AMÉRICA IS IN THE ARCHIPELAGO: MARIANO DE LA ROSA’S FÍAME AND THE FILIPINO (AMERICAN) NOVEL IN SPANISH OF WORLD WAR II

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Abstract
Via analysis of the World War II novel Fíame (Filipinas-América) [Trust in Me (Philippines-America)] by Mariano L. De la Rosa, this essay argues that Filipino literature in Spanish written during the United States colonial period undermines any normative definitions of both American and Filipino literature. Fíame, a hitherto unknown text, challenges the marginality of its oblivion by revamping putative national boundaries through a symbolic plot in which two couples, each composed of a Filipino and an American, develop subtly subversive relationships before, during, and immediately after the War. The novel thereby can be connected to questions of Filipino American identity implicitly raised in texts as diverse as the National World War II Memorial in Washington, D.C., and the testimonial narrative America Is in the Heart by Carlos Bulosan. The conceptual diversification of “Filipino American” to include texts written in the islands and in an older imperial language makes the term not an ethnic designation of immigrants and their descendants but a heuristic device of potentially global usage and implications. Meanwhile, Fíame also forces a reappraisal of the twentieth century tradition of Filipino fiction in Spanish because scholars have supposed unanimously that Los pájaros de fuego [The Birds of Fire] by Jesús Balmori was the lone archipelagic novel in that language to be written during and about World War II. This essay is a companion piece to an analysis of Balmori’s novel that was published in Kritika Kultura 17.

Keywords
hispanophone Asian novel, World War II literature, Filipino Literature in Spanish, Mariano De la Rosa, Fíame

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however, is now another country. The Philippines stands thereby as the only foreign nation honored between the Capitol and the Lincoln Memorial. And yet in 1945, the year in which the Pacific ground campaign culminated with the annihilation of Intramuros, the old Spanish walled city of Manila, the Philippines was not sovereign. All Filipinos were Americans at that point as much as were all Alaskans, Hawaiians, and Puerto Ricans, to the extent that none of those people lived in states of the United States either and nevertheless also were formally subject to laws and policy coming out of the federal government in Washington. A memorial pillar erected by a colonizing power certainly does not amount to justice, but it does at least grant recognition in the metropolitan center to the dead and destroyed of the land it appropriated.

Such recognition is not the case with literary history of either the imperial or national kind when the subject is Filipino literature written during the War and in Spanish, the language spoken by much of the Intramuros population that was obliterated amid the bombing of Japanese forces by the United States. This small but important body of literature remains unknown on both sides of the Pacific despite its innate involvement in the joint story of the United States and the Philippines and its refractions, via an unfamiliar vantage, of larger dynamics of colonizing and colonized peoples. Wartime Filipino literature in Spanish lingers in oblivion in large part due to its authorship in the language of the empire that ruled the archipelago prior to 1898. By the time Intramuros was devastated, Spanish power in the islands had been extinct for nearly half a century and not many survivors remained who spoke the tongue of the old empire. The Western language known by most Filipinos at that point was English. One result of the limited familiarity with the hispanophone tradition is that the few people who have paid any attention to twentieth century Filipino literature in Spanish have supposed unanimously that Los pájaros de fuego [The Birds of Fire] by Jesús Balmori was the lone archipelagic novel in that language to be written during and about World War II. Yet Mariano L. De la Rosa, also a Filipino, began composing Fíame (Filipinas-América) [Trust in Me (Philippines-America)] before the cataclysm commenced, kept working on it during the War, and completed it a year after the atrocities ended.

Both novels complicate dramatically any normative definitions of the modern contours of literature from the United States and the Philippines, and, for that matter, the Spanish-speaking world as a whole (wherein twentieth century Asian literature in Spanish is entirely unrecognized) and so are of exceptional significance despite their dearth of readership. The texts merit immediate, serious, and sustained analysis, especially Trust in Me, for up until now it has not been known to exist. The unpublished manuscript of The Birds of Fire remained buried in archives for over half a century but nonetheless garnered occasional commentary over time. In 2010, moreover, it saw light at last in an annotated edition that is sure to yield additional scholarship. Trust in Me, however, is (insofar as presently known) the only World War II Filipino novel in Spanish to be published in
its era of composition. Furthermore, albeit arguably, it is also a rather more sophisticated literary project than that by the relatively famous Balmori.

De la Rosa was evidently an amateur creative writer who began his foray into fiction only in his later years. If he contributed short stories or poetry or drama to any of the many pre-War Filipino newspapers and magazines, they remain to be discovered. Yet ultimately, De la Rosa may be deemed to have produced in *Trust in Me* a novel of more lasting interest than *The Birds of Fire*. This is despite the fact that Balmori, by contrast, had been a well-known poet and fictionalist for four decades. Much of the attention to Balmori’s novel stems from issues of biography and reception: the reputation and prolificacy of the author, the manuscript unpublished and often unfound. Yet De la Rosa, though virtually invisible to literary historians, deals with World War II in *Trust in Me* in a way far more closely connected to the present and future of an interwoven world than Balmori in *The Birds of Fire*. This is to say that the internationalized text of the novel, not the fame of the author or the seductions of a long-lost manuscript, would be the primary impetus for any decision to read or study it.

Despite the horrors of the War in the Philippines, the plot of *Trust in Me* is rather chipper. The novel opens in November 1935 with the inauguration of the Commonwealth, a transitional political entity designed by power brokers in Washington and Manila to move the Philippines gradually from colonial rule by the United States to independence a decade later. The heroes of the novel are four well-connected young people, the strapping lads Harry and Max and the coquettish virgins Rosy and Nena. Harry and Rosy are Americans passing through Manila, he as a “guapo oficial del ejército de los Estados Unidos” [“handsome official of the United States army”] and she, “del vergel americano, la nítida flor” [“the clearest flower of the American fruit and flower garden”], as an assistant to the Congressional delegation that has arrived to celebrate the birth of the Commonwealth (11, 5). Max, “un apuesto joven filipino” [“a handsome Filipino youth”], is a member of the reception committee for the visiting officials, while Nena is his childhood friend. Like Rosy, she is an undeflowered flower: “Orquídea oculta … ignorante de su belleza y fascinación, su virginal modestia es su mejor encanto” [“A hidden orchid … ignorant of her beauty and fascination to others, her virginal modesty is her greatest enchantment”] (11). Max and Rosy meet each other at the welcoming ceremonies and flirt at the Inaugural Ball of Manuel Quezon, the incoming President of the Commonwealth, “ella con su blonda femenidad y él, con su continente varonil, moreno” [“she with her blonde femininity and he with his dark, manly countenance”] (6). Harry, who is also blond, falls for Nena at the same Inaugural Ball.

The clichéd descriptions of these protagonists may seem laughable to readers today but De la Rosa is quite serious about the symbolic extrapolations at hand. The development of the twin interracial romances, which provides the fictional infrastructure of the novel, represents the unity
of the Philippines and the United States throughout the Commonwealth and the War. The thesis of
*Trust in Me*, as stated repeatedly by De la Rosa, is that

Era natural que en los primeros días de la ocupación existiese desconfianza entre unos
y otros [i.e., filipinos y estadounidenses]. Además, las diferencias en usos, costumbres
y, sobre todo, la cuestión de raza, que siempre ha dado lugar a lamentables
disensiones, se han interpuesto para impedir un contacto más íntimo. Pero, la mutua
comprensión acabará con tal estado de cosas, que no tiene razón de ser en una
sociedad civilizada. (32)

[It was natural that in the first days of the occupation there was distrust between
some and others (i.e., Filipinos and Americans). Besides, the differences in manners,
customs and, above all, the racial question, which always has created space for
lamentable dissensions, have come between and impeded a more intimate contact. But
mutual comprehension will end that state of things, which has no reason for being in a
civilized society.]

This desired coming together across distrust based on difference is the key to the
anagrammatic title of the novel in Spanish. The word *Fíame* translates in English as the heartfelt
imperative “Trust in me” while combining eurythmically the first syllables of “Filipinas”
[“Philippines”] and “América” [“America”]. The romances of Max and Rosy, Harry and Nena
function as allegories of unified Filipinos and Americans, which in turn stand as micro-realizations
of a universal harmony among all people(s) that is the ultimate ideal championed by De la Rosa.
The relations among the four youths play out at the level of a romantic comedy, foregrounded
at first while the gigantic forces leading up to the War are well in the background. As the novel
proceeds, however, the relative prominences of the two plots interchange. The standout figures and
episodes of the War become covered in *Trust in Me* in a fashion that is nearly journalistic. The small
and large scale stories, nonetheless, are complementary and intertwined from the very beginning,
starting with the meeting of the foursome at the pre-War political arrangement that is the
Commonwealth. De la Rosa thereby keeps his fictional characters and events manifestly embedded
within the specific news frames of the era.

As a judge by profession between 1924 and 1953, De la Rosa seems to have been well-
positioned in terms of education and worldliness to keep track of social, political, and military
developments before and during the War, outside as well as inside the Philippines. Yet this is just a
guess, for little is currently known about him. According to the dust jacket of his novel *La creación*
The Creation of 1959, “Only the constitutional age limit of 70 years prevented his further promotion to the Supreme Court, the highest tribunal of the land.” His birthdate in 1883 meant that De la Rosa was already a young adult by the time the United States began sending over shiploads of English teachers in the early twentieth century after taking the islands from Spain in 1898. His native languages would have been Spanish and, presumably, a dialect of Bikol, the main language of the Camarines Sur province where he was born. To succeed in such a political sphere as the judiciary, he surely would have had to have spoken, or learned to speak, Tagalog as well, the vernacular of the Manila region, even though that language was not declared a national idiom (in a slightly adjusted form called Filipino) until 1937. Meanwhile, the post-1898 colonial regime emphasized the use of English throughout the official public sphere and De la Rosa would have faced increasingly limited professional prospects had he not adapted to that reality, too. The dust jacket of The Creation duly notes that after passing the bar in 1906, “Without the assistance of a tutor, he learned to speak English.” Given his long career in the public sector, archival investigations in the Philippines might turn up additional biographical information of interest. For example, like many members of the Filipino elite, De la Rosa was a Mason, having been one of the three founders of a Masonic lodge in Camarines at some point prior to 1917 (Kalaw 241).1 Research into Masonic activities in the islands might also reveal some noteworthy background on him.

While De la Rosa was developing his career as a jurist during the United States occupation, thousands of Filipinos in a rather distant stretch of the socioeconomic spectrum were making their way to the contiguous 48 states and becoming migrant laborers. The most famous of them is Carlos Bulosan, author of a novelized autobiography in English titled America Is in the Heart that since has achieved canonization among Asian American studies and United States ethnic studies in general. Bulosan’s account of his travails during the Depression, published in 1943 and therefore composed while De la Rosa was working on Trust in Me back in the Philippines, is most remarkable in the eponymous passage:

We are all Americans that have toiled and suffered and known oppression and defeat, from the first Indian that offered peace in Manhattan to the last Filipino pea pickers. America is not bound by geographical latitudes. America is not merely a land or an institution. America is in the hearts of men that died for freedom … America is also the nameless foreigner, the homeless refugee, the hungry boy begging for a job and the black body dangling on a tree. America is the illiterate immigrant who is ashamed that the world of books and intellectual opportunities is closed to him. We are all that nameless foreigner, that homeless refugee, that hungry boy, that illiterate immigrant
and that lynched black body. All of us, from the first Adams to the last Filipino, native born or alien, educated or illiterate—*We are America!* (189)

Notably, this America is transhistorical and unbordered and marked by interrelated stories of struggle, not so much a nation or a place as an idea that links diverse oppressed peoples across time and space. The original inhabitants of Manhattan and lynched African Americans and Filipino agricultural workers all participate in the common narrative of a concept that outstrips its own boundaries, for “America” is not actually *in* America but wherever the story of America, of its conquered but not defeated, is told.

The metaphoric flexibility needed for acceptance of that definition of “America,” however, is merely an expansion of the particular case of the United States colonization of the Philippines as of 1898. Neither Bulosan nor the “last Filipino” to which he refers had to emigrate across the Pacific to join in the story of that America. For that matter, Bulosan did not emigrate at all. No Filipino did who arrived in the United States between 1898 and 1946. Like everyone born in the Philippines in the early twentieth century, Bulosan was *already* in America, because the United States included the archipelago. As Oscar Campomanes points out, Filipinos in the Philippines “moved to the continental states not as nationals of a sovereign nation but as *U.S. nationals* of a territory ‘appurtenant to’ but considered as ‘belonging to’ the United States. It is kind of like the movements Puerto Ricans make now from the island to New York” (Tiongson 41).

Campomanes adds that “the term ‘Filipino American’ is a redundancy” that “can be a signifier just as descriptive of the modern and US colonial period formation of Filipinos as it is of an emergent and self-empowering political subject in US multiculturalism” (Tiongson 42). The implications of this idea extend to all Filipinos who never left the colonized Philippines for the continental United States, including those who wrote in Spanish such as De la Rosa. Yet while Bulosan’s story has been swallowed into the service of existing United States and Filipino genres of immigrant literature and the sociopolitical structures they perpetuate, the texts of his hispanophone contemporaries in Manila, and of De la Rosa in particular, are left out of the narratives of both national literatures. Just about every large bookstore in the two countries keeps *America Is in the Heart* available on its shelves; in Manila, it is usually available in a Tagalog translation as well as in the original English. This stands in sharp contrast to the absence on retail shelves of any Filipino literature in Spanish at all, notwithstanding the length of the tradition (seven decades into existence by the time De la Rosa published *Trust in Me*) and its contemporaneity with the life of a figure such as Bulosan. The lone Filipino author who worked in Spanish whose texts are available to the general public is José Rizal, the nineteenth century national hero and foundational writer, but his oeuvre precedes the imperial shift of 1898 and in any case appears in bookstores only in translations.
into English and the vernaculars. In short, Filipino literature in Spanish of the United States colonial era has no place in the imaginary of either country as separate entities or as the single one they were for nearly fifty years. Most scholars in the United States would be astonished to learn that Filipino literature in Spanish exists at all, much more so to find out that it gives a unique take on the World War II history of the United States from inside the United States.

This is why Trust in Me deserves a readership and analysis: it redefines imperial and national narratives of literary history. But any serious grappling with the novel requires a general understanding of the trajectory of archipelagic history from 1898 through World War II. Once the United States defeated Spain and then the Filipino revolutionaries, the surviving island elite quickly strengthened its ties with the new imperial rulers. Theodore Roosevelt had proposed as early as 1899, then as Governor of New York, that Filipino independence seekers who opposed rule by Washington be annihilated. As he pithily put it, “Resistance must be stamped out. The first and all-important work to be done is to establish the supremacy of our flag. We must put down armed resistance before we can accomplish anything else, and there should be no parleying, no faltering, in dealing with our foe” (188-89). Roosevelt spared no tolerance for domestic political opponents of colonialism either, asserting,

I have scant patience with those who fear to undertake the task of governing the Philippines, and who openly avow that they do fear to undertake it, or that they shrink from it because of the expense and trouble; but I have even scantier patience with those who make a pretense of humanitarianism to hide and cover their timidity, and who cant about “liberty” and the “consent of the governed,” in order to excuse themselves for their unwillingness to play the part of men. (188)

Roosevelt, who quickly assumed ultimate responsibility for the Philippines when he rose from Vice-President to President of the United States in 1901 after the assassination of William McKinley, made it quite clear to the Filipino elite where their alliances should lie. His point man in the islands, William Taft, the future President and Supreme Court Chief Justice of the United States, reinforced the message. The United States presence in the islands that would come to be regarded as salvational by the end of World War II began half a century earlier under the threat of a very big stick.

Under the United States regime, anglicization of the Filipino population was rapid and widespread. Although the local elites at first produced their major governmental documents in Spanish, English increasingly became the dominant lingua franca among all Filipino classes. As the decades passed, the United States developed a corps of high-ranking civil partners among the
Filipino oligarchs, and they in turn began to wonder about the future sovereignty of the islands. Their discussions and power jockeying in the archipelago and Washington led to the creation of the Commonwealth in 1935, presided over by Quezon and charged with the transition to independence. That gradualism exploded when the War came to the Philippines a matter of hours after it came to Hawaii, the other significant United States island holding in the Pacific.

At the time of Pearl Harbor, there was little substantive difference at the imperial level between Hawaii and the Philippines. Both were conquered Pacific archipelagos that the United States had seized in the late nineteenth century for economic exploitation and military utility. Japan acknowledged as much by bombing both of them in quick succession; the builders of the National World War II Memorial in Washington likewise were justified in recognizing each equally. Horrors followed the bombardment, as the subsequent Japanese occupation of the Philippines from 1942 to 1945 was one of the particularly atrocious chapters in human history. Douglas MacArthur, who as leader of United States forces in the Philippines was forced to retreat to Australia, pledged that he would return eventually and drive Japan out. It was in fulfillment of this famous personal promise, not military advisibility, that he decided to stage the major land battles with Japan in the Philippines rather than elsewhere. The result was that hundreds of thousands of Filipinos died unnecessarily, many in the most brutal ways imaginable, while Manila and its environs were destroyed. Despite this gruesome legacy, two sweeping conclusions about the United States wartime involvement in the islands remain commonplace in the Philippines: (1) first, in 1945, MacArthur saved the islands; (2) second, in 1946, the Philippines became the only major colony in history to be granted independence due to peacefully requested legislation rather than revolution (the later and bloody wars for independence by dozens of Asian and African societies against European colonizers would strengthen this conviction). Trust in Me by De la Rosa is a text that operates on both these premises.

Once the War ended and Philippine independence was recognized, the Huks, who had formed as a rural guerrilla force against the Japanese invaders, strove to change the balance of power in which a clique of Filipinos arrogated national wealth and power while the rural masses remained impoverished. Manuel Roxas, handpicked by MacArthur to become the first president of the independent Philippines and, like most of the oligarchs, a collaborator with the Japanese—he was even a cabinet member of the puppet Philippine Republic, set up in mid-War by Japan—crushed the Huks with the consent of the United States. Although official colonial rule was over in 1946, the United States had no intention of allowing a broad democratization that might jeopardize its economic, political, and military interests in the Philippines, or those of the domestic elite with whom it ran the archipelago. De la Rosa glorifies the work of irregulars during the War and even has Nena participate in it as an informant with ties to the allied urban underground, but
chronologically *Trust in Me* stops shy of the post-War reconsolidation of the traditional Filipino elite and the neocolonization by the United States. The last page of *Trust in Me* notes the end of the War in August 1945 but concludes its timeframe with the independence of the Philippines the following July. This event is positioned at the front of the novel in a brief preface titled “La bandera” [“The Flag”].

In the opening part of *Trust in Me*, in stark contrast to the atom bombs at the end, the four young protagonists play golf together while exchanging repartee by the walls of Intramuros on a modern course that once was a fetid swamp (21). The symbolism here is that by the legacy of the Spanish past, Americans and Filipinos forge together socioeconomic progress and an egalitarian future. With the Commonwealth celebrations over, meaning that Rosy must now return home with the Congressional committee while Harry ships off to China, the foursome found a friendship club named RAMY intended to double as a movement dedicated to eliminating worldwide “de las sociedades prejuicios de raza y clase” [“prejudices of race and class from societies”] (43). A few colorful episodes, though, remain before World War II breaks out. In one sequence, for example, Max receives a charm from an old indigenous Filipina priestess whom he has saved from an accidental fall (74-75). In another, Max proves his affections for Rosy after she leaves the Philippines with the Congressional delegation by unexpectedly beating her to San Francisco and waving at her from the dock when she arrives (84). Such moments are rudely interrupted at the start of the second part of the novel by the Japanese bombardment of Hawaii and the Philippines. As De la Rosa, who wrote this part during the War itself, chronicles the military campaigns of the Pacific, his reportage of macro-history tends to background the earlier focus on flirtatious banter and idyllic evocations of a racially harmonious world. The adventures of the protagonists do not disappear altogether, though. Max is wounded in an early battle—he is saved because the shrapnel is blocked from hitting his heart by the amulet given to him by the aged indigenous priestess—and is transported to Australia to recover (126-27). There, he is found by Rosy, who is now a Red Cross nurse; and when Max recovers, he is hired onto MacArthur’s staff. Since MacArthur proclaimed “I shall return” in Australia, Max is foreshadowed by association here as likewise eventually arriving anew and in triumph in the Philippines. Meanwhile, Harry ends up leading Filipino irregulars back in the archipelago. He is helped at times by Nena, such as when she provides key information leading to the successful assassination of a Japanese commander (137). At the end of the novel, allied United States and Filipino troops defeat the Japanese and the foursome, together again, marry soon after the atom bombs fall. They, presumably, live happily ever after.

The allegorical family of *Trust in Me* powers the plot even though its twinned components do not become family in a legal way until the last paragraph of the novel, when the double wedding is sanctified. In this sense, the novel builds continuously toward the creation of a symbolic family
for the Filipino future rather than chart continuously its horrific collapse. This is in marked contrast to what takes place in Balmori’s contemporaneous *The Birds of Fire*. Strikingly, the generation of Filipinos born before 1898 and therefore under Spanish rule, the same to which De la Rosa belongs, does not even seem to be relevant in *Trust in Me*. No characters of parental age or older play a substantive role in *Trust in Me*, excluding historical figures such as Quezon and MacArthur. The Philippines of *Trust in Me* is to be constructed by the young and hopeful with nary a look back even at such recent history as the pre-Commonwealth decades in which the United States governed the islands as an imperial holding. De la Rosa stresses the peacetime campaigns of RAMY to show that equality, particularly the version evinced by Filipino-American fraternity, is the wave of the future, and that their wartime campaigns struggle in the same moral cause against Japanese aggression.\(^7\)

The foursome are elites, of course, but neither because of inherited wealth in the traditional archipelagic fashion nor of pre-existing ties of blood or matrimony. On the contrary, they are close to political power despite not being politicians themselves. They are urban and hip and are charged with more or less creating the binational and planetary zeitgeist while personally and relationally embodying it. They are the most modern of global citizens who intend to spread their version of modernity across all borders. This will include via literal progeny, surely, though the consummation of the double marriage is safely relegated to the unwritten space after the wedding ceremony on the last page. Everything about RAMY bespeaks a fruitful future.

The implicit dismissal by De la Rosa of the older imperial history of Spain in the Philippines seems unexpected, given the language in which he chose to write the novel despite the several that he had at his disposal. It takes a certain act of will to compose in an imperial tongue nearly half a century after the empire in question collapsed, but essentially De la Rosa treats the first empire to occupy the archipelago as a dusty historical marker amid his fraternal and romantic embraces of the second. The United States is everywhere explicit in *Trust in Me*, from Harry and Rosy as main characters to the pivotal military battles now also memorialized in stone on the Washington Mall. Linguistically, the United States is ubiquitous too, for example via the incessant code-switching on the golf course such as the following:

> En el segundo tee, Nena, ya tranquil, *drove*ó tan perfectamente que su pelota voló ondeando, como una golondrina.
> 
> – Excelente! – exclamó Rosy.
> 
> – *Perfect!* – dijo Harry.
> 
> Lo hiciste admirablemente, Nena – agregó Max. (22)

[On the second tee, Nena, now tranquil, drove the ball so perfectly that it flew undulating like a swallow.]
“Excellent!” exclaimed Rosy.

“Perfect!” said Harry.

“You did admirably well, Nena,” added Max.

In this exchange, everybody understands everybody, whether Max is talking in Spanish or Harry is ejaculating in English or the reader is following the narrator in Spanglish: “draiveó” is a Hispanized spelling of an English word, a linguistic unison and union that complements symbolically a round of golf played on a modern Americanized course by ancient Spanish walls in the heart of the Philippines. Meanwhile, the very name “Rosy” suggests that of Rosie the Riveter, the archetypal embodiment of the contribution of United States women to the war effort. And most importantly, De la Rosa makes a move that Balmori never does: he transports the plot outside the Philippines to the United States. He achieves this by having Max travel to San Francisco aboard the China Clipper, a hydroplane on the first commercial transpacific flight in history. There is a Spirit of St. Louis feel to this jawdropping sequence, with De la Rosa extolling the “exitoso vuelo inaugural de un servicio de aviones, que establecía la vecindad, anulando la distancia entre América y Filipinas” [“successful inaugural flight of an airplane service that established a common neighborhood, annulling the distance between America and the Philippines”] (83). Once again, the United States joins the Philippines in a common future.

In fact, when Max is subsequently introduced by Rosy into her social circle in California, Filipino matters per se are left behind altogether as the framework of the novel shifts to the context of United States race relations in the pre-War period. De la Rosa is quite aware that light-skinned people in the United States do not necessarily behave in accord with the principles of RAMY. This recognition undermines any assumption that his devotion to the stated ideals of the United States blinds him entirely to sociopolitical realities on either side of the Pacific. In San Francisco, Max encounters various Americans who doubt he is equal to them due to his skin tone. Through a combination of handsomeness, charm, and the occasional feat of strength, he convinces all the racists otherwise. It is easy to smile grimly at the naivete of De la Rosa’s solutions for bigotry, but the fact that he tackles it as he does suggests that a lot more is going on in Trust in Me than some unthinking embrace of a romanticized colonial power. Swimming pools may not strike twenty-first century readers as political spaces, but when Max leaps into one in San Francisco and saves the pretty white daughter of a powerful national politician, the interracial taboos of the era are being roundly denounced at a symbolic level whatever the superficial silliness of the scene (92). De la Rosa does not hold up the United States as a colorblind ally in order to create a contrast with the ferocious racism of imperial Japan. When Max, flying to San Francisco, “creía ver la estatua de la Libertad, con su antorcha en alto” [“believed he saw the Statue of Liberty with her torch held
high”], he was heading to a place that, though “un eden” [“an Eden”], also would present him with “días de prueba” [“days of testing”] (101). A utopian image of the Statue of Liberty suspended mid-air over the Pacific and signaling a Garden ahead is complicated significantly by De la Rosa’s understanding that the gates of Eden in the United States did not automatically open for dark people.8

Another maneuver by De la Rosa that unsettles any quick conclusions about his apparent enthusiasm for the United States and its presumptive egalitarian partnership with the Philippines is how he repeatedly inverts symbolic relations of power between the two lands. Quite unexpectedly, given his rapt appreciation for the ongoing United States influence in the islands, his characters neither accept United States supremacy as natural nor ignore an asymmetrical political reality under the guise of equality. For example, Max, the Filipino, is accepted by all as the natural head of the RAMY foursome, not Harry the G.I.: “Ninguno propuso la nominacion de un leader, porque Harry, Rosy y Nena, virtualmente reconocían y se sometían al liderato de Max” [“No one proposed the nomination of a leader, because Harry, Rosy, and Nena virtually recognized and submitted themselves to the leadership of Max”] (44). Later, Rosy even tells Max, “eres genuino leader, porque todos te seguimos, espontáneamente” [“you are a genuine leader because we all follow you spontaneously”] (53). That a Filipina woman such as Nena might be deemed the natural leader may be too much to hope, but still, the consensus verdict that a Filipino civilian and not a United States soldier is the most innately qualified person to assume leadership of RAMY and its campaign for global harmony is significant.

In another notable moment of symbolic power inversion, Nena jumps into a river to rescue a fat United States Senator who has fallen overboard; he, energized by her good will, musters the forces to get up from the riverbed. Nena then congratulates him—“Vd. se levantó por sí mismo” [“You stood up by yourself”]—as everyone chuckles, but this scene is allegorically not light at all. First, it foreshadows the later incident in the California swimming pool when Max saves the white girl with the powerful father from drowning. Second, it stands as an ironic commentary on the Commonwealth relationship that the corpulent Senator had come to the Philippines recognize. Here it is the United States that figures out how to stand on its own, inspired by the good graces of the Philippines, rather than vice versa. Nothing of this sort ever occurs in Balmori’s novel.

In corollary moves within RAMY, Harry and Rosy willingly allow themselves to be Filipinized even more than Max and Nena open themselves to Americanizations. Although Harry does end up leading Filipino guerrillas during the War, when doing so he often goes native by operating according to longstanding military techniques of the rural Igorot people who instruct him. Rosy, for her part, is routinely depicted as becoming as Filipina as Nena, if not more so. At a shrine to Andrés Bonifacio, the martyred early leader of the Filipino revolution against Spain, “Rosy
y Nena depositaron, piadosamente al pie del monumento sus collares de sampaguita, blanca y fragante, flor nacional” [“Rosy and Nena piously deposited at the foot of the monument their rings of sampaguitas, white and fragrant, the national flower”] (53). It is safe to say that when she first arrived in the Philippines, Rosy had no idea who Bonifacio was; now, she pays him homage. The sampaguita always stands in Filipino literature for national identity, its whiteness for innocence and purity. It is therefore extremely suggestive of a metamorphosis in national profile when later “Max y Nena mismos pusieron en el cuello de Rosy los collares de sampaguita que traían para ella” [“Max and Nena themselves put around Rosy’s neck the rings of sampaguitas that they brought for her”] (80). With these white flowers synonymous in the tradition with both Filipina women and the Philippines itself (or, rather, herself), the frequent associations throughout Trust in Me of Rosy with sampaguitas betoken a Filipinization of her that upends any facile notion of a novel in which Filipinos act as if their relationship with the United States is one of assimilation and unqualified acceptance. Max goes so far as to say of Rosy to Nena, “es más filipina que tú” [“she is more Filipina than you”] (79).

With regard to formal Filipino politics during the War, De la Rosa dismisses the Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere—the shell created by Japan intended to cover its expansion as a shared continental progress—as “propaganda” (110). And he refers sarcastically to the Philippine Republic, the purportedly independent state set up by Japan, as “una panacea, la píldora dorada” [“a panacea, the golden pill”] (132). Furthermore, when a Japanese ruler announces the creation of the Philippine Republic in Luneta (now Rizal) Park, the symbolic center of the archipelago, De la Rosa even switches momentarily into Tagalog, followed by a parenthetical translation into Spanish, to show how Filipinos in attendance used their own language to jeer among themselves at the Japanese pronouncement. De la Rosa also weaves explicitly political sentiments into the pre-War scenes that open the novel, such as when the pros and cons of the independence debate are raised at the Army and Navy Club in Manila (“punto de cita de la crema social americana” [“meeting place of the American social crème”]) soon after the Inaugural Ball of Quezon (15). Featured here are opinions on the decolonization by businessmen and civil and military officials from the United States who claim understanding of the Philippines. Harry, entering the discussion, asserts that the independent Philippines will do fine but that, on the off chance a foreign country tries to take advantage of the unprepared military of the new nation, he himself will volunteer to defend the islands (16-17).

De la Rosa on occasion does take a long view of history. For instance, he selects as seminal a moment of the first age of globalization that is other than 1492: the battle on Mactan Island in 1521 in the central Philippines when Magellan, the first European to reach the archipelago, fell to the forces of a local king named Lapu Lapu. When Max is wounded by the Japanese, he is saved
fortuitously by the amulet of the indigenous priestess, but logistically by a hospital ship dubbed, deliberately, the Mactan (126). And when MacArthur returns to the islands in realization of his monomaniacal pledge, he does so in the wake of 1521, “entrando por la misma ruta que el hado llevara al gran navegante Magallanes a los mares interiores de Filipinas” [“entering via the same route that fate had carried the great navigator Magellan to the interior seas of the Philippines”] (152). This complicated but familiar embrace by a Filipino writer of both the inaugural Iberian invader and the indigenous resistance to him, that is, of Magellan and Mactan as jointly heroic and foundational markers, appears in another unknown Filipino text in Spanish of the late 1930s and early 1940s, Félix Gerardo’s unpublished collection of short fiction titled Justicia social y otros cuentos [Social Justice and Other Stories].

Despite such compelling dynamics in the novel, De la Rosa barely appears in the main overviews of Filipino literature in Spanish. Luis Mariñas, in La literatura filipina en castellano [Filipino Literature in Spanish], mentions Trust in Me in passing (77). And Lourdes Castrillo Brillantes notes in 81 Years of Premio Zóbel that The Creation was one of nine entries for a 1961 award for the best Filipino literature in Spanish (218). It is reasonable to assume that De la Rosa might have submitted Trust in Me for a Zóbel had the contest not been suspended from 1942 to 1952 due to World War II and its consequences. Archival sleuthing may turn up acknowledgments of Trust in Me in high society periodicals right after its completion in 1946. At that point, however, Manila lay in ruins and the surviving local elites were busy positioning themselves in order to cement their status as the archipelago transitioned to an independent nation. Reading, or at least commenting on novels, may not have had a high profile amid the grasping for spoils left by the dead. The copyright date of Trust in Me is 1946 but the prologue by Manuel C. Briones is dated December 1950, so the manuscript took at least four years to see print—no actual publication date is given—but still, it is hard to imagine that the (apparently self-published) text was commercially distributed and widely commented even at that point. Today, only a handful of libraries are known to have a copy of Trust in Me.10

None of this anonymity means the novel is unimportant either nationally or internationally. First, the mere existence of Trust in Me doubles the number of known Filipino novels in Spanish written during World War II. This belies the statement repeated for at least two generations of academics that Balmori’s The Birds of Fire was the only such text. In the longer chronological context, Trust in Me also diversifies substantially the overall tradition of Filipino literature in Spanish that most Filipinos, and most scholars outside the archipelago (that is, those few who are even aware of the phenomenon), surely assume began and ended, more or less, with the poems and prose of Rizal some six to seven decades earlier. The project of analyzing Filipino literature produced in all languages used in the islands during the War would be bereft without substantive consideration of Trust in Me.
Second, it may not be at all true that the novel was unnoticed by the Filipino upper class of the post-War period. The importance of De la Rosa as a high-ranking public official implies that whatever readership did exist for *Trust in Me* was a powerful one. The book may not have circulated among many people, given the decimated population of Spanish-speaking Filipinos after the War, but those who did obtain a copy of *Trust in Me* were doubtlessly often from the same matrix of elites as De la Rosa. The prologuist Briones, for instance, began his career as an editor of Spanish-language newspapers in the central Philippine island of Cebu, then became a lawyer who rose to extremely high national political posts. After many years serving in the House of Representatives, adds the website of the Senate of the Philippines, “Briones was also member of the Philippine Independence mission to the United States in 1930. From 1931 to 1935, he served as senator. He was a delegate to the Constitutional Convention in 1934, and he was one of the seven that composed the Committee of Wise Men, which drafted the Philippine Constitution. The Nacionalista party mad [sic] him vice-presidential standard-bearer in 1949, but he lost. In 1951, he was again elected to the Senate and he was subsequently chosen Senate President Pro Tempore up to 1957.” With a figure such as Briones authorizing the novel as its prologuist, De la Rosa would seem to be pitching by proxy his production to peer members of their common socioeconomic stratum. Anyone interested in the weltanschauung of the governing elite of Filipino society throughout the critical period stretching from the pre-Commonwealth years through the Japanese occupation to the early aftermath of national independence therefore might find in *Trust in Me* an artifact of singular revelations.

Another indication of an extremely elite context for the intended reception of *Trust in Me* is the handwritten dedication that is inked onto the title page of one of the extant copies of the novel. The signatory remains to be deciphered but the dedication itself is clear: “A Doña Adelina Gurrea, filipina pulcra e intelectual, que honra a su país, dedico este regalo, con la autorización del autor. Madrid, a 12 de Junio de 1952” [“To the esteemed Adelina Gurrea, beautiful and intellectual Filipina who honors her country, I dedicate this gift with the authorization of the author. Madrid, June 12, 1952”]. Gurrea is probably the most famous hispanophone Filipina author of the twentieth century but spent almost the entirety of her adult life in Spain and wrote from there. The dedication therefore suggests the social tightness of prestigious Filipinos despite the distances involved, in this case, between Spain and the Philippines. The signatory was undoubtedly also a member of that class who personally carried a copy of *Trust in Me* with him to Spain at the behest of De la Rosa. If the novel had been sent by mail, De la Rosa would have had no need of an intermediary. Moreover, since the prologue by Briones is datelined December 1950, *Trust in Me* was in all likelihood published in 1951 or early 1952. Either way, the date of the dedication reveals that one of the first things that De la Rosa did was ensure that a copy was hand-delivered to a fellow writer from the...
Philippines who lived on the other side of the world. And in some sense, he stands today as the missing third of the three leading Filipino authors of creative prose who wrote during the time of the War in the Philippines, for Gurrea in Spain published her *Cuentos de Juana* [*Short Stories of Juana*] in 1943. That text and Balmori’s *The Birds of Fire* were chosen by the Cervantes Institute of Manila to inaugurate a new series of publications in 2010 titled *Clásicos Hispano-Filipinos* [*Hispanic-Filipino Classics*].

Yet it would be a misstep to conceive of *Trust in Me* solely in national terms, or in the national terms of one class. After all, the novel itself takes an innately internationalized approach to the conflict that was the most globalized in all of human history. And De la Rosa, notwithstanding his high position and elite contacts, was at the same time anything but a national writer given his fluid and complicated positionalities. He was an individual who spent his youth as a subject of one empire and much of his adulthood as a subject of another. Under the Commonwealth his colonized status altered somewhat, but then with the Japanese occupation he became a subject of a third empire. Eventually with independence he became a postcolonial author of a new nation, but *Trust in Me* was all but finished by that point. And of course, as the World War II monument on the Washington Mall implicitly acknowledges, that formal independence took place on the Fourth of July. Not all independences would appear to be created equal.

Whatever future studies are undertaken on De la Rosa, investigators might keep in mind that whenever the subject is modern Filipino literature, the subject is also modern United States literature. This is the case literally with *Trust in Me*, a text finished in the last moments of the pre-independent Philippines, when the United States still held ultimate power over the archipelago in legal as well as realpolitik senses. The consideration of Carlos Bulosan within Asian American studies, and American Studies more broadly, is incomplete without the apposition of his contemporary quasi-national De la Rosa. He too offers a transgeographic concept of America that, in its own way, considers the fraternity of culturally different people as the fundamental definitive at stake. And viewing *Trust in Me* as American does not mean that it is not Filipino but that the meaning of “Filipino” can encompass that of “American.” Such a vantage allows for important inversions of understanding, if not hard power. United States culture, in turn, is deepened and complicated when recognized as including literature produced in its colonies by the people who live there.

World War II still is fought every day, the battles having shifted to classrooms and to myriad ongoing global algorithms of power. De la Rosa speaks to all the computations at hand. The United States continues to be the dominant political, cultural, and economic power in the Philippines. Its military continues to run operations in the archipelago, with or without the consent of Filipinos, and its mass culture continues to penetrate deeply every level of Filipino society. Meanwhile, the
descendants of the old elite continue to rule, with the President of the Philippines in 2012 no less than the grandson (on the paternal side) of a Cabinet member of the puppet Philippine Republic of 1943 and (on the maternal side) of one of the richest sugar barons in the archipelago, not to mention son of another President. America may or may not be in the heart, depending on how one reads that phrase, but America is definitely still in the archipelago and América certainly was. Studying unread Filipino (American) novels in Spanish may seem like a dusty archival exercise, but there is rarely anything more relevant than the workings of writers who witnessed the wrack of the world before.
NOTES

1. The lodge was called “Isarog” after a mountain of that name in Camarines; “Isarog” means “The only beloved” (Kalaw 214). In 1917, the Filipino and United States Masonic lodges in the Philippines united as one entity, which is why De la Rosa must have co-founded the Filipino lodge in Camarines before then.

2. Roosevelt too seems to have conceived of the Philippines as de facto American from 1898 onward. The passage above is immediately followed by “Their doctrines, if carried out, would make it incumbent upon us to leave the Apaches of Arizona to work out their own salvation, and to decline to interfere in a single Indian reservation. Their doctrines condemn your forefathers and mine for ever having settled in these United States” (188). In effect, Roosevelt accepts that the United States colonization of Filipinos is an extension of the United States colonization of Apaches. He rejects not the charge but the assumption that it is negative.

3. Golay notes that “MacArthur had used his power and prestige while in the Philippines in 1945 to restore the collaboration-tainted Quezonista faction to power and promote Roxas as Quezon’s successor” (480). He adds of the independence ceremonies on July 4, 1946: “It was appropriate that the American architects of the transformation of the colonial relationship to a ‘special relationship’ of Philippine dependence on the United States were gathered for the birth of the new nation. There was MacArthur, who had used his brief reign in the Philippines to ensure that the Quezonistas and the economic elite behind them would continue to monopolize power in the Republic” (483). Karnow writes that MacArthur “aborted change in the Philippines by reinstalling the traditional dynasties, whose primary aim was to protect their vested interests” (324).

4. RAMY is an anagram of the first letters of the names of Rosy and Max and the last letters of the names of Nena and Harry.

5. At the time, the narrator characterizes the charm as an “ídolo” [sic] [“idol”] (74). Later it is referred to as an “amuleto” [“amulet”] (127).

6. The lone footnote of Trust in Me appears right after a passage on the bombing of Pearl Harbor and reads, “Escrito durante la guerra” [“Written during the war”] (105).

7. There may be undertones here of a continuing active adherence to Masonic principles of international brotherhood. As abovementioned, De la Rosa in his younger days co-founded a Masonic lodge in his home province. In 1917, the Filipino and United States lodges in the Philippines combined in what Kalaw terms “the fusion” (passim). The first Deputy Grand Master of the joined lodges was none other than Manuel Quezon, the future President of the Commonwealth; he become the Grand Master of the post-fusion lodges in 1918 (it seems that Filipinos and Americans alternated the top position in that era) (250). In 1920, Kalaw described the merger in terms that resonate strongly in Trust in Me, written a generation later: “The fusion of Filipino and American lodges, under the jurisdiction of the Grand Lodge of the Philippine Islands, was an event joyfully celebrated by everybody ... It established union and harmony, not only between Americans and Filipinos, but also between Americans, Filipinos and foreigners” (204).

8. De la Rosa’s stance on racial equality for African Americans, however, is ambiguous. In an early conversation about relations among foreigners and locals in the Philippines and how everyone should blend socially, Harry reminds Rosy that “existe esa barrera entre blancos y negros en América” [“that barrier exists
between whites and blacks in America”] (12). She replies that a white American “se tiene a orgullo poseer sangre india” [“is proud of possessing Indian blood”] and Harry points out, “Los indios no son negros” [“The Indians are not blacks”] (12). The curious reply by Rosy is “Tampoco los filipinos” [“Nor are the Filipinos”] and the conversation ends abruptly (12). A noncharitable reading of this exchange might infer that black people, in the view of De la Rosa, occupy a lower rung on the race ladder than white people, Filipinos, and American Indians, and as such do not merit the same types of relationships.

9. Thus the very first book of Filipino literature in Spanish, an 1880 volume of poetry by Pedro Paterno, was titled *Sampaguitas*.

10. WorldCat, the global library catalog, inaccurately gives the author of *Trust in Me* as “Manuel de la Rosa.” A search under “Mariano de la Rosa” for the novel therefore yields no results.

11. Mariñas says the novel was published in 1950 but if so, the turnaround from the prologue in December of that year by Briones to the publication of the entire manuscript would have been extraordinarily quick (77).

12. The current President is Benigno Aquino III. His paternal grandfather of the same name collaborated with the Japanese; his father of the same name led the opposition to the dictator Ferdinand Marcos and was assassinated as a result; his mother was Corazon Aquino, who became President after Marcos was overthrown and whose purported policies of redistribution made little headway, in part because of the landed wealth of her own family in the sugar sector of the economy.
Lifshey
America is in the Archipelago

WORKS CITED


