'Indian,' a pure native strain like the Ilocano." José, therefore, bases his works' nationalism on "ethnicity and place," first and foremost.

José and his works, most notably the Rosales Saga, have come to represent the Philippines on an international landscape and continue to renew interest in the history and culture of the Philippines. Considering that the saga focuses on the Philippines and Filipinos, it is important to note that all or at least several of the five novels have been translated into other languages, such as Japanese, Italian, French, and Russian. The first three—parts of which detail years of the Spanish colonial period in the

Philippines—have been translated into Spanish. *Po-on,* titled *Anochecer* in Spain, was translated by Carlos Milla Soler for the publishing house Maeva Ediciones in 2003. *Tree* was titled *El Arbor de la Esperanza* by the same translator and publishing house in the same year. *My Brother, My Executioner,* on the other hand, was published by Maeva Ediciones under the title *Mi Hermano, Mi Enemigo* in 2004, after having been translated by Soler and cotranslator Isabel Ferrer.

Through translation, the nationalistic Rosales Saga, as well as José's other works, have garnered global acclaim from readers, writers, and critics. In an article written after José's death, *The New York Times* described him as "a public figure in the world of letters, traveling often to lecture and to attend writers' conferences, and he was bursting with energy even into his 90s" (Mydans 2022).

Perhaps because of his being an internationally known literary figure, even José himself was aware that his works—including the Rosales Saga—were considered more successful abroad than in his own country. In a 2007 article promoting the Korean translation of Jose's novel *Ermita* (1988), Filipino journalist Cathy Rose Garcia quoted José as having said, "I'm bragging but I have more readers outside my country than in my own country."

This holds true in the local university setting. José's novels and other works are rarely used as required reading in Philippine schools and universities. In 2016, at the Ateneo de Manila University, only José's novel *Viajero* was required reading—for Literature and Ideas III: Literature and Memory Studies (Lit193.30), an elective open to both undergraduate and graduate students. His works were also barely in the syllabi of other classes, even in Philippine Literature in English (Lit161).

While José's popularity in the Philippines attained its zenith early in his lifetime, many believed his reach could have been expanded even more—increasing the divide between the national and international understanding of and acclaim for his works. Cited on the cover of every copy of José's *Po-on*, a quote from *The New York Review of Books*' Ian Buruma reads, "[José] deserves a much wider readership than the Philippines can offer."

In 2015, the OZY news site posted an article titled "Will Francisco Sionil José Ever Win the Nobel Prize?" In it, writer Leslie Nguyen-Okwu puts José's odds of winning the Nobel Prize in Literature at fifty to one. If awarded the Nobel Prize, he would have been the first Southeast Asian

to receive it out of the 111 who had already received the award. Nguyen-Okwu, however, laments that the Swedish Academy that is behind the Nobel Prize "is unlikely to pluck a little-known author like José from obscurity"—further cementing the notion that international readership and recognition (some of which are made possible by production and circulation through translation) are worth more, or at least considered differently, than mere national or local acclaim.

Through translation, José's Rosales Saga has come to represent the nationalist's oeuvre on an international scale. By using Philip Holden's commentary on José's language in *Po-on* and *My Brother, My Executioner,* Pascale Casanova's theories on the literary inequality of languages, Rebecca Walkowitz's notion of comparison literature, and David Damrosch's notion of a world literature, this study analyzes the place of both José and his Rosales Saga in the literary world in four sections. First, considering that the saga is written in English, the language propels José and this set of works into international space but at the same time highlights language inequalities in the novels that also enact the social inequalities present in Philippine history. Second, because of these inequalities of language, and considering Casanova's theories on literary space and domination, the translation of the Rosales Saga has become a means of its "consecration" in the literary world, which is largely political. Third, the production of the translations of the Rosales Saga, as an example of a born-translated work, has helped the saga be considered as comparison literature. And lastly, the Rosales Saga can be considered world literature, as a collection of literary works that have been translated and that live between its source and numerous host cultures.

Anxieties in Inequalities: Philip Holden's "Colonialism's Goblins"

Philip Holden (2008) uses José's *My Brother, My Executioner* and *Po-on* to illustrate the "strangeness" or anxieties present in the language used by José in the two novels (168). The anxieties Holden refers to arise from the fact that José's fiction in English undermines his position as a nationalist, considering that the language he writes in highlights inequalities left over from colonialism. The Philippines is one of only several countries in Southeast Asia—the others being Singapore and Malaysia—that still use languages introduced to them through colonialism. The American colonial government first established public schools in Manila in July 1899. The US colonial government then established a new educational system

in the Philippines, with English as the medium of instruction and the official language of the archipelago. Singapore and Malaysia also adopted in the 1820s an educational system that used English as their medium of instruction under British colonial rule.

Holden argues that English, as a global language with transnational capital, has helped José put forth a certain nationalism but also contributes to the increasing inequality between languages, considering that English was introduced in the Philippines through colonialism (168). Therefore, Holden makes a direct correlation between a country's history and the language used in that country's nationalist literature.

The language José used to forward his nationalistic ideals has long been the topic of debate. In write-ups about him, publications and other organizations are careful to distinguish that he is a Filipino writer *in English*. Bibsy Carballo, in her 2014 *Philippine Star* article, describes José as "the most widely-read Filipino writer in English." Amina Saïd (2005), José's French translator, writes in her essay in *F. Sionil José: A Tribute* that "most people are surprised to hear that such a thing as Philippine literature exists, and they are hardly aware why this literature is written in English" (188).

Like Rizal choosing to write his landmark novels—*Noli me Tangere* and *El Filibusterismo*—in Spanish, José always chose to write in English instead of Filipino or his regional vernacular, Ilokano. José recognized the power of the English language taught to Filipinos by the Americans and even thanked the latter for saving him from the life of an average working-class Filipino. José is quoted as having said that he "thanks the Americans for the educational system they have introduced to the country, or else he 'will still be on top of a water buffalo in [his] village today. [The Filipinos] have that to be grateful for'" (Laurel 2008, 276). In other words, José himself acknowledged the apparent superiority of English over Filipino, despite forwarding his nationalistic views through his works.

Amid the debate surrounding José and his use of English, there is no denying that José's sense of nationalism is most evident in his characters. Holden writes that, in the Rosales Saga, each novel "features a male protagonist who struggles to embody Filipino nationalism" (159). *Po-on* has Eustaquio "Istak" Salvador, a former acolyte. *Tree* has an unnamed boy, the son of a plantation manager. *My Brother, My Executioner* has Luis Asperri, a writer-editor. *The Pretenders* has Antonio "Tony" Samson, a graduate of Harvard University. *Mass* has José "Pepe" Samson, a student

turned rebel leader. Holden reads these protagonists as José's attempts at writing social realism and characters who may, themselves, attempt to enact what Gyorgy Lukacs called "concrete potentialities" or the possibilities in a man's mind. José, through his protagonists, wrote about the innumerable possibilities for man's development. However, Holden argues that even "the writing produced by José's characters is in languages which themselves enact social inequality" (160). This social inequality can be seen in the way the characters favor one language over another or in José's decision to not include phrases or sentences in languages that are not in English.

For instance, *My Brother, My Executioner* was written in English, as were all the five novels included in the Rosales Saga, but includes allusions to Ilokano, the novel's main characters' (and José's) regional dialect. The conflict of the story, centered on the Hukbalahap (Hukbong Bayan Laban sa Hapon) uprising, manifests itself at the beginning of the third chapter of the novel when a stone is hurled at the window of Don Vicente's room. The novel states: "Indeed it seemed familiar, although it was in Ilokano: 'The land belongs to the people and the people will get what is rightfully theirs. The next message will be delivered with a bullet. Commander Victor'" (37). The note is said to have been written in Ilokano, and yet what appears in the novel is a note of three lines written completely in English—a decision made by José perhaps for the sake of his non-Ilocano readers.

There also exist various instances of José referencing Spaniards or Spanish-Filipino mestizos in Spanish terms in *Po-on*. On page 42, the narrator acknowledges the existence of ilustrados (the Spanish term for "the enlightened ones" or those who belonged to the educated class during the Spanish colonial period) and *filibusteros* (those who obstructed progress in legislature). Referring to Spaniards and/or Spanish-Filipino mestizos in their own language further widened the gap between the Spanish and native Filipino characters in the novel.

On page 54 of *Po-on*, Istak begins praying "Ave Maria, purisima"—a prayer in Spanish—but then reverts to the Ilokano "Ama mi adda ca sadi langit" when he believes himself to be at the brink of death. Istak's praying in Ilokano in his last breath can signify his desire to return to his native Ilocano origins, despite his erudition and knowledge of Spanish and even Latin. His education in these foreign languages, then, begins to appear artificial and disposable.

In the novels *Po-on* and *My Brother, My Executioner*, the nationalistic protagonists use Spanish and Latin as an expression of elite sentiment. The main characters, purporting themselves to be part of the masses, are described to be speaking Ilokano. Those of more noble occupations—such as priests and acolytes—are said to be knowledgeable in languages spoken by those of higher standing. All of these contribute to the inequalities between ethnicity and social classes in both novels. However, these sentiments can also be applied to José, who continued to write in English, which, like Spanish and Latin, is also considered an expression of elite sentiment (that has saved him from life atop "a water buffalo").

On page 94 of *Tree*, the narrator recounts a postwar conversation that he, then a high school sophomore, has had with the character Tio Doro at the library of the latter's home. It is here that Tio Doro explains why Filipino writers should write in the English language. Tio Doro says, "It is just too bad. . . . We don't have a language that is known throughout the world. Even if we could have a national language someday, it would still be better if our writers wrote in English. Then, they will have a wider following." If José did write about the innumerable possibilities for man's development, then he saw more progress in writing in English than writing in an authentic Philippine national language. English, then, can be considered a tool of American hegemony that José nonetheless embraced.

There exists, therefore, an incompatibility between the nationalistic ideals that José portrayed in his novels and through the nationalists—José and his protagonists—themselves. The languages they use undermine their position in their postcolonial settings. Holden explains, "José's novels themselves, written in English, register, expose and yet ultimately cannot transcend class contradictions fundamental to a history of nationalism in the Philippines" (160). English has allowed José's works—and, therefore, his brand of nationalism—to flourish and find readership outside the Philippines, yet his use of English and his portrayal of the use of other "elite" languages in his novels highlight the inequalities present both in his stories and in Philippine history.

Domination and Translation: Pascale Casanova's *The World Republic of Letters*

While José's use of English in his writing has set him apart from other Filipino writers as elitist in the national sphere, the place of Philippine

literature in English in the world republic of letters is one that has been the constant topic of nationalist debate.

In *The World Republic of Letters* (2003)—a book detailing a world of letters relatively independent from economic and political spheres and in which languages, aesthetic orders, and genres struggle for dominance—Pascale Casanova writes that "literary capital is inherently national" and that there exists a link between the state and literature, which "depends on the fact that, through language, the one serves to establish and reinforce the other" (34). Caroline Hau (2000) also acknowledges that literature and history are dependent on each other, with "one taking shape in and through the other" (8). Nationalism is a narrative evident in the country's literature, having the ability to transform the Filipino understanding of the past, the present, and the nation itself. The Philippine government is presumed to have understood this link between the state and literature, hence Republic Act No. 1425 or the Rizal Law in 1956, which requires all education institutions in the Philippines to offer courses on Rizal.

Although the state is inherently related to its literature, Casanova writes that literary space "translates political and national issues into its own terms—aesthetic, formal, narrative, poetic—and at once affirms and denies them. Though it is not altogether free from political domination, literature has its own ways and means of asserting a measure of independence; of constituting itself as a distinct world in which external concerns appear only in refracted form, transformed and reinterpreted in literary terms and with literary instruments" (86). These literary terms and instruments include the history, choice, and usage of language.

As "it is through language that the literary world remains subject to political power" (115), Casanova introduces the concept of literary domination or the relationship between dominant and dominated spaces. The supposed dependence of literature on the nation fuels the inequality present in the literary world, between and among the dominated and the dominant. This dynamic is present if colonized countries were forced to learn the language of their colonizers and thus display literary dependency; while some advocate the use of Filipino and other dialects to battle this dependency, others like Gemino H. Abad believe that Filipino writers now write "from" instead of "in" English, because the use of the language in literature has "been chiefly toward affirming, within the adopted language, a Filipino sense of their world"—or if domination were "exerted and measured in literary terms alone" (115).

The existence of several books of essays and conversations praising José—such as Edwin Thumboo's *Frankie Sionil José: A Tribute* (1991) and Miguel Bernad's *Conversations with F. Sionil José* (2005)—not only proves but also contributes to José's and his works' value in literary terms. Thumboo refers to José as an "outstanding fictionist" and a "visionary" whose primary concern was "the Filipino experience." The book was published in honor of José's eightieth birthday, and so the essays included in it map José's "contribution to—and his place in—Filipino E(nglish)-Literature" (vii). Bernad, on the other hand, writes that the conversations included in his book are important because "they are conversations with a significant figure in the Philippine literary scene" (vii)—this significant figure being José. These conversations are "wide-ranging explorations by well-informed persons of several nationalities about many things" (viii), including their experiences of and with José, pre- and postconsecration in the literary world. The consecration of literary works and authors depends on the literary capital or value given to them by those in possession of it, such as Thumboo, Bernad, and the people whose opinions were included in their books.

Therefore, while domination may be seen as an aftereffect of colonization, it may also be "exerted and measured in literary terms alone," as in the cases of literary works "consecrated by central authorities, the power of critical decrees, the canonizing effect of prefaces and translations by writers who themselves have been consecrated at the center, . . . the prestige of the collections in which foreign works appear, and the leading role played by great translators" (Casanova 2004, 115). In relation to this, Casanova cites Johann Wolfgang von Goethe as seeing the "translator as a central actor in the world of letters, not only as an intermediary but also as a creator of literary value" (14). A number of translators of José's Rosales Saga may be considered "great translators" who have helped consecrate his literary works in the world of letters.

Translator Igor Podberezsky was a citizen of Russia and a leading research fellow at the Institute of World Economy and International Relations, Russian Academy of Sciences. He was awarded the Philippine Presidential Medal of Merit in 2009 by then president Gloria Macapagal Arroyo because he was considered the first specialist in the study of Philippine culture. José met Podberezsky in Moscow in 1967, and Podberezsky's translations of José's Rosales Saga and other works were

published during the existence of the Soviet Union and used as the source of later translations into Lithuanian, Latvian, and Ukrainian.

Amina Saïd, a poet, essayist, and short story writer, has translated a number of José's works into French. Saïd's poetry has also been translated into several languages and awarded the Jean Malrieu Prize in 1989 and the Charles Vildrac Prize in 1994. Saïd wrote to José and first translated his works in *The God Stealer and Other Stories* (1968) in 1996.

Not much is written about José's Spanish translators. Carlos Milla Soler is part of the translators' faction of the Asociacion Colegial de Escritores de España or ACE—the collegial association of writers of Spain. He won the 2006 Esther Benitez Award for his translation of *The March* by Edgar Lawrence Doctorow. Soler has translated the likes of John Connolly, Woody Allen, and Stephen King.

Apart from a number of his pieces being worked on by respected translators, José was also awarded for his literary efforts both nationally and internationally. Aside from being proclaimed a National Artist for Literature in 2001, he was also awarded the First Prize in the Palanca Memorial Award for Novel in English in 1981, the Cultural Center of the Philippines Award for Literature in 1989, and the Cultural Center of the Philippines Centennial Award in 1999. Internationally, José was awarded the Outstanding Fulbrighters Award for Literature in 1988, the Chevalier dans l'Ordre des Arts et des Lettres in 2000, and the Order of Sacred Treasure in 2001.

Translators, critics, and publishers all take part in the process of establishing the value of literary works, considering that "critical recognition and translation are weapons in the struggle by and for literary capital" (23). Additionally, according to Casanova, "the literary power of a nation can be measured in terms of the literary innovations produced by universally recognized writers from its suburbs" (120). Although many are opposed to using languages—and, consequently, the process of translation—to consecrate and forward a nationalism forged in colonialism, it is nondebatable that English as a "transnational capital" has allowed the Rosales Saga to be translated and ergo consumed by readers worldwide. If, according to Casanova, the dominated may convert their literary dependence on the dominant into "emancipation and legitimacy" (116), then this possibility must be taken into account when analyzing the translational power relations between countries and the Rosales Saga translations' "source" and "target" languages.

Born-Translated: Walkowitz's "Comparison Literature"

The Rosales Saga translations' content, production, and circulation affect and are affected by the translations' "source" and "target" languages. Rebecca Walkowitz (2009) writes that comparison literature, called so because it invokes "historical practices of translation that emphasize comparison between source and target" (235), puts to question "whether transnational enlargement in fact enhances—or ultimately thwarts—our capacity for social responsibility and political agency" (236). In the foregoing sentence, the term "transnational" is understood in the general acceptation of the word as "involving more than one country" or "reaching beyond or transcending national boundaries." In other words, similar to Casanova, Walkowitz asks what transnational fiction, or fiction that is translated and travels, truly does for the nation.

Vicente Rafael (1999) writes that translation has played a key role in Philippine colonial history, considering that translation has been a mode by which the source (the original work) may be bridged with the target (the work as translated or otherwise derived from the original). He narrates how Castilian Spanish allowed ilustrados to communicate with others from both within and outside colonial society. "With Castilian, they found a second language common to each because it was native to no one" (88). According to Rafael, the genesis of translation in the Philippines "lies in the transmission of messages across social and linguistic borders among all sorts of people whose identities and identifications were far from settled" (88). The Philippines, then, has a history of compromise in translation—just as Castilian acted as the middle ground between ilustrados and other members of society during the Spanish colonial period, English has acted as a bridge for Philippine literature to be shared internationally—with both Castilian and English in the Philippines finding their roots in colonialism.

However, Walkowitz explains that, at present, transnational fiction is stimulated in part by the global literary marketplace. The latter is defined as a situation or place "where values, opinions, and ideas are put forward for debate or recognition." This concept is supported by Benedict Anderson's theory of "imagined communities," where he posits that "the rise of print culture, and especially the rise of novels and newspapers, contributed to the possibility of imagining a nation as a shared, exclusive collectivity among strangers" (quoted in Walkowitz 2009, 242). Walkowitz posits that "the repression of translation may be tied, as it is in Anderson's

text, to the repression of transnational impulses within national projects" (243). The imagining of a nation, then, is made possible by its creation of the impression of simultaneous reading across space and the simultaneity of people who never meet. This is evidenced by the ways by which José's readers and translators came to learn of and regard his works.

At a remarkable frequency, translators would approach José with requests to be allowed to translate his works into different languages. In this researcher's interview with José, the latter explained that he rarely approached translators to request that they translate his works; it was the translators who sought him out and requested to be allowed to translate his works. It has been said that José's works—written in English, a dominant global language, and thus having greater global readership—have the qualities of being easily translatable from English to other languages and bear themes that are relevant to readers of other nations. José's novels could be considered as belonging to a class that Walkowitz refers to as "borntranslated novels," or novels written for publication in multiple languages, "designed to travel" or cross national and linguistic boundaries, and whose accessibility can be credited to the author prioritizing narrative over idiom for the novel to "survive translation" (239).

Walkowitz, however, makes the fine distinction between novels that appear in translation and novels that have been written for translation—the latter meaning that the novel must survive having its translator/s "homogenize regional differences within national languages by simplifying vernacular idioms or exchanging vernacular phrases for standard formulations" (239). In addition, Walkowitz suggests that new translation studies emphasize "internal variety and a complex mixing of local, regional, and global idioms" (237). Aspects of the source or original text may, therefore, be simplified in the target language's terms, undermining the source writer's authority over his original work. Walkowitz cites Tim Parks' assertion that "books written for translation will need to invent alternatives to the emphasis on idiolect" (238), or the writer's unique use of vocabulary, grammar, and speech.

José's Rosales Saga has been translated into many languages and has survived translators' "simplifying vernacular idioms" and homogenizing "regional differences" for the source text to suit its target languages. The novels in this saga have been translated into various languages, including Russian, Vietnamese, French, Indonesian, Portuguese, Dutch, Czech,

and Spanish. The Spanish translations of the first three novels feature glossaries for definitions of Filipino terms to provide readers with accurate definitions of the distinctive nationalistic terms in the novels. Yet, a disparity between the source or original work and the target or translated/derivative work is immediately evident in the novels' titles.

The title of the first novel, *Poon*, is an Ilokano word that means "source" or "origin." The title was revised to *Dusk* by Random House in its edition of the novel and then translated to *Anochecer*, the Spanish term for "dusk," in Maeva Ediciones' edition. The second book's title, *My Brother, My Executioner,* was changed in its revision to Spanish. It appears as *Mi Hermano, Mi Enemigo,* which translates to English as "my brother, my enemy." The third book's title, *Tree*, was rewritten in Spanish as *El Arbol de la Esperanza*, which literally translates to English as "the tree of the hope." The foregoing illustrates instances when translators would take upon themselves the responsibility of revising the title of the source and adapting it to better suit the target language, in this case Spanish. These instances highlight the issue of whether the translated works retain and reflect enough of the "nation" found in the source or original work.

In *El Arbol de la Esperanza*, for instance, there appears to be a notable disparity with the source, *Tree*, when after Tio Doro renders an eloquent speech on nationalism, "he finally concluded: 'God forbid that I will ever have ties with foreigners who ravaged this beautiful Philippines!'" (93). In *El Arbol de la Esperanza* (131), the same line reads differently. The Spanish translation states: "Finalmente concluyo: No quiera Dios que jamas tenga lazos con los extranjeros que han saqueado estas maravillosas Filipinas." The term *han saqueado* translates to English as "they have looted," as if the damage done by foreigners to the Philippines was limited only to looting and such petty crimes as theft, robbery, and other crimes against property. The phrase does not adequately convey Tio Doro's sentiment that foreigners "ravaged this beautiful Philippines." The more accurate Spanish phrase for the term "ravaged" would be *han devastado,* "they have devastated." The change in the Spanish term may be read as undermining the author's ideas regarding the presence of foreign—specifically Spanish—colonizers in the Philippines.

According to Parks, borntranslated novels must be able to accommodate translation—in the form of "appropriation, opportunism, and innovation" (quoted in Walkwoitz 2009, 238). Thus, comparison literature "does emphasize narrative over idiom, but it uses that emphasis to explore the

political history of languages in formal and thematic registers that can survive translation" (Walkowitz 2009, 238). While several disparities exist between the source texts and the Spanish translations of José's works, the translations to Spanish generally provide an intelligible idiomatic and idiolectic equivalent to the source text. Additionally, the translations to Spanish retain the same characters and plot as the source texts.

With regard to theme, José's novels tackle such issues as social realism, including the cacique system; the failure of the local government to uphold justice and enforce laws; rebels resorting to guerilla tactics to protect marginalized and disadvantaged people; and other issues. It may be said that the fact that José's novels dwell on these global themes has allowed the novels to survive translation. In a published conversation between Russian translator Podberezsky and José, the two discuss their admiration for the same themes, with José telling Podberezsky about how he was once asked why he remained in the Philippines. He answers, "A country can be poor but it still needs justice. So when you were talking about socialism, meaning social justice, this is it" (Bernad 1991, 87); this José promotes through his literary works. Podberezsky then tells José, "It's the same in my country" (87). José's works—dedicated to social justice—belong to what Podberezsky calls "critical realism" or "social criticism"; José's outlook is realistic and critical, and "he believes that his writings can change the country for the better" (Thumboo 2005, 196). While Holden believes that José's works in English undermine his position as a nationalist, considering that the language he writes in highlights the inequalities left over from colonialism, Podberezsky posits that José's works are attempts at social realism and proves that they are enactments of, in Lukacs' terms, the innumerable possibilities for man's development (Holden 2008, 160), which is a positioning that is arguably nationalist. José seemed to agree with this, considering that, although he wrote in English and not in the vernacular, he could still have been viewed as part of the vernacular tradition because of his participation in local social criticism.

Aside from the works' relative translatability, another point to consider when discussing comparison literature is their ability to respond "to the ongoing problem of statelessness and postHolocaust debates about the treatment of minorities" (Walkowitz 2009, 236). While translation can contribute to the imagining of national communities, Anderson argues that "translation puts pressure on the conceptual boundaries between

one community and another and may spur the perception of new communities altogether" (Walkowitz 2009, 244), perhaps in the merging of communities affected by the same struggles and concerns tackled in the literary works through possessive collectivism. Walkowitz cites anthropologist Richard Handler's definition of "possessive collectivism" as "'a collection of individuals and a collective individual,' who/which possesses unique, permanent qualities such as a 'soul, spirit, and personality,' and who/which has the capacity to exercise sovereignty, free will, and choice" (241). While possessive collectivism may explain why the original production of artworks and literature tend to affirm literary histories through the sharing of a collective "soul," Walkowitz writes that it could be speculated that "a theory of artworks that understood acts of editing and translating as acts of making might affirm a different norm of literary history and a different conception of the community that literary history helps to justify" (242). This possessive collectivism and the conception of different communities through translation are evident in commentaries about José's choice of themes tackled in his Rosales Saga. Thelma Kintanar (1989) writes that social justice is a common theme throughout the saga, yet an even larger theme is the Filipino's role in the change in social order. José treats Cabugawan, Rosales, as "any village, any town"—a group of minorities (30). Social injustice also appeals to José's Russian audience, with Podberezsky believing that José "writes about social injustice which is something deeply felt by every Russian . . . that always finds a place in the soul of any Russian. That's why [he is] so popular in the Soviet Union, and [he]'ll be read for a long, long time" (Bernad 1991, 82).

Social injustice is a common theme in José's novels—whether felt by members of the Hukbalahap movement in *Mass* or the families toiling under Spanish colonialism in *Poon*; the Rosales Saga dramatizes revolution while emphasizing the Philippine identity and consciousness through the protagonists' resistance to colonial power and oppression. Possessive collectivism, then, is not restricted to the Philippine nation alone but is relevant even to José's nonFilipino readers.

Within an Ellipse: David Damrosch's "World Literature"

In *What Is World Literature?* (2003), David Damrosch's work on how literary texts shift from national to global contexts, he quotes Johann Peter Eckermann: "At this time I heard the name *Goethe* for the first time and

first acquired a volume of his poetry . . . it seemed to me that in these poems my own hitherto unknown essence was reflected back to me" (2). To Eckermann, "Goethe was the living embodiment of world literature, even of world culture as a whole" (quoted in Damrosch 2003, 2). Goethe, as an example of an author of world literature, partly found "in the foreign text a middle quality, a distinctive novelty that is *likebutunlike* practice at home" (Eckermann quoted in Damrosch 2003, 11). This *likebut-unlike* characteristic allowed Goethe to find international readership—a readership largely dependent on the production and circulation of his poetry.

Goethe's work has come to be considered as an example of world literature. Damrosch proposes the concept of a world literature as an elliptical refraction of national literatures; national literature and world literature are not antithetical to each other, but the ongoing vitality of national literary traditions affects the study of world literatures. When Goethe reviewed several works abroad that were based on his own, he wrote that the authors had borrowed "from us without thanks" and made "use of us without acknowledgment" (7). The borrowers who created derivative works based on his original work—that had traveled from its own national literary tradition to world literature—had undermined and undercut the creator of the original.

What Goethe experienced in his time is still evident today, as evidenced by the creation and treatment of some of the translations of José's works. In this researcher's interview with José in 2015, José explained that he was not entirely certain how many translations there were of his works, but he was aware that, similar to Goethe, he did not earn from many of them because a number of his works had been translated without his knowledge nor consent. However, it may be said that all of the translations of José's works, whether authorized by José, "continue to bear the marks of their national origin even after they circulate into world literature, and yet these traces are increasingly diffused and become ever more sharply refracted as a work travels farther from home" (Damrosch 2003, 283). As José's nationalist works have been translated into numerous languages, the degree of nationalism in these translated works are "increasingly diffused," as evident in the disparity between the source and translations of the Rosales Saga. Unfortunately, this diffusion of nationalism or "Filipinoness" in José's works is precisely that which he had sought to guard against. In *F. Sionil José: A Tribute,* Sam Vaughn, an American editor

of the Rosales Saga for Random House and Modern Library, wrote that he once asked José how he would like to be edited, and José said, "Do with it what you will, but please do not make me less Filipino" (185).

José's works, as translated to other languages, can be argued as showing less of the "nation." However, Damrosch (2003) explains that national literatures still "become world literature by being received into the space of a foreign culture, a space defined in many ways by the host culture's national tradition and the present needs of its own writers" (283). He writes, "a literary work manifests differently abroad than it does at home" (6). The receiving culture can use the foreign material as a positive model for future development or even "as an image of radical otherness against which the home tradition can more clearly be defined" (283). Therefore, while a local text may lose several of its original nationalistic references, characteristics, and nuances through translation, it may still be embraced and adopted by foreign cultures using their own national traditions.

Podberezsky translated José's *Pretenders* because it would suit Soviet readers at a time when Philippine fiction would have been "attractive" to Russians in terms of "Russian tradition." He says, "My first idea was that it was written for Soviet readers. That it should be translated into Russian because it will find readership in the Soviet Union" (Podberezsky 1991, 87). In Podberezsky's essay in *F. Sionil José: A Tribute,* he wrote that, at the time that he chose to translate José's works, everybody was "seeking something new, even exotic. And the Philippines, a faraway archipelago, was especially attractive" (Thumboo 2005, 192). Podberezsky took the text and transformed it to suit his target language and host culture to address the needs of readers in the Soviet Union. José's French translator Saïd (2005), on the other hand, "thought it would be good to start translating a few F. Sionil José short stories, for they are fragmentary chronicles of the history of the Philippines" (189). Saïd's main goal, then, was to translate fragmentary Philippine history into French for French readers. She quotes journalist Zulueta's sentiments that "to render José's work in French is to reaffirm that the universal cuts across race, gender, geography, and word constructs" (188).

The source and host cultures, therefore, provide "the two foci that generate the elliptical space within which a work lives as world literature, connected to both cultures, circumscribed by neither alone" (Damrosch 2003, 283). Damrosch calls this the "splitting self that is at odds with the coming together from separate worlds" (284). Despite the fact that

translations may lack the ability to capture the essence of original works—frequently leading to "textual poverty in postcolonial literature" (Escoto-Ramos 2017, 12)—the translations of and derivations from José's works allow his fiction to continue living in the space between both Filipino and foreign culture and stand as their own world literature.

Conclusion

José, a National Artist in Literature and prizewinning author, accomplished everything a Filipino writer in English could, except win what is arguably the most sought-after international award in literature—the Nobel Prize. Many have been of the view that this is because the Philippines is but a country of "obscurity," in Nguyen-Okwu's terms, or, in other words, a country of colonialism. While many of José's works, most notably those of the Rosales Saga, could be considered world literature through the production and circulation of their translations—which have helped in the literary consecration of both the works and their author—the works themselves are rooted in the language in which José writes, which is English.

José, often compared to Rizal for their choice of themes and language, once wrote in his *Philippine Star* column that "Rizal became the greatest single influence in my life as a writer, and all of my writing has been dedicated to his theme—the Filipino's search for a moral order and social justice." While José proved to be both grateful for and aware of the prominence of English in the Philippines, he showed more concern for the struggles of which he wrote—warning his editors or translators not to might make him "less Filipino"—than the language he wrote in or the languages he was translated to. Perhaps that is part of the legacy he has left Filipino writers in English—those of today and those to come.

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