

**Forum Kritika:** Philippine Literature in Spanish  
**GODS, MONSTERS, HEROES, AND  
TRICKSTERS IN ADELINA GURREA'S  
CUENTOS DE JUANA<sup>1</sup>**

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**Abstract**

Gurrea's *Cuentos de Juana* (*Juana's Tales*) may be read as a palimpsest of the whole of Philippine history, with its indigenous system of thought and knowledge refusing to be erased or overwritten but instead, actively engaging with its colonial history. Colonialism did not so much mean the loss of the people's teleological world as its dispersion into the Spanish world of significations. Moreover, as a unit of Philippine literary history, *Cuentos* bridges the gap between Philippine indigenous cosmology (now called "folklore" or even "superstition") and modern narrative traditions. It thus confirms the continuity of this history, despite the interruptions wrought by imperialist invasions by Spain and the United States and their subsequent hegemonic rule.

**Keywords**

Local history, postcolonial literature, mythology, translation studies, trickster tales, regional writing

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**ADELINA GURREA WAS A MAVERICK**, even among Filipino writers who, writing in Spanish in the 20th century, were themselves considered an oddity in Philippine literary history. In Philippine literary histories, when Gurrea is mentioned at all, it is as a poet, having won the premier Zobel award in 1956 (*Writing* 7), but she has been largely overlooked by Philippine literary critics and historians as an author of fiction.<sup>2</sup> The publication in 2009 of Beatriz Álvarez Tardío's two-volume project, *Cuentos de Juana (Juana's Tales)* and *Writing Athwart: Adelina Gurrea's Life and Works*, may make her more accessible now to a reading public. However, Álvarez Tardío's edition of Gurrea's short story collection, *Cuentos de Juana*, remains in Spanish and is therefore restricted only to those able to read that language. This excludes most Filipinos, whom these stories are about. *Writing Athwart*, which is Álvarez Tardío's anthology of Gurrea's selected works in English translation, includes only one story from *Cuentos*.

Perhaps the reason for Gurrea's continued exclusion from the canon of Philippine fiction is because she is four times removed from it by virtue of her place of residence (Madrid), language (Spanish), her fictive setting (an obscure Visayan town), and her gender. As such, one might expect that Gurrea, writing and publishing in her home country of Spain about life in colonial Philippines as a colonizer's daughter, would have produced colonialist fiction, that is, fiction written in the interests and with the bias of the colonizer, rather than those of the colonized. However, Gurrea is not to be so easily pinned down to this category, either.

Gurrea's *Cuentos de Juana* may be read as a palimpsest of the whole of Philippine history, with its indigenous system of thought and knowledge refusing to be erased or overwritten but instead, actively engaging with its colonial history. Moreover, as a unit of Philippine literary history, *Cuentos* bridges the gap between Philippine indigenous cosmology (now called "folklore" or even "superstition") and modern narrative traditions (and the multifarious sub-traditions in between) and confirms the continuity of this history, despite the various interruptions wrought by imperialist invasions by Spain and the United States and their subsequent hegemonic rule.

The "duplicitous tropes" of the "manichean allegory"—which interpret racial difference as "moral and even metaphysical difference," and whose "allegorical extensions dominate every facet of imperialist mentality" (JanMohamed 80)—do not apply to Gurrea. Although she may present her characters as being in typical states of ambivalence—whether peninsular, creole, or even colonized native—because they are "genuinely and innocently confused" (JanMohamed 79), her larger narrative perspective demonstrates an authorial awareness not possessed by her characters, especially the Spanish ones, whose limitations and self-contradictions she subjects to interrogation. This is how she exposes and analyses the "domination, manipulation, exploitation and disenfranchisement" (JanMohamed 78) of the native by the Spanish elite, who themselves are differentiated by their positions of peninsular superiority and creole inferiority.

To go by Fredric Jameson's dictum, "Always historicize!" (1981), one may account for the uniqueness of Gurrea's stories, collected in her book, *Cuentos de Juana*, by beginning with the unusual temporal and geographical circumstances of her birth and life. However, because of the dearth of source materials on her, no account of these has as yet been made. Álvarez Tardío (*Writing* 4) describes the difficulty of finding sufficient, let alone reliable, data on her subject. Her biography of Gurrea, especially regarding the first phase of the latter's life spent on the Philippine island of Negros, is sketchy at best. Of Gurrea's early life, only the bare facts of her birth place and date, and her Spanish peninsular elders' origins and occupations have so far been discovered. Much of Álvarez Tardío's sketch has had to focus more on Gurrea's adult life spent in Manila and Spain. Therefore, by way of filling in the historical, geographical and biographical lacunae, here are the data specific to Gurrea's birthplace and childhood home, the Philippine island of Negros.

## Historical Context

Adelina Gurrea was born in the shadow of Kanlaon Volcano, at the Gurrea hacienda in La Carlota, Negros Island (Fig. 1), Central Philippines, on 26 September 1896 (*Writing* 4). This was just a month after "the cry of Biak-na-Bato," now known historically as the official launch of the Philippine revolution. Biak na Bato, however, is in Bulacan, a Tagalog province in Luzon, which is an island to the far north of Negros; hence, this cry initiated what was at the time called merely the "Tagalog revolt." In Negros, the plantation owners—most of them either Spanish peninsulars and creoles—demonstrated their disapproval of the revolt by circulating manifestos proclaiming their allegiance to Spain and by raising "battalions of volunteers" to defend the island against the revolutionaries. By 1898, however, the Negros sugar planters would act in solidarity with the revolutionary government already established in Luzon and across the archipelago, including Negros's sister island of Panay, which lies just across the Strait of Guimaras. These Negros revolutionary leaders consisted of native Filipinos, Chinese-Filipino mestizos, and third-generation Spanish creoles, with names like Lacson, Araneta, Golez, Locsin, Severino, Lopez, Lizares, Diaz, Montilla, and Guanzon (Cuesta 438-45).

It was on 25 January 1571 that *conquistador* Miguel Lopez de Legaspi had first distributed the island among seventeen encomenderos. Since then, throughout the Spanish colonial period, pockets of revolt in Negros occurred intermittently, escalating in the 1880s, primarily because of the displacement of the native inhabitants of the island by the expansion of sugar plantations, which had started in the 1840s. Displaced natives fled to the foothills of Kanlaon Volcano and became *tulisanes* ("bandits, robbers and pillagers"); or they were *pulahanes* ("cult followers of native religious priests" called *babaylanes*) who also survived by banditry. By 1885, the activities of these bandits and cult movements began to take on patriotic

overtones. The demand was for social justice; the central issue, land ownership (Cuesta 432).



Figure 1



The acquisition and cultivation of vast tracts of land for the planting of sugar had begun in Negros in 1845, with the partnership of two Europeans, the Frenchman Yves St. Germain Gaston and the Spanish peninsular Agustin Montilla (Varona 31). A third pioneer was Eusebio Ruiz de Luzuriaga (Cuesta 366); and a fourth appears in the records merely as “Tía Sipa” (Echaz 20) but was known to be Josefa Río, the native widow of a Spanish *hacendero* (Varona 47).

In the next half century, Negros would continually attract Spanish peninsulars for its extremely fertile, volcanic soil, ideal for sugar cultivation, because of Kanlaon Volcano, which stood in the middle of the island. Several small rivers crisscrossing the island also provided for a natural irrigation system for the cane fields, and hydraulic power for the sugar mills. From thereon until the end of the Spanish period, a thousand haciendas and settlements would be established in western Negros, always along the Negros coast, away from native *remontados* (“mountain bandits”) (Cuesta 389-95).

Because it was in the interiors, La Carlota, Adelina’s birthplace, was the exception. It was originally named Barrio Simancas, after a town in the province of Valladolid, Spain, because it was under the jurisdiction of the town of Valladolid, Negros. In 1869, the Spanish governor of Negros, Don Manuel Valdivieso Morquecho, declared it an independent municipality and renamed it La Carlota (Cuesta 215; note 52; 186).

These two factors—that La Carlota was originally part of Valladolid, Negros, and that it was uniquely located in the interiors rather than on the Negros coastline—are crucial to the reader’s understanding of the geographical details of setting and plot conflicts of Gurrea’s stories. La Carlota, nestled in the foothills of Kanlaon Volcano, was (and still is) believed to be in close proximity to the mountain forests’ spirit guardians (called *encantos* in Spanish, *tamao* in Hiligaynon) (Magos 54-55). It was also, in actual fact, vulnerable to the *remontados* and *vagamundos* who used its forests as their hideout (Corpus 168).

With the opening of the Suez Canal in 1869, the sea voyage between Spain and the Philippines was considerably and conveniently shortened (Corpus 257); Spanish colonization of La Carlota and the concomitant prosperity for Spanish and creole settlers steadily grew. By the mid-1870s, twenty such settlers had cleared its forests and established haciendas. In 1874, the parish priests of the neighboring towns of Valladolid and San Enrique bewailed La Carlota’s lack of a church and its own priest for the “10,000 souls living in the town and scattered around the haciendas” (Cuesta 187). Their provincial head complained to the bishop, implicating the *hacenderos*, who bore the responsibility for the spiritual well-being of the native population: “All these five years, despite many exhortations, we have not been able to make the people of La Carlota build their own church although they have been admonished repeatedly to do it. . . . I cannot see why my religious, aside from other problems, should have to put up with the lack of proper lodging . . .” Such neglect,

the provincial head goes on to lament, can only be because of the “laziness of the beneficiaries” and not poverty (Cuesta 187).

Nevertheless, from a mere backwater village drawing bitter denunciations from the bishop, La Carlota, within ten years of its founding, grew in wealth and sophistication to rival the northern town of Silay, the hacienda site of the pioneering Frenchman Yves St. Germain Gaston and which prided itself in its epithet, the “Paris of Negros”: “The spectacular development of the haciendas in La Carlota was the most important achievement of these years. In 1870, La Carlota was still a new town and probably had no haciendas” (Cuesta 375). Ten years later (1880), it was already being compared to Silay, not only in sugar production (Cuesta 376) but also “in vitality and importance” (Varona 71).

## Adelina’s Paternal Line: The Gurreas

Adelina’s grandfather, Teodoro Gurrea, contributed in no mean way to La Carlota’s “spectacular development.” A peninsular hacendero, he promptly responded to the religious provincial’s plea for active cooperation by turning over “a beautiful house near the church where he [the parish priest] can live with all the necessary comforts and facilities” (Cuesta 187). Fray Andres Torres arrived soon after to become La Carlota’s first parish priest. He would build a church of stone and mortar, with a roof of galvanized iron (Echaz 28) and would remain its parish priest until just before the end of Spanish rule in 1898 (Cuesta 187). Gurrea, therefore, wittingly or unwittingly, ensured that his grandchildren, among them Adelina, who was to be born twenty years later, would be baptized by La Carlota’s first parish priest.

Originally from Navarra, Spain, Teodoro Gurrea had arrived in the Philippines on military assignment. He married a Tagalog mestiza (*Writing* 4), and moved to Negros to establish an hacienda in La Carlota. Gurrea was a typical hacendero in that “. . . the men who created and developed the sugar industry in Negros were many of them former government employees or former army officers who had come to Negros in the hope of enriching themselves easily and fast” (Cuesta 400).

Despite his determination to carve his own fiefdom on this Philippine island, Teodoro Gurrea also submitted himself to the laws and policies of the Spanish peninsular government. He was one of the first hacenderos to submit to the land registration system, which was established by the Ministry of Colonies in the late 1870s. To protect government lands and the forests, which were fast being depleted, landowners were now being required to register and obtain titles to their lands. Understandably, they were slow to comply with this tedious bureaucratic process and, in fact, lodged protests and petitions against it. In 1878, however, Gurrea purchased, and undertook the documentation process in Bacolod City to obtain titles to, an additional 596 hectares of land in La Carlota, for about one peso per hectare (Cuesta 378-79).

The Gurrea patriarch seems to have passed on his zealousness of purpose to at least one son, Carlos Gurrea, who would be Adelina's father. In 1896, a few months short of Adelina's birth, Carlos was appointed director of the *Círculo de Agricultores*, a mutual credit society intended to protect hacenderos from "usurious practices of moneylenders and underpricing by merchants" (Cuesta 405). It is not surprising, then, that in his account of 19th-century hacienda life in Negros (1894), Robustiano Echauz, who had been Judge of the Court of First Instance in Bacolod from 1881-85, included the Gurreas in a list of pioneers of La Carlota deserving of "love and respect."<sup>3</sup>

## Adelina's Maternal Line: The Monasterios

Adelina's maternal line, named Monasterio, arrived from Zamora, Spain, a full thirty years or more after the first Gurrea in the Philippines. Adelina's uncle, Agustin Monasterio, was a medical doctor who might have come to Negros in or about 1889, the year he is recorded to have been appointed by the Spanish insular government as a "titular physician." Among his many duties was to provide free medical services to prison inmates and to the poor. Dr. Monasterio is listed merely as "interim" and did not last a year in this position, the reason probably being the low annual salary of 1,000 pesos, which "did not allow them to maintain the level that their social origins and their profession jointly required of them" (Cuesta 283; note 154; 268).

In 1890, Dr. Monasterio opened his own private clinic in Valladolid (Cuesta 268), the town that originally had jurisdiction over La Carlota but was now a neighboring town. Valladolid would be the setting for Adelina's first story, "La Doncella que Vivió Tres Vidas" "The Maid Who Lived Three Lives," in *Cuentos de Juana*.

There were only three other doctors to open their clinics in western Negros, and these in the safer towns north of the island's capital, Bacolod City: Silay, Talisay, and Saravia. The southern towns, as will be seen in Gurrea's stories, were more dangerous because these were along the mountain range, in the center of which was Kanlaon Volcano. From any of these hills and mountains, *tulisanes* and *pulahanes* would descend to rob and pillage. "The haciendas and retail stores of the Chinese were the favorite victims of the bandits, who stole *palay* and carabaos and who kidnapped and murdered" (Cuesta 432).

Nevertheless, Monasterio was apparently optimistic about what the future held for him in the Philippines, because, in 1890, he persuaded his mother and two sisters to move from Spain to join him in Valladolid, Negros. One of these two sisters was Ramona Monasterio y Pozo, who would meet and marry Carlos Gurrea of La Carlota and would become Adelina's mother in 1896 (Writing, 4). Hence, on her mother's side, Adelina was a first-generation creole, while on her father's side, she was a third-generation one (the mestizo aspect of her mestiza-Tagalog

grandmother having been considerably diluted by the marriage of her male elders to full-blooded Europeans).

Monasterio married Doña Paz Koch, whose maternal grandfather, Don Agustin Montilla (Genova 57), was one of the three founding fathers of the Negros sugar industry and, perhaps fortunately for him, his namesake. Her paternal grandfather was a Prussian naturalist, Hugo Koch (Loney 106), who had founded the town of Valladolid between 1849 and 1851, and brought in migrant laborers from Antique in Panay island, notwithstanding its being “in the center of a solitary and frightful desert” (Cuesta 255; 277, note 91). Hence, Adelina Gurra was of the Negros creole elite, despite her first-generation elders’ humble origins in their native Spain.

Initially, the lands that the peninsulars cleared and transformed into haciendas were uninhabited. But as towns began to sprout, usually in the vicinity of an hacienda, and as a result of the church and colonial government’s *reducción* (“re-settlement policy”), the lowlands began to have more natives claiming ownership, both as residents and small farmers. Nevertheless, these natives could be easily evicted because they had no land titles. In fact, some parish priests did accuse their own landowning Spanish compatriots of being “land grabbers,” if the lands appropriated were already inhabited by natives. The taking of natives’ farm land, these priests continually warned, would turn them overnight from small landowners into lessees and tenants or—even more dire—mountain bandits (Cuesta 430).

Agustin Monasterio himself was one Spanish peninsular who would be denounced as a “land grabber.” Says the parish priest of the area (Cuesta 462, note 9): “This barrio has been abandoned by the natives from the time that D. Agustin Monasterio appropriated its lands, leaving only the cemeteries.” Furthermore, “. . . when Negros already had a registry of property, civil guard, forest rangers, etc., D. Agustin Monasterio was able to set up his own hacienda in the southwestern part of Negros, without looking too closely as to whether the lands chosen by him already belonged to others” (Cuesta 430).

There were similar denunciations made by other parish priests of such “land takeovers,” for example: “The greater part of the lands of this parish belong to four rich men [one of them being Agustin Monasterio] who have stolen them and hold them either without cultivating them or by leasing them to tenants, who pay them one-half of the harvest” (Cuesta 462, note 9).

Why Monasterio would be singled out as a “land grabber” when previous Spaniards— peninsulars and insulars alike—had just as unceremoniously taken land for themselves, was probably because he was a Johnny-come-lately in the Negros sugar industry. Fertile land along the island’s coast, which was a safe distance from the tulisanes of Mt. Kanlaon, had already been developed into haciendas by peninsulars who had preceded Monasterio by half a century. If Monasterio were to establish an hacienda of a size equal to those of his predecessors, he needed to find virgin forests that he could clear and claim his own. These would have to be in that part of Negros as yet uninhabited by Spaniards, farther south of Valladolid and La



Carlota, all the way round the bend that made up the heel of the boot-shaped island that was Negros.

But find those forests he did. In a letter to the editor of *El Porvenir de Bisayas* (dated 25 April 1896), Monasterio describes how, in May 1894, he took a *baroto* (“native canoe”) and embarked on a journey toward this European’s “no-man’s land.” Besides the standard explorers’ provisions, he also brought with him some books, proof of an intellectual propensity that Adelina would perhaps inherit. After twelve days of natural disasters and perilous encounters with hostile natives, Monasterio finally found the place that fulfilled the conditions he required: *extensión grande de terreno, que fuera bueno éste, próximo á la playa, y amplitud de cogonales ó bosque de fácil tala* (“a large tract of land, how good it was, near the coast, and vast cogon fields and forests easy to clear”)<sup>4</sup>

This edenic wilderness he would clear of its trees to replace them with sugarcane, rid it of its “ungovernable, old inhabitants” to replace them with migrant workers from Panay, and call it Hacienda Asia (Genova 209). Within three months of his discovery of the area, he had settled his family there and organized it into a plaza complex, complete with a chapel, thanks to *la piedad de la virtuosa familia Monasterio* (“the piety of the virtuous Monasterio family”) (Genova 205). By February 1896, two years after he founded Hacienda Asia, Monasterio was running an advertisement in *El Porvenir de Bisayas* to recruit workers for his hacienda, offering, besides the standard wages and free boat fare, other enticements, such as a free school and a cock pit for the workers’ Sunday recreation.

At least once, Hacienda Asia would be raided by the tulisanes. It happened on a day that Monasterio was away from the hacienda, leaving only his wife Doña Paz to fend them off. This was what prompted him to write the lengthy letter to the editor of the newspaper, *El Porvenir de Bisayas*, urging the Ministry of Colonies to station at least a dozen of the *guardia civil* in the area, for whom he promised to build comfortable quarters. He would also earn, as Monasterio himself would wryly admit, the epithet of *mapintas Cachila* (“cruel Castille”).

## Adelina Gurrea’s Literary Sources and Influences

These were the typical circumstances in which haciendas sprung and thrived, and to which Adelina, who was to be named María Adelaida Gurrea Monasterio, would be born in 1896. These she would mine for her gothic stories of monsters, murder, and mayhem. Her first language was Spanish; her second, Hiligaynon, which was the local language of Negros. The raw material of her short stories, set in the plantation village of La Carlota and its neighboring town of Valladolid, was derived from the native folk life of Negros, presumably recounted to her by her *yaya*, or “nanny.”

Having been born two years short of the end of Spanish rule, Adelina was educated in the American educational system, which was instrumental in

determining the literary sources and influences of that generation's would-be writers. Professor Dean S. Fansler of the University of the Philippines is often cited in histories of the Philippine short story for having encouraged his students to collect and re-tell Philippine folk tales, which he compiled in *Filipino Popular Tales* (1921). Student contributors to this anthology went on to establish distinguished reputations as short story writers and critics in both English and Spanish. First-generation fiction writers of the American colonial period tried their hand first at the gothic short story. Before Jose Garcia Villa wrote his better known realistic short story "Footnote to Youth," he wrote "The Fence," which was in the style of Edgar Allan Poe and Nathaniel Hawthorne.

Of direct relevance to Adelina in the school curriculum would have been the gothic stories of Poe, Hawthorne, and Washington Irving, who would provide fictive structure, tone, and style to Filipino writers wanting to use local legends, folk tales, and tales of supernatural horror for their raw material. On the other hand, 19th-century Spanish *costumbrismo* would provide Adelina with the stylistic devices and descriptive technique to locate her folkloric material in the specificities of her time and place. Hence, when Adelina moved with her family from Negros to Spain in 1921 to live there permanently (*Writing*, 5),<sup>5</sup> she was already equipped with her trove of local knowledge and fictive techniques, both Fil-Hispanic and Fil-American, that she would fuse into her own original short stories. These she would publish in Madrid as *Cuentos de Juana* in 1943.

## Adelina Gurrea's *Cuentos de Juana* in the Philippine Critical Tradition

The Augustinian Recollect priest, Angel Martinez Cuesta, who has written what is to date the most detailed, reliable, and comprehensive history of Negros, was probably the first reader in the Philippines to take notice of Adelina Gurrea's *Cuentos*, although he mentions it merely in an endnote (216, note 75). Describing it as a "precious booklet," he valued it more as a historical and sociological tract, "highly useful for the understanding of the lower classes of Negros. The author, niece of Teodoro Gurrea [Junior], one of the first plantation owners of La Carlota, knew the mentality of the day laborers." Cuesta adds that, like another book by Robustiano Echaz on 19th-century Negros, it is a "good example of the vitality of Malayan atavism among the more humble Negros people . . ." This unintended caricature elides the agency of the hacienda workers and the complex power of their cosmogony, which Adelina Gurrea sought to demonstrate in her stories.

A groundbreaking work on *Cuentos* is Perla B. Palabrica's translation in 1999 for her doctoral dissertation, "La Traducción al Inglés: *Juana's Tales*," at the University of the Philippines Diliman. Palabrica's work demonstrates her knowledgeable use of Negros hacienda culture as a basis for her translation. She deliberately chose to retain and annotate certain Spanish words that have acquired meanings peculiar

to Negros hacienda culture and that have, in fact, been absorbed into Hiligaynon, the local language of Negros. For instance, in the story, “El Bagat: *Mala Suerte*” ‘The Bagat: Bad Luck,’ Gurrea herself annotates the word *camarín* because of its specialized meaning in the Negros hacienda system: *Edificio grande de una sola planta, abierto, pero techado, donde se instalaban los hornos, maquinarias, calderos, enfriaderas, depósitos, etc., para elaborar el azúcar de caña* (165; *Cuentos* 95) (“A big, one-story building, open but roofed, where are installed the ovens, machinery, cauldrons, coolers, storage room, etc., for the making of sugar”). It is not, therefore, a small structure, which “*camarín*” is generally understood to mean in the Spanish language. The word reappears in “El Lunuk” in the sentence: “*Al camarín de la molienda todos, que allí hay sitio y es el mejor resguardo contra el baguio*” (Gurrea 240; Álvarez Tardío 95). Palabrica respectfully retains the word in her translation thus: “Everybody, go to the *camarín* of the sugar mill! There is place for you there and it will protect you better against the *baguio*” (352).

The Palabrica translation, however, is an attempt to produce a popular version, not a literal translation, of *Cuentos*, with the assumption that the translations will be read as independent stories in the English language, unmediated by the Spanish original. It therefore falls short of an accurate translation, if the Spanish original is the measure of accuracy. On the other hand, a pitfall of word-for-word, decontextualized translation may be illustrated by the difference between Palabrica’s translation of this same sentence and that of Álvarez Tardío, who translates “*camarín*” into “cabin”: “Everybody to the sugar mill cabin! There is room there and it is the best refuge against the *baguio*” (Writing 82). The word is not only incongruous with the Negros hacienda landscape but also illogical in the context of the paragraph in which the sentence occurs.

Álvarez Tardío’s edition of *Cuentos* is based on Gurrea’s second edition, published in 1955, the first having been published in 1943. She points out that this second edition divides the short story collection into eight sections, whereas there are really only five stories (26). This is because three of the five stories are each divided into two parts, each part in turn bearing a title. However, all titles are listed in the table of contents separately, thus making eight titles in total. There is also a blank page between the two parts of these three stories, functioning like a story separator. Therefore, the reader of Álvarez Tardío’s edition of *Cuentos* must be careful to note which stories must be read as parts of a whole or as singular stories.

One problem created by Álvarez Tardío’s edition of *Cuentos*, for the academic reader, is that her footnote annotations are sourced arbitrarily and inconsistently. In “El Lunuk del Remanso Verde,” Gurrea (234) italicizes the word *maestro* obviously to indicate a specialized meaning. In her translation, Palabrica (346) retains the word *maestro* and explains the word as used in the hacienda context: “‘Maestro’ here refers to the person who was an expert in sugar-making.” Álvarez Tardío takes recourse to this same annotation of Palabrica’s, with only the slightest modification: “Here refers to the person who is [sic] an expert in sugar-making”

(*Writing* 78). Unfortunately, Álvarez Tardío does not source Palabrica for this annotation. Another footnote annotation of Álvarez Tardío's (96) explains at length a "homestead law" that Gurrea mentions in "El Vaquero de Calatcat" "The Cowherd of Calatcat' (63). Because this annotation is not sourced, one can only gather, based on its details, that Álvarez Tardío is erroneously referring to a law of 1862 in the United States and applying it to the Philippines, although Juana's story is set in Spanish colonial times.<sup>6</sup> In another annotation, Álvarez Tardío enumerates the spelling variations of the word *chonca* (Gurrea 41; *Cuentos* 77-78): *sunka*, *sungca*, *sunkaan*, *sunca*, and *tsunka*—and then gives a lengthy explanation of its origin (Africa) and a description of the Filipino version. However, no source is given.

In several scattered footnotes in *Cuentos*, Álvarez Tardío notes that certain Filipino words used by Gurrea are currently spelled differently in the Filipino language. Gurrea's *camagong* is now spelled *kamagong* in Filipino (Álvarez Tardío 51); *achara*, now *atsara* (53); "*Canlaon*," now "*Kanlaon*" (105), and so on. Because Álvarez Tardío annotates such words individually, it becomes her obligation to annotate all such words consistently. However, again, the words are chosen arbitrarily. There are many such words in Gurrea's stories requiring the same kind of explanation, some more significant than others, such as *tic-tic*, which is now *tiktik*, and *camá-camá*, which became *kamâ-kamâ*, before accents were dropped from the Filipino alphabet. However, all of these little details could have been simply explained in one summary statement that the original Philippine alphabet, which had been modeled after the Spanish one, was "indigenized" by national-language crusader, Lope K. Santos in *Balarila ng Wikang Pambansa* 'A Grammar of the National Language' (1940); and certain letters, like /c/, were replaced by /k/; /ch/, by /ts/, and so on.

Significantly, both Gurrea's 1943 and 1955 editions of *Cuentos* carry the byline "Adelina Gurrea." This follows the Filipino naming system, that is, the last name is the father's family name, and the inclusion of the mother's family name is optional. Gurrea opted not to append her mother's family name. The Spanish naming system, however, is to have two surnames, the father's family name coming first, and the mother's family name last, thus: Adelina Gurrea Monasterio. Álvarez Tardío's 2009 edition retains Gurrea's chosen byline on the cover but prominently displays the author's name as "Adelina Gurrea Monasterio" on its title page. The difference between Gurrea's original byline and Álvarez Tardío's revision becomes even more obvious on page 40, where this title page reappears, this time with its facing page being the facsimile of the original edition bearing Adelina Gurrea's original byline. Gurrea could not have chosen her byline on a whim, especially if we see it in the context of her dedication, which proclaims her love for both her father and the Philippines, which she calls "his country" and "our land": *A la memoria de mi padre, que fué tan amante de los libros y de su Patria, dedico este libro, escrito con aromas folklóricos de nuestra tierra* ("To the memory of my father, who loved books and his country, I dedicate this book, written with the folkloric scents of our land").

Álvarez Tardío's introductory commentary on the stories, in "Sombras en el Trópico" (*Cuentos* 25-30), consists essentially of summaries, paraphrases, and explications of the already explicit meaning of details in Gurrea's stories. One might glean a faint echo of Cuesta's stereotype of the Negros rural folk in Álvarez Tardío's remark (29), though more carefully worded, that *[e]n el ambiente rural filipino se considera que la sociedad es a su vez parte de un universo habitado por espíritus y humanos* ("In the Philippine rural environment, it is considered that society is part of a universe inhabited by spirits and humans". And her explication of the supernatural beings populating Gurrea's stories rather incongruously concludes with a lament on the ecological problem that has put "the trees, supernatural protagonists, and animals populating Gurrea's stories in danger of extinction," because "the forest cover in the Philippines has been reduced to two percent." (*El paisaje tropical que ambienta las historias ha desaparecido en gran parte, pues se calcula que la masa forestal en Filipinas se ha reducido a un dos por ciento. Desgraciadamente muchos de los árboles, protagonistas, y de los animales que pueblan estos relatos están hoy en peligro de extinción*" (*Cuentos* 30).]

Nevertheless, Álvarez Tardío *does* offer occasional, albeit isolated and single-statement, readings of the supernatural beings as personifications of the colonial situation. She tentatively offers the interpretation that the natives' "inhuman suffering" may be "the *Bagat* incarnate itself" (*Cuentos* 28; *Writing* 53), and this is why it stands in the way of every effort to rescue the Spanish masters from the mountain bandits who have abducted them and held them hostage. She astutely observes that Gurrea, in her stories, "keeps a respectful distance from the native beliefs" and shows an ambivalence toward them (*Writing* 55). And, in her conclusion to her general introduction in *Writing*, she suggests a postcolonial study of *Juana's Tales* (29), "which could provide an interesting analysis of the condition of the colonized, their land, and their relations with the Spanish colonizers."

Academic readers may view the differences between the original, 1943, Gurrea edition and the Álvarez Tardío edition as either substantive or the accidentals of the text, depending on their purpose for reading *Cuentos*. If they are hard put to find the original Gurrea edition and have no choice but to use Álvarez Tardío's, they should at least use it with caution.

## Cuentos de Juana

It is through the supernatural beings in *Cuentos de Juana* that Gurrea presents the hybrid nature of Philippine postcolonial life, consisting of an indigenous system of thought that is the vital source of the natives' agency, on which was overwritten the hegemony of a Spanish plantation economy and the violent transition into American colonialism that they were undergoing at the time. This paper aims, therefore, to distinguish the various voices constituting Gurrea's stories and the various ways in which each seeks to dominate, or silence, the others by turns. To



achieve this, it offers an intertextual reading of the first story, “La Doncella” and will refer to a few details regarding the tamao in “El Lunuk.”

A central trope of Spanish colonial history that Gurrea interrogates in *Cuentos* is the *reduccion* as a set of discursive strategies. The *reduccion* was a process in which the conquered natives were brought into settlements, also called “*reducciones*,” which eventually became pueblos (Corpus 161). This transformation of the island’s geographical map was also the restructuring of its people’s cognitive map. However, this did not so much mean the loss of the people’s teleological world view as its dispersion into the Spanish world of significations. The tamao in *Cuentos* embodies both the boundary between, and the mutual assimilation of, these two frames of reference and frames of mind. A tamao living in a tamarind tree appears in the first story, “La Doncella,” and another tamao living in a *lunuk* ‘banyan’ tree appears in the last, “El Lunuk del Remanso Verde.” Hence, the tamao frames the whole collection.

The stories are told through a narrator-within-a-narrator: there is a seven-year-old first-person narrator who relays the stories that Juana, her nanny, has told her. The collection begins with this very first sentence, which is in the preface: *Juana me contó estos cuentos* (“Juana told me these stories”) (Gurrea 7; Álvarez Tardío 47). And further (Gurrea 15; Álvarez Tardío 55): *Yo lo relato como Juana me lo narró, sin poner ni quitar nada y sin obligar a nadie que crea las explicaciones de aquellas personas que lo comentaron*. (“I relate this as Juana narrated it to me, without adding or leaving anything out and without compelling anybody to believe what other people make of it”). And then again, the final sentence of the first story (Gurrea 39; Álvarez Tardío 75): *Así me lo contaron, y así lo cuento* (“Thus it was told to me, thus do I tell it”). Over and over again, the Spanish colonizer’s daughter tells us that she and the native storyteller are one and the same.

Notwithstanding the child narrator’s resolve, the points-of-view do shift according to the author’s need. There is the voice of the seven-year-old when Gurrea conveys a sense of marvel at supernatural phenomena. Other times, editorial comment is made in the mature authorial voice of one whose psyche straddles both those of colonizer and colonized, now swinging toward one pole, now toward the other. Dominating these voices is the Philippine mythic tradition, though the author is unaware that what she presents as mere “folklore,” or even “superstition,” is the residual element of this powerful tradition. But because Gurrea’s stories are in the realist mode, the conventions of the realistic genre affirm the actual existence of these spirit-beings, whose actions influence plot and character and who consequently wield moral and political power.

The author draws heavily from her own childhood for the stories’ details, including the geographical and historical circumstances of their settings, which are the towns of La Carlota and Valladolid.<sup>7</sup> The grown-up narrator nostalgically situates herself within a very clearly defined setting:

*Vivíamos el año 1901 y estábamos en el Extremo Oriente, muy lejos de la capital, donde existían ya tranvías, conducción de aguas y alcantarillado. En medio del campo no había posibilidad de más lujos ni de más higiene. Además, el sol lo desinfectaba todo. Todo lo que dejaban de engullir los cerdos y las gallinas. (Gurrea 101)*

We used to live, in the year 1901, in the Far East, very far from the capital, where streetcars, water pipes, and a sewerage system existed. In the countryside, there was no possibility for extra luxury nor hygiene. Besides, the sun disinfected everything. Everything that the pigs and chickens did not gobble. (Álvarez Tardío 124-25)

Thus, the historical specificity and cultural embeddedness of her stories rationalize the credulity of her fictional characters and assert her affinity with the primitive conditions of farm life in La Carlota, which is “very far from the capital.” Manila being at the time the only Philippine city with a streetcar system, this is the capital to which Gurrea must have been referring.

## The Philippine Mythic and Epic Traditions Embedded in Cuentos

The Malay population of pre-Christian Negros and Panay had a highly complex and elaborate belief system, revolving around the concept of *dungan*, the closest Western equivalent of which is the “soul.” The *dungan* was the root of “origin myths, explanations of illness, the antagonism of spirits to humans, the contests of *dungan*, the tribal *datu*’s leadership, and the *babaylan* priest’s centrality” (Magos 50). Humans and spirit-world beings alike were, and still are, believed to possess *dungan*. To be *dungganon* is to be a “man of prowess.” “A person with unsurpassed *dungan* exhibits acute intelligence, vast knowledge, indomitable willpower, and self-confidence; generates wealth and an awesome reputation; exudes capacities to rule, dominate others, and subdue enemies” (Aguilar 27). Labaw Donggon, the name of the hero of the epic of Panay, literally means “unsurpassed power” (Magos 50). A spirit-being could entice a person’s *dungan*, if it was weak, to leave its body and even hold it captive. Power struggles and negotiations between humans are won or lost according to the strength or weakness of the participants’ *dungan*. A *dungan*’s power can sap the energy of another, or steal a trait that he desires in another (Aguilar 27). Illness and death are explained by the *dungan*’s straying away from its body and being unable to return. When a person falls asleep, the *dungan* is believed to wander away and will return to the sleeping person’s body at the right time. A rude or abrupt awakening will cause the *dungan* to lose its way and will be in danger of never returning (Magos 50).

Seen in this light, what Gurrea mistakes as native diffidence toward the Spanish master can be explained by the native’s respect for any person’s *dungan*, whether foreign master or fellow native. With amused hyperbole, she describes a native’s

terror of rousing a master from his sleep (23; Álvarez Tardío 63): *Por más grave que fuera un suceso, el servidor nativo no concebía la falta de respeto de despertar a los amos. Esto le hubiera causado a Juana aún más terror que bajar de nuevo la escalera y seguir buscando a Pinang a la luz del farol agonizante bajo el viento y la lluvia* (“No matter how serious the event might be, the native servant would not conceive of the lack of respect of waking up the masters. This would have caused Juana even more terror than going down the stairs and continuing to look for Pinang by the light of the lamp, flickering in the wind and rain”).

## The Tamao

A *tamao*, in Panayanon myth, is the generic name for all spirit beings, mostly guardians of nature. By Gurrea’s time it had evolved into various subtypes: *engkanto* and *engkanta* were handsome men and beautiful maidens inhabiting forests; the *kapre* was a hairy *tamao* who lived in a tree—usually a *lunuk* ‘banyan’—and smoked a gigantic cigar. These Spanish-period versions derived from the Spanish *encanto* and *encanta* (“enchanted beings”); the *kapre* derived from the Spanish *cafre*, or English “*kaffir*,” which is “Islamic for ‘infidel’” (Aguilar 33; 235, note 4). The Spaniards’ own fear of anything associated with the Moors must have contaminated the natives too. Today, the *kapre* is generally imagined by the Visayans as a fearful *tamao*.

In an episode of the epic, *Labaw Donggon*, despite his name, is temporarily defeated by the powerful *tamao*, Saragnayan the Sun God, in a battle between their *dungans*. Saragnayan holds *Labaw Donggon* captive underneath his residence (Castro et al. 151):

Buyung Labaw Donggon,  
Imprisoned he might be by Saragnayan  
Underneath his home.  
Or else swallowed he might have been,  
For a *tamao* is Saragnayan,  
A notorious devourer of men.

When *Labaw Donggon* is rescued, he is in a state of stupor and needs to be led by the hand (Castro et al. 179):

He could no longer hear,  
Stopped were his ears.  
Buyung Labaw Donggon  
Had lost his sense of hearing.  
Lost as well his stable mind.

Similarly, in Gurrea's "La Doncella," Juana tells her young charge of a *tamao's* abduction of thirteen-year-old Pinang, whom he imprisons in his dwelling, which is a tamarind tree. She is rescued by the household cook, who knows what incantation and ritual to use to overcome the *tamao's* power over Pinang. But, despite her release from the *tamao's* prison, *siguió viviendo automáticamente, sonámbula de todos los momentos, muda, con los ojos muy abiertos, hipnóticos, ausentes* ("She continued living like an automaton, a sleepwalker all the time, mute, with the eyes wide open, in a daze, blank") (Gurrea 35; Álvarez Tardío 72).

Juana, the storyteller, insists on the truth of her story, much as mythical truth is unquestioned by the people who create and live by them:

*En el tiempo en que Juana me contó esta historia me la refirió como un hecho real, que acaeció en un pueblo de la isla de Negros Occidental llamado Valladolid, y me citó testigos, entre ellos a mi propio padre, el cual confirmó que, efectivamente, la doncella desapareció, . . . y apareció reclinada sobre tres diminutas ramas de un tamarindo, en estado de idiotez. (Gurrea 14-15)*

At the time that Juana recounted this story, she narrated it to me as a real fact, which happened in a town on the island of Negros Occidental called Valladolid, and she cited witnesses, among them my own father, who confirmed that, effectively the maiden disappeared . . . and appeared, reclining on three small branches of a tamarind tree, in a state of idiocy. (Álvarez Tardío 55)

Mythological and historical intertexts weave in and out of Gurrea's description of the *tamao's* dwelling:

*Vivía—y es de suponer que aun sigue habitando—en los troncos de los grandes arboles; pero dentro de ellos, por no sé qué poder infernal o, por lo menos, desconocido, levantaban palacios magníficos, con suelos de la más ricas y perfumadas maderas orientales y columnas de narra y camagong que resisten la acción del tiempo y de la humedad durante cientos de años, aunque estén enterradas. (Gurrea 11-12)*

It used to live, and presumably still continues to live—in the trunks of big trees; but within those, by I don't know what infernal, or at least unknown, power, arose magnificent palaces with floors of the most splendid and perfumed Oriental wood and columns of narra and camagong, which withstood the actions of time, of humidity for hundreds of years, though they be buried. (Álvarez Tardío 51)

In the *Ulahingan*, which is an epic of Mindanao bearing a cultural affinity with the epic of Panay, the hero, *Agyu's balay tulugan*, or palace, is described in almost exactly the same detail as the palace of Gurrea's *tamao* (Castro et al. 223). There is a catalogue of trees that compose the palace's pillars, together with the names of

faraway places where these trees were taken from. *In-agnay*, the temperamental *tamao* of creation, lives deep underground so that those who dig the holes to erect the pillars for the chief's palace must be careful not to hit her forehead.

Materials gathered for a building,  
 Far and wide supplies were assembled.  
 The pillars of the tulugan  
 Were carefully chosen:  
*Batunlinaw* of Sugbu,  
*Banat-i* of Simugay,  
*As-as* from Milung-ilung.<sup>8</sup>  
 When the posts were erected,  
 They only stopped digging  
 When they reached  
 The forehead of In-agnay.<sup>9</sup>  
 Proof of the strong foundation  
 In case of a great earthquake,  
 It prevents  
 The house from falling apart.

The historical and factual basis for such a description of native architecture can be found in the accounts of Spanish officials during the early years of conquest. Antonio Morga, a Spanish lieutenant-governor in the Philippines between the years 1593 and 1603, reports that native chiefs' houses were "built upon tree-logs and thick stakes and very roomy and comfortable. They are well built of timber planks, are large, secure, furnished and fitted with every necessity, and are much more splendid and substantial than the others" (270).

In the other *tamao* story, "El Lunuk," Gurrea describes the *tamao*'s dwelling beneath the tree and beside the pool thus (200; Álvarez Tardío 203): *Las raíces precisamente son la visera de la entrada a su reino subfluvial; detrás de ellas debe estar la grandiosidad cavernosa de las estancias negras* ("The roots are precisely the awning of the entrance to his underwater kingdom. Behind them should be the grandiose cavern of black mansions"). This "grandiose cavern of black mansions" is, in the Panayanon epic, Saragnayan's dwelling, the "land of *dingli*, the land of towering stone walls," which Labaw Donggon seeks to penetrate (Castro et al. 139-40):

Then leaving, he sailed  
 Till the land of Dingli, he reached  
 That land of rock stone walls.  
 "Now where shall I pass,  
 Where shall I go through?"



Sky high those walls are  
 And rooted one earth below.  
 “I call upon you, o pamlang  
 Lend me your power great,  
 Make it soar upward,  
 My biday, my charmed boat  
 My magic vessel.  
 Make it fly beyond this wall  
 Of darkness,  
 This land of black night.

“Dingli” is the Hiligaynon word for “a kind of dark sandstone” (Kaufmann 192), or limestone. There is a municipality in the province of Iloilo, Panay Island, named Dingle, famous for its thirteen “black caverns,” where tamaos are believed to land and take off on their *biday*, their magical boat. On the other hand, limestone was also the building material for churches and the Spanish elite’s *casa grande* (locally called *bahay-na-bato*). Thus, the supernatural hence purportedly non-existent tamao’s dwelling, described in Gurrea’s seemingly innocuous phrase, “a cavern of black mansions,” is itself a palimpsest of the whole of Philippine history, from the mythical kingdom of an unconquerable god, to the royal residence cum assembly hall of pre-colonial chieftains, to the church fortresses and mansions of colonial rulers.

## The Trickster Hero

A second, important character of Philippine mythology, now reduced to a comic character in Philippine popular culture, is the trickster hero. The trickster is excluded from the pantheon of deities, because it is he or she who challenges the prevailing order, rationalized in myth as the cosmic design. “This figure, distinguished perhaps most of all by his [her] defiance of any definition or restriction, appears in many forms—animal, human, and indeterminate forms . . .” (Gill 69).

In Philippine literature, the trickster has evolved from the Southeast Asian mousedeer, *pilandok*, to the human Pilandok of Mindanao, who outwits crocodiles and sultans by lies and deception, to Juan Pusong of Christianized Filipinos. The word “*pusong*” in the Panay language dictionary (Kaufmann 777) means “a liar, boaster, braggart, teller of invented stories; one who builds castles in the air; to tell stories, etc.” Pusong (Tiongson 1) is generally assumed to be a poor or lower-class person, with any of the following traits: 1) sluggish, lazy, or dull; 2) boastful and insolent; 3) ignorant and stupid; 4) faultfinding and sharp-tongued; 5) naughty and street smart; and 6) uncouth and obscene.

All the indio,<sup>10</sup> or native, characters in Juana's stories are trickster characters, because their roles—big or small—are precisely to show up the Spaniards, if not actually turn the tables on them. Juana's very personality is quintessential trickster:

*Hablaba el castellano, pero se olvidaba de él tan pronto como se la reprochaba alguna mala acción o falta en el cumplimiento de su deber. Entonces no se encontraba modo de evitar que diese sus pródigas explicaciones en el dialecto visayo. Como todo filipino, escuchaba las órdenes á instrucciones que se le daban con un gesto de complacencia, cual si fuese a cumplirlas al pie de la letra, y luego hacía lo que mejor la venía en gana. (Gurrea 8-10)*

She spoke Spanish but she would forget it as soon as she was reproached for some wrongdoing or fault in the completion of her duties. Therefore, there was no way that could be found of avoiding the elaborate explanations that she would give in the Visayan dialect. Like all Filipinos, she would listen to the orders and instructions that were given to her with an expression of complacency, as if she would obey them to the last letter, and then she would do what she liked. (Álvarez Tardío 48-49)

The pusong in Juana frequently rears her mischievous head in the various strategies of discourse that she uses to tell her stories. There is her sly analogy, for instance, between the Spanish civilizing project and the primitive brutality of torture (Gurrea 18; Álvarez Tardío 59): . . . *le regaló unos zapatos blancos . . . , los cuales lució con garbo y sufrió con resignación, porque la presión del calzado es un suplicio en un pie virgen de él, como el europeo no podrá jamás imaginar* (“Her mistress gave her a pair of white shoes . . . , she wore them with élan and endured with resignation, because the pressure of footwear is torture to a foot unused to it, as the European will not be able to ever imagine”).

In a later story, still using footwear as metonymy, Juana makes a bolder, overtly political, even facetious, assertion (Gurrea 53-54; Álvarez Tardío 89): *En esos días acudían a los festejos todos los braceros de las haciendas vecinas, con sus familias, vistiendo trajes nuevos. Calzaban zapatos cuando venían y durante las ceremonias, pero generalmente regresaban con ellos en la mano. Era mucho sacrificio para un pie acostumbrado a la santa libertad* (“In those days, all the laborers of the neighboring haciendas would attend the festivities, with their families, wearing new clothes. They would wear shoes when they came and during the ceremonies, but generally they would go back with them in hand. It was much sacrifice for a foot accustomed to holy liberty”). Since the laborers were not residing *debajo de las campanas* (“under the bells”), they would submit to the rules of *urbanidad* only “when they came” to town but would quickly shed them beyond the sound of the bells.

The people's unease with their “shoes” signifies two motifs in the Philippine literary tradition. Shoes and feet, besides being metaphors for political subjugation

and freedom, also distinguished between the savage and the civilized, the uncouth and the refined, the yokel and the sophisticate, the *reducciones* and the *remontados*. This trope is inscribed in such major works of colonial literature as the *pasyon*, which was a verse adaptation of the life and passion of Jesus Christ, and the manual *de urbanidad* (“manual of urbanity”), or the conduct book, which laid out codes of right conduct and good manners.

In the classic manual *de urbanidad*, *Urbana at Felisa* (1864), the author Padre Modesto de Castro admonishes the people on the improper use of their *chapin*, or *chinelas* (“footwear”). “Don’t,” he says, “keep inspecting them; don’t slip them off and hold them in your hands or carry them in your armpit; or, if you keep them on, don’t make clattering nor dragging noises with them, because you will instantly be recognized as not being accustomed to footwear and you will be everyone’s object of derision” (de Castro 83).

In the *pasyon*, what Spanish hegemony would see as native recidivism is overtly condemned through the image of Christ being nailed on the cross but covertly glorified in its identification with Christ, the *pasyon hero*:

The subservient feet  
Of the Lord Jesus Christ  
Were nailed on this cross  
By the vagabonds and traitors,  
May you behold this! (Casaysayan 104)

Such lines from the *pasyon*, despite their piously Catholic overtones, imply the subversive character of Christ, whose feet must be nailed down to serve as an example to “the vagabonds and traitors” of the land. Hence, Christ is lumped together with vagabonds and traitors as people whose feet—as Juana would put it—“were accustomed to holy liberty.”

Juana repeatedly draws the contrast between the Spanish master and the indio, always leaving it to the reader to infer the indio’s superiority. Threading through her stories are episodes of the Spaniards’ futile—and fatal—attempts to challenge and do battle with the indios’ supernatural beings, because, while they are overtly dismissing these as either nonsense or mere superstition, they are also compelled to subdue these as they must subdue the whole indio universe of significations.

Even minor characters with quick entrances and exits are given instant trickster roles. Here is Pinang’s mother making a quick visit to her daughter, who works as a maid with Juana in the hacienda household:

*Por eso, cuando la deuda de la chica aumentaba—ya que a la madre, mujer de experiencia y lagartona, se le morían los parientes más de lo debido—, el ama no lo tomaba en consideración y le largaba los pesos a la vieja, que se iba encantada, pensando en qué personaje iba a ser el siguiente en morir o en enfermar gravemente. (Gurrea 18)*

So, when the debt of the girl grew—because her mother, a woman of experience and cunning, whose relatives died more than they should—, the mistress did not mind and gave the pesos to the old woman, who left happily, thinking about which person would be the next to die or to become gravely ill. (Álvarez Tardío 59)

Despite Juana's insistence at having personally witnessed Pinang's abduction by the tamao, the narrator's peninsular grandmother chooses to interpret it within the logic of the hacienda's capitalist system (Gurrea 28; Álvarez Tardío 67): *Juana, eres tonta de remate. . . . Pinang debía demasiado, y su madre sabía que va no podía ni pagar ni sacarme más dinero. Y prefirió liquidar la cuenta induciendo a su hija a huir* ("Juana, you are an utter fool. . . . Pinang was heavily indebted, and her mother knew that she could neither pay nor get more money from me. And she preferred to liquidate the account by inducing her daughter to run away"). But Juana is vindicated soon after by the series of mysterious events that transpire, ending with Pinang's sudden, inexplicable re-appearance, "in a state of idiocy, resting on three small branches of a tamarind tree."

In the other tamao story, "El Lunuk," the Spanish masters from one generation to the next are killed one by one by the tamao, simply because they do not leave it in peace, although it is never the aggressor. On the other hand, none of the indios are ever harmed by the tamao, because they simply keep a respectful distance, hurrying past it and "wearing out a semi-circular path several meters away from it" (Gurrea 190; Álvarez Tardío 196).

Colonized people's strategy of giving the colonizer their comeuppance is what Homi Bhabha would describe as the "Sly Civility" (1985) of the "litigious, lying native." Or, as Robert Young would say, paraphrasing him: "The native really does lie, albeit politely" (151).

### "La Doncella que Vivió Tres Vidas"

Pinang, the sixteen-year-old india who is abducted by the tamao, imprisoned in his tamarind tree, and rescued by the family cook, is said to have lived three lives. These consist of: first, her "normal" life as a gentle, charming, and hardworking housemaid in the narrator's household; second, her life inside the tamao's "palace" in the tamarind tree; and third, her life, lived in a state of permanent stupor after her rescue and return to the natural world. One might view these three lives as analogous to the three periods in which Philippine history is conventionally divided: the pre-colonial, the Spanish colonial, and the American colonial and neo-colonial.

In the pre-colonial epic tradition, the imprisonment of *Labaw Donggon* by the tamao Saragnayan was the result of a battle for dominance between the dungan of two godlike beings. By Gurrea's time, an indio or india's abduction and imprisonment by the tamao had taken on the romantic motif of the Spanish *corrido* ("medieval

romance”), the *tamao* having “falling in love” and cast a spell over the object of his or her love. Exclaims Pinang (Gurrea 36; Álvarez Tardío 73): *Me miraba. Qué ojos tan grandes! Me pedía amor* (“He was looking at me. What big eyes! He was asking for my love”)!<sup>11</sup>

Juana prefaces her story of Pinang’s abduction with her perplexity at the *tamao*’s refusal to be contained within his ancient, mythical function. Hence, she can describe it only in terms of the Spanish corrido discourse of romantic love:

*Es difícil explicar por qué un tamao roba un ser humano, ya que no se les supone estar sujetos a las exigencias del amor; pero como todo tiene una causa, habremos de pensar que este tamao de nuestro cuento era un poco distinto en naturaleza a los otros y le gustó la muchacha más de lo debido o más de lo que correspondía a un ente de su especie.* (Gurrea 19)

It is difficult to explain why a *tamao* steals a human being, because they are not supposed to be subject to the exigencies of love. But we will have to think that this *tamao* in our story was a little different in nature from the others and the girl pleased him too much, or more than that which is proper to a being of its kind. (Álvarez Tardío 60; emphasis added)

Such is the mysterious fluidity of a *tamao*’s nature. It is also the fluidity of identities forced upon it by the colonial project. For the obtuse colonizer, the irrepressible indio could be only either of two constructs, noble savage or ferocious beast. Gurrea’s stories, however, demonstrate otherwise. Her perception belies the colonialist depiction of the colony being a heart of darkness, “manichean and essentially unchanging” (JanMohamed 90). Well into Spanish colonization, the *tamao* had metamorphosed into the *engkanto* or *engkanta* (from Spanish *encanto* or *encanta*, meaning “charm, enchantment, or spell”), whom anthropologist Alicia Magos (65) describes as “fair-skinned and handsome or beautiful.” Additionally, they are:

golden haired, blue eyed; they have clean-cut features and perfectly chiseled faces. . . . though known to dislike noises, they themselves sometimes indulge in raucous noises while feasting or punishing a mortal who has refused their love or abandoned them. They are whimsical and unpredictable. . . . (Aguilar 33, qtd. in Demetrio 138)

Historian Filomeno Aguilar Jr., writing about friar hegemony on this self-same island of Negros, sees parallels in Magos’s description of the *engkanto* and that of the Spanish friars, particularly their mis/behavior:



. . . [T]he characteristics of the folkloric *engkanto* have been culled from the friars' idealized physiognomy and their historic sacerdotal misdemeanors. . . They demanded silence in the rectory but broke it with their own noisy gatherings; their orders had to be obeyed lest the *indio* receive a severe beating; and their cravings for sexual gratification could not be spurned. Despite pretensions to clerical celibacy, those white men left Spanish mestizo offspring. (33-34; emphasis added)

The abductee, it is said, will forever stay under the *tamao's* spell if she partakes of the meal that he offers her in his "strange, big, and beautiful house" (Magos 65), which, extending Aguilar's analogy further, may be taken to signify the friar's rectory, and the meal, to signify illicit cohabitation:

*"Qué blanca, qué blanca, qué blanca! Y qué olorosa!" decía Pinang dormida. . . "La morisqueta. . . La vianda." Y sonreía.*

*"Comiste?" Interrogaba Felipe con angustia.*

*"No, no, no!" gritaba aterrorizada. (Gurrea 36)*

"How white! How white! How white! And how good it smells!" exclaimed Pinang in her sleep. . . "The rice! . . . The viand!" And she smiled.

"Did you eat it?" asked Felipe in anguish.

"No no no!" she cried in terror. (Álvarez Tardío 72-73)

In Gurrea's story, the *tamao* is abetted by *duendes* ("elves or goblins"), Juana's description of which evokes the image of the friar with his army of *indio* sacristans swinging the incense burner to heighten the eroticism of his (not-so-secret) agenda (Gurrea 14; Álvarez Tardío 54): . . . *cuando el tamao ambiciona la posesión de uno de los nuestros, . . . además del atractivo natural del manjar, enanitos morenos queman hierbas embrujadas, que despiertan los sentidos a apetitos irreprimibles* . . . ("When a *tamao* wants to possess one of our kind, aside from the natural attraction of the food, dark little elves would burn magic herbs to stimulate the senses to an uncontrollable appetite").

The *tamao's* various strategies of seduction and rape recall the friar's own: the entrapment of the *india* in his rectory (*convento*), sacristy, or even the confessional box; the promise of material gifts, special privileges, power, and status; the lure of sensual pleasure and worldly enjoyments—although the *india's* surrender to these enticements would also mean the betrayal of her own kind. All these are alluded to in several separate passages of the story.

Says Pinang (Gurrea 37; Álvarez Tardío 73): *Era fuerte, me vencía* . . . ("He was strong, he overpowered me . . .") Says Felipe, the male servant (or "houseboy," as he is colloquially called in the Philippines) (Gurrea 26; Álvarez Tardío 65): *Resistiendo o cediendo. De todos modos es un sufrimiento: si resiste, porque las tentaciones son fuertes y el tamao tiene medios poderosos para rendir a sus víctimas* ("Resisting or

yielding. Either way is suffering. If she resists, because the temptations are strong and the tamao has powerful means of overcoming his victims”). In love with Pinang, Felipe shouts curses at the *tamao*, calling it *ladrón de mujeres* (“thief of women”) (Gurrea 34; Álvarez Tardío 71). He despairs of ever winning her heart again, because (Gurrea 25; Álvarez Tardío 65) *el tamao no devuelve a las mujeres que se lleva, porque, aunque retornen, ya no son mujeres para nosotros los hombres* (“The tamao does not return the women that he takes away, because, though they come back, *they are no longer the women for us men*” [emphasis added]).

However, more than just a montage of the Spanish clergy’s prurient depredations on a hapless india population, all the quotes above also embody the larger allegory of Spanish conquest, consisting of the complex narratives of the colonizer’s physical force and hegemonic control, and the colonial response of compliance, complicity, and multiple forms and degrees of resistance. The characters’ names match their role in this political allegory: Pinang, condemned to live in a semitrance, is the colonized Filipinas; Felipe, with his unarticulated love and active participation in the attempts to free her, is Filipino patriotism or, in postcolonial terms, a “nationalist subaltern resistance” (Young 149); Burcio the cook (from Tiburcio), whose name rhymes with Bonifacio (founder of the Katipunan revolutionary movement against Spain, and always depicted with the iconic *bolo* [“machete”]) and who sets Pinang free with his incantatory rites and *bolo*, is Philippine independence. (Here, Gurrea pointedly uses the Hiligaynon word *talibong* [27] in favor of the better known Filipino word “bolo,” signifying that the revolution against Spain was not merely a “Tagalog revolt” but a national movement, including the participation of the Visayan people.)

The tamao is the whole palimpsest itself: the epic god and the monstrous colonizer; the Self and the Other; the Otherness of the Self. He is Saragnayan, the tamao of old, the belief in which the likes of Juana still cling to. He is the Spaniard (“How white! how white!”), whose *dungan* seems no match for Felipe’s love nor for Burcio’s *bolo* and ancient wisdom; but these two men’s victory is pyrrhic at best. Although they force the tamao to expel Pinang bodily from her prison, it remains in possession of Pinang’s *dungan*, because, for the rest of her brief life, she remains debilitated, lost, confused, neither here nor there (Gurrea 37-38; Álvarez Tardío 74): *La tercera vida de Pinang fué una sombra continuada y alargada . . . . No era ni de este mundo ni del otro, al cual perteneció durante su segunda vida, dentro del palacio que encerraba el tamarindo* (“The third life of Pinang was a continuous and long shadow . . . . She was not of this world nor of the other, to which world she belonged during her second life, within the palace that the tamarind tree enclosed”).

Gurrea wrote and published *Cuentos* toward the end of the Philippine Commonwealth period (1935-46), which was under US supervision. Looking in hindsight at the turn of the twentieth century, she might have been describing a Filipino national identity that was just emerging from the Spanish colonial condition, only to have it overwritten, but not quite erased, by the American one.

It is an identity unknown, undefined, or perhaps as yet undiscovered—a potential alterity, which is neither the colonizer's, Spanish nor American, nor any longer the indio's.

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## Notes

1. I am deeply grateful to Dr. Jonathan Chua, who saw this paper through from its inception to its end and whose help with the translation of the Spanish texts, together with Concepcion L. Rosales, was considerable. They are both of the Department of Interdisciplinary Studies of the Ateneo de Manila University. I also thank Wystan de la Peña, chair of the Department of European Languages of the University of the Philippines, for the enlightening discussions.
2. The most recent book on the history of Negros (Guanzon 2002), which was the Philippine island where Gurrea had been born and spent her youth, boasts of its writers in Spanish (121-30): Antonio Jayme y Ledesma, Agustin P. Seva, Jose Lopez Ayalin (a.k.a. Joffar), Geminiano Arroz, Jose B. Gamboa, Ramon Torres, Simeon Bitanga, Anatolio Dasmariñas, Jose Marco, Joaquin Sola, Soledad Lacson-Locsin, and Zacarias Robles y Caram. Nowhere does Gurrea's name appear among them.
3. "Negros must never forget that in Pontevedra and La Carlota surnames like Frias, Urquijo, Gurrea, Camon, Uriarte, Perez, Locsin, Tejjido, Zuloaga, Aldecoa, Lopategui, Corteza, Araneta—are remembered with love and respect" (Echauz, 29; emphasis added).
4. Monasterio's "La Odisea de un Hacendero" (1896), in which he vividly recounts his adventures as a colonizer, shows evidence of the writer's gift for storytelling that also runs in his niece Adelina Gurrea's veins. Another uncle on the Gurrea side was a playwright (Writing 4). In her book's dedication Adelina also describes her father as a lover of books. They and their books were probably her earliest literary influences.
5. The vast Gurrea hacienda has since been subdivided, two of which still retain the names of the original Gurreas, e.g., Hacienda Adelina and Hacienda Danao-Ramona, and are presently owned by Eduardo Cojuangco.
6. Álvarez Tardío's footnote explanation (96) of this Homestead Law requires correction on three counts. First, Álvarez Tardío explains this law as one implemented by the United States government, first, "to boost migration from the east to the west" on its own land and then on its territories, the Philippines presumably being one of them. This law, however, was not passed by Philippine Legislature till 1903, which is two years after Juana, the nanny, purportedly tells the story. Second, this homestead program of 1903 was implemented only partially to encourage restive peasants of Northern Luzon to migrate to Mindanao. It was not nationwide (Agrarian Reform History 8) and therefore did not include Negros. Third, details in Juana's story clearly set it in the Spanish colonial period. Granting that Gurrea uses the anachronistic term "Homestead," this can be interpreted in the context of 19th-century Philippines. In 1884, a law on colonias agrícolas ("agricultural colonies"), passed by the Spanish Ministry of Colonies, preceded the 1903 Homestead Act. It encouraged natives to establish their own plantations by granting them exemptions from forced labor, military service, and any or all taxes, if they cultivated land ten kilometers or more from town centers. In fact, Gurrea's uncle, Agustin Monasterio, took advantage of this policy and initially established his Hacienda Asia as an agricultural colony

(Cuesta 388-91; Genova 56-63; 183-209), notwithstanding the government's express preference for the natives to avail themselves of this government offer (Aguilar 91). This was probably the reason why Monasterio was assailed by the parish priests in the area as being a "land grabber" (Cuesta 430).

7. On a personal trip to the Gurrea hacienda, I traced the location of several central details in Gurrea's stories, such as their ancestral home, beside which stood the tamarind tree, in which a tamao was said to have resided (see "La Doncella que Vivió Tres Vidas"). Only the ruins of the house remain, because the hacienda's recent owners have had it demolished. Beside it sits the stump of the tamarind tree. However, although the property has been subdivided, two haciendas are still named after the Gurrea's, notably Hacienda Adelina and Hacienda Danao-Ramona. A detail in another story ("El Bagat") is the chimney beside an abandoned camarín in which a bagat is said to reside. Today, the chimney is no longer visible because the lunuk tree originally growing beside it has completely engulfed it; but parts of the chimney are still visible among the tree roots growing around it.
8. Batunlinaw, banat-i, and as-as are different kinds of Philippine indigenous trees. Sugbu is now Cebu; Simugay is Zamboanga; and Milung-ilung is Iloilo.
9. In-agnay is the tamao of creation. She carries the world on her shoulders with the help of two pillars, one on either side of her. A sleeping giant python wraps itself around each pillar and wakes up whenever In-agnay shakes the world in anger because of a human transgression.
10. In the Philippines, natives of Malay stock were called indio ("indian"), which was the generic Spanish word for the natives of all Spain's colonies (Corpus xiv), including Mexico, Central America, and South America.
11. A famous legend of a tamao, this time female, falling in love with a mortal, is the story of "Mariang Makiling," written by Jose Rizal based on his townspeople's oral tradition. Rizal describes the eponymous heroine as a "nymph or sylphide" who guards the forest of Mt. Makiling in Laguna province. In Tagalog, the spirit-guardians of nature, are called diwata. The diwata of Makiling was a spirit-guardian of the forest before she was Hispanicized and the appellation "Maria" appended to her name. In Rizal's story, she falls in love with an indio peasant, whose behavior is "quite mysterious . . . wandering the mountain, seated beside some torrent, at times speaking by himself or seemingly listening to strange voices" (130).