

philippine studies

Ateneo de Manila University • Loyola Heights, Quezon City • 1108 Philippines

Rizal in Guerrero's Translation: El Filibusterismo

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Philippine Studies vol. 15, no. 1 (1967): 204–205

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Fri June 30 13:30:20 2008

RIZAL IN GUERRERO'S TRANSLATION

EL FILIBUSTERISMO. (Subversion). A Sequel to Noli Me Tangere. By José Rizal. A Completely New Translation for the Contemporary Reader by León Ma. Guerrero. London: Longmans, 1965. xvi, 299 pp.

It is one of the ironies of our culture that the youth for whom Rizal wrote his novels can now no longer read those novels in the language in which Rizal wrote them. Rizal wrote in Spanish; the modern youth must read the novels in translation, preferably in English.

For half a century the standard English translations have been those by Charles Derbyshire. Even the titles were translated: "The Social Cancer" for *Noli me tangere*; "The Reign of Greed" for *El Filibusterismo*. There have been many other translations besides those of Derbyshire. Many if not all of them labored from one defect: they were accurate but stodgy. They made the novels uninteresting. Those who read the novels did so from a sense of duty, not from a sense of excitement.

Guerrero's translations are different. In his pages it is possible to recapture some of that excitement which Rizal's first readers must have felt when the novels were first issued in Ghent or Berlin. León Ma. Guerrero is a public figure: he has served as Philippine Ambassador, first in London, then in Madrid, and now in New Delhi. In many respects he is the ideal translator both from the linguistic and from the historical point of view. Linguistically, he is at home in both English and Spanish. Historically, he has written a biography of Rizal (awarded a prize by the Rizal Centennial Commission in 1961) to which he has given the provocative title of *The First Filipino* (Manila, 1963). In writing that book he had to read his way into the history of Spain and of the Philippines, an excellent historical preparation for anyone who would attempt to translate the novels.

Guerrero possesses an even rarer gift. He has that peculiar feel for language which only the best writers possess. He is alert to the nuances of meaning, and he has an ear for the sound of words and the cadence of good phrasing.

Guerrero's translation of *Noli me tangere* was published in London in 1961. It was subsequently issued in the United States under a different title—"The Lost Eden". The process was reversed in the case of *El Filibusterismo*. His translation first appeared in America (the University of Indiana Press) in 1962 under the title "The Subversive". In 1965, it appeared in London under the original title—*El Filibusterismo*—but with a subtitle which retains the abstract form of the Spanish original: *Subversion*.

Perhaps one way of appreciating the quality of the translation is to open the book at random and compare the English rendering with the Spanish original. Thus, in Chapter One ("On the Upper Deck") we find: "Ben Zayb, the writer who looked like a friar, was arguing with a young religious who in turn looked like a gunner." That is a neat rendering of: "Ben-Zayb, el escritor que tenía cara de fraile, disputaba con un joven religioso que á su vez tenía cara de artillero." And in Chapter Two ("On the Lower Deck"), Isagani's complaint ("Esos hombres del pasado para toda encuentran dificultades") is rendered: "These old-timers find obstacles to everything."

That is neatly done. But it is by reading the whole book that one can best appreciate the work. Even the bad Spanish of the social-climbing Doña Victorina is rendered into equally bad English. "how nasty also!" she says in her Tagalicized English. What she had said in her Tagalicized Spanish was: "Uy, que asco!"

Alas, even Homer nods. This translation, otherwise so excellent, has its bad moments. The word "balot" gives the translator plenty of trouble. He renders it by an entire clause: "eggs like the ones the niggers eat when the little ducks is not yet born". That is of course how Doña Victorina would have spoken if she had been speaking in English. But what she actually said in Spanish was: "los huevos balot".

There are also the epigraphs. The Latin epigraph "Sic itur ad astra" is well rendered: "This way to the stars". But the German poem:

Ich weiss nicht was soll es bedeuten
Dass ich so traurig bin

is less happily translated into: "I want to cry: I don't know why."

That is not quite it. But if you want to read Rizal and can't read Spanish, read him in Guerrero's translation.

MIGUEL A. BERNAD

RELIGION AND JAPANESE SOCIETY

RELIGION IN JAPANESE HISTORY. By Joseph M. Kitagawa.
New York: Columbia University Press, 1966. x, 457 pp.

The post-World War-II occupation authorities destroyed State Shinto and the emperor cult because of their political rather than their religious implications; they played "a role of decisive importance in the religious history of Japan" (p. 278). How decisive this role has