Forum Kritika: Philippine Literature in Spanish
**"THERE'S AN ALLIGATOR!":
AN APPROACH TO THE STUDY OF THE
POEM *A LA LAGUNA DE BAY* BY FERNANDO
CANON**

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Abstract

Perseverance is the key to understanding Fernando Canon, a man who participated in the most important events of Philippine history at the turn of the 20th century. He was an *Ilustrado* who fought with the Katipunan revolution; helped Rizal distribute his novel *Noli me tangere* in the Philippines in 1887; acted as a member of the Malolos Congress; taught in 1908 at the School of Engineering and Architecture; served as Secretary of the University of the Philippines' Conservatory of Music upon its foundation in 1916; and wrote and published essays and poetry. When he was almost 60 years old, he fulfilled his childhood promise to his friend, José Rizal, and published this narrative poem *A la Laguna de Bay* in 1921.

This paper unveils Canon's aim, which was to show how Philippine esoteric knowledge and spirituality can intertwine with technology, philosophical thinking, and modernity. It explains how the poem envisions the stages of a process towards a mutual understanding and cooperation between the modern and traditional knowledge that would nurture the spirit of the Filipino people. This union is conveyed in the poem through the adventures of the two main characters' experiences together in their journey along La Laguna de Bay.

Keywords

Spanish-American modernism, Philippine modernism, Philippine epic poetry, Spanish-Philippine literature

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Her endeavors for the preservation and revaluation of Philippine Literature in Spanish brought forth her two books on the Filipina writer Adelina Gurrea Monasterio: *Writing Athwart: Life and Works* (Ateneo de Manila UP), and a critical edition of her short stories *Cuentos de Juana* (Instituto Cervantes). Alvarez Tardio has also written essays about, as well as lectured on, Philippine Literature in Spanish. She is also a translator and poet, and recently, has translated and published Philippine poetry into Spanish.

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Author's Note

I would like to thank the editor of this special issue and the readers for their insightful comments on earlier drafts of this article.

TWO CHILDREN ARE PLAYING ON A BOAT. They sneak out to sail along the lake where their fantasies take them afar, crossing to the island in the middle of the lake and discovering great hidden treasures there. Suddenly, one of them shouts, "There's an alligator!" and instead of being frightened they begin to imagine everything that that great lizard is capable of consuming with its jaws, "with teeth to devour the Moon and the Stars," said José. Fernando would reply to this forty years later by writing a long poem about the tales of Laguna de Bay.

Who was Fernando Canon?

Not much is known today about this important figure in Philippine arts and sciences. Only a few people would be able to recognize who he was upon hearing his name. However, placing him alongside José Rizal would be different since he is often mentioned in books dealing with Rizal, owing to their friendship and the many letters they wrote to each other.

Canon (Fig. 1) was a man of culture in every sense of the word, dedicating himself to three great arts: music, poetry and science. He was an important engineer and inventor, a renowned guitarist, writer and poet. He was also engaged in the struggle to create a brighter future for the Philippines, as revealed by his biography.

Fernando Canon lived for 78 years, between the 19th and 20th centuries. He was born in Biñan in 1860 and died in 1938. He grew up in the surrounding areas of Laguna de Bay where he played with his childhood friend, imagining magical beings that lived in its waters.

Being the only boy in a family with four sisters, he had the privilege to go to school. He studied at the Ateneo Municipal de Manila under the Jesuit priests, where he shared classes and sometimes even a desk with his close friend, José Rizal. Like other Ilustrados of his generation, he left for Spain in 1877 to continue his studies.

Fernando inherited the inventive ability of his father, who was a watchmaker. The devices he created during his youth became great projects, and his interest in the new technologies of the 19th century led him to study engineering at the Real Escuela de Barcelona. He participated

Fig. 1

in the publication of the newspaper *La Solidaridad*. Rizal's execution in 1896 affected him very much. Later on he traveled from Barcelona to the Philippines to take part in the revolution for independence, becoming a General and a member of the Malolos Congress (Fig. 2). Under the government of the Philippine Republic he was named Director General of Public Works, in which he initiated projects such as the canalization of the Bulacan River, and electric lighting and telephone installation in Malolos.

At the end of the Philippine-American war, he returned to Spain, from where he traveled to various European countries improving his knowledge about mechanics and electricity.

Fig. 2

His improvements on electrotherapeutic devices are one of his notable contributions to medicine. In 1903, he was recognized by newspapers such as *La Vanguardia* and medical journals like the *Revista de Medicina* for his inventions to improve equipment used in Dr. José Anfruns's Electrotherapy Institute.

Upon his return to the Philippines in 1908 he taught at the Liceo de Manila and in the School of Engineering and Architecture. Under the American regime he occupied a position at the Bureau of Public Works. He continued his scientific and mechanical studies, publishing articles about his discoveries, among them a type of fire-resistant roofing and the extraction of oil from the *tangan-tangan*² plant.

Fernando Canon was also a talented chess player and guitarist. He won medals in chess championships in 1905 in Barcelona and in Manila in 1910. In November 1891, he received accolades from French newspapers for his guitar playing skills in Paris.³ He studied with maestro Tarrega in Spain and in Manila he was named Secretary of the University of the Philippines' Conservatory of Music upon its foundation in 1916. He wrote an article about the *kuriapi*,⁴ a traditional Philippine string instrument that he also played.

Fernando Canon lived his last years surrounded by his devices, tirelessly working towards the future through new inventions and advance techniques on which he used his savings. According to Zaide, the Commonwealth government offered him a pension for his services, which he refused saying that he could only accept it if

all the veterans of the Philippine revolution would receive the pension that they deserve. Canon received this offer in 1938, the same year he passed away.

Fernando Canon, Poet⁵

His first poem that we know was published under the pseudonym "Kuitib." It was the sonnet "A las dalagas malolenses," which appeared in 1889 in the newspaper *La Solidaridad*. This ode to the young women of Malolos, who had requested Spanish classes in the evening, allowed Canon to make a poem about hidden progress and changes:

Gold, though covered by slag,
Emerges much brighter through fire⁶

Many years passed before he published another poem. We do not know today what other poems he could have composed given that his papers and manuscripts have become lost through the years.

The poem "Flor ideal" ("Ideal Flower") was published in the second issue of *Cultura Filipina* in May 1910 and later on it also appeared in the last pages of the book containing his long poem *A la Laguna de Bay*.

In the anthology *Parnaso Filipino*, published around 1923, Eduardo Martín de la Cámara included two poems of his: "Flor ideal" y "Rizal artista."

Two of his poems dedicated to Rizal were part of the book *Poesías dedicadas a José Rizal* by the 1961 National Centennial Commission.

Other Works

Canon liked writing and he maintained an elegant and poetic style. His autobiography is among his unpublished works, as well as essays about electricity and kundiman. The essays "Cundiman," "Kuriapi," "Kawit," "Fire-resistant roofs for light materials," "Ohm's Law" and "Practical Memories" appeared in *Cultura Filipina*, a monthly arts and science magazine, between 1910 and 1914. In "Practical Memories," Canon remembers a beautiful vegetable garden that he discovered during his daily trips from Sarriá (Spain) to Barcelona. Here is an excerpt that shows Canon's style:

The windmills quivered soundlessly at the slightest blow of breeze and drops or trickles of water gathered at the pond to be distributed, as dew, as cleaning or underground water with temperature and fertilizers that allow the early exuberant growth of small red radishes, artistically clustered here, and there minute cucumbers, now compact ivory lettuce, and in its season, the coveted succulent asparagus and even the ridged watercress . . .

His vocabulary is precise and descriptive, with a very personal touch in the selection of terms that generally corresponds to an educated level of language. The memory of this orchard is a comparison that Canon uses to discuss the situation of cultivation and the use of land in the Philippines.

A la Laguna de Bay Among Philippine Literatures

Philippine culture is a network nestled in the restlessness of the impossibility of a utopian Babel. It is a labyrinth worthy of a "Funes the Memorious," the Borges character whose capacity for memory would have enabled him to speak all of the languages used in the archipelago. If it were possible to use all languages and at the same time bring about parallel translations for all of them in order to preserve them, their speakers would be left tangled in the multiplicity of possibilities and perhaps with this burden, just like Funes, they would not achieve abstraction nor communication.

Along the way, some literary pieces were left trapped in this web, forgotten by the collective memory as it proceeded in other directions. One of these pieces was Fernando Canon's *A la Laguna de Bay*. Therefore, this article is absorbed in the very same turbulent waters that engulfed it, and for this reason a portion is dedicated to remembering what the poem relates; despite that, in order to understand its richness, rewriting it would be necessary.

The In-visibility of the Spanish-Philippine Literature

As if dealing with a story by Borges, the criticism of Spanish-Philippine literature goes around in circles, whirls around the axis of a work that continues to be the primary source of information, which is the *Historia analítica de la literatura filipinohispana: desde 1566 hasta mediados de 1964* (*Analytical History of Spanish-Philippine Literature: from 1566 to mid-1964*). Estanislao B. Alinea entitled his book to reflect his intention of writing a manual that would be useful for the teaching of the Spanish language in universities.⁷ His objective was clear: record the written literary production in Spanish by Philippine writers. In 1964, Alinea could already feel the listlessness with which the publications in Spanish were surviving.

Alinea contributed to set a literary canon that tried to establish the Philippine characteristics of a literature written in a language that had been that of the colonizers but one that also showed its emancipatory capability. However, his analysis is concentrated on a dozen names, alluding only to the rest of the authors, among whom Fernando Canon is not included.

Despite more than fifty years since its publication and the accumulation of studies about literature in the Philippines in the recent decades, Alinea's *Historia* remains unparalleled to this day.⁸

Spanish-Philippine literature scholars are confronted by the paradox of writing about texts that no one has read such in a long time that they have ceased to exist. In this article, we run the risk of the contradiction of making a critical comment about a text that, published in 1921 and available today over the internet via the University of Michigan, has only been read by a dozen people. Just like Borges' famed character Pierre Menard, we think that perhaps by rewriting the text word for word, we can yield a contemporary reading that would give it back its visibility.

Beyond the possibility that in this personal literary "folly" one is able to find and read lost texts, and being faced with the irony of writing about a non-existing literature, the first task that must be completed is to come up with a reason that it existed and to show that it does exist and that it is important.

Between Generations

In *Silueta*, which serves as the book's epilogue, Renán de Zojas⁹ cites the following passage from Fernando Canon: "If I allowed myself to be carried away by modernism, if I wrote like you," he told me confidentially on certain occasions, "it would be ridiculous at my age" (*A la Laguna* 93).

To which modernism was Canon was referring? This is not an unwarranted question since a big part of literary discussions relating to Spanish-Philippine poetry, which thrived from the end of the 19th century until the first few decades of the 20th century, was centered on the influence of Spanish American Modernismo.¹⁰ However, Canon was probably referring to "modernism" in a less restrictive sense and he could be alluding to a form of understanding and creating poetry that was connected to modernity in a much broader sense. This expression reveals a Canon who felt old amid the artistic movements surrounding him.

Among the modern literary sources that flowed in the Philippines was, of course, that of Spanish American Modern poetry. In certain libraries of that period, one can discover that among the most read poets were Rubén Darío y Santos Chocano.¹¹ Along with this trend was the ever growing influence of Anglo-Saxon literature, whose way of writing was also called "Modernist" and had since the 1930s been consolidated and expanded, having entered the Philippines through English education under the American government.¹²

The criticism of linguistic and cultural circles followed different paths to discuss these ways of thinking art and literature that, although they belong to what is called Modernity, remain in fact different. The term *Modernismo* was already known in Hispanic circles since Darío's irreverent use of it in the 1880s.¹³ However, in English literature the term Modernism in this context (artistic group, themes and literary resources) was not accepted until the 1930s or later, between 1930 and 1940 (Barnhisel 511). On the other hand, in the Hispanic criticism "vanguard" is used to refer to a number of artistic and literary movements that undermined the pillars of classicism in the period between wars and even before the First World War.

Fernando Canon writes in between both worlds and as a poet who "coexists [...] with the last two generations," as explained by the editor in his introduction (*A la Laguna de Bay II*). José Rizal was his companion during his early years as a poet and the generation to which he belonged was that of Pedro Paterno, Trinidad Pardo de Tavera and Isabelo de los Reyes, where he earns a place among "the brains of the nation."¹⁴ After many years passed, in between wars and travels, he had two marriages that resulted in a considerable number of descendants. The engineer and general finally began to compose a narrative poem as he turned 60 years old.¹⁵ He was already based in the Philippines and his poetry companions had also changed. Cecilio Apóstol, Jesús Balmori, Fernando María Guerrero, Claro Mayo Recto, to name a few, had struggled for intellectual emancipation using the weapons that *Modernismo* had placed at their disposition, as such contributing to the development of a particular Spanish-Philippine Modernist poetry.¹⁶

Towards the end of the 19th century in the Philippines, poets defended a social and political stance. They had an opinion to express and their works were part of the struggle that had to be fought in all aspects, among which were the literary and linguistic. Many poets had been revolutionaries, actively participating in the armed struggle that took place first against the Spanish colonial government and later on against the American government. Their fights were in practice. Both the world of objects and the world of words were part of this revolution and contributed to these fights. In this context, Philippine literature experienced a display of creative imagination since the 1896 revolution. Various factors contributed to this literary activity such as the abolition of censorship. There were also several reasons that moved the intellectuals and artists to write, one of the most important being the need to define themselves. The intellectual battle for freedom of thought was forged with metaphors that originated from Latin American *Modernismo*, which was not foreign to Philippine writers despite the distance and the war. The writers of the revolution wrote carrying out in their words a historical and revolutionary act which extended later on to the American colonial government. For Canon, there is a real battle for freedom (81):¹⁷

Upon the cry of Freedom
The integrity will emerge
In each rightful nation

Following Canon's generation were poets such as Cecilio Apóstol and Fernando María Guerrero. What kind of poetry did this generation compose? The few examples discussed here will outline how that *Modernismo* of Latin American origin developed in Spanish-Philippine poetry.

Born in 1870, Fernando María Guerrero composed a poem in 1907 entitled "Dead Mirrors" in which he combines the symbolism of mirrors with death and madness, with Eros and the "arrows of impossible love." In his 1908 poem

"Emeralds," he constructs Modernist images through the evocative beauty of this symbol, which works as poetic perfection. The aesthetic aspiration of the "emerald" is as messenger of ideals and hopes. Since it is charged with mysticism, it functions as the key towards the understanding of the relationship between life and death.¹⁸

Cecilio Apóstol, born in 1877, might have published his first poem "The Terror of the Indian Sea" in 1894, according to Alinea (168). In 1898, he published "To the Anonymous Martyrs of the Country," wherein the martyrs became "temple priests of the Idea." Apóstol has always talked about freedom in his poems, calling it "the goddess of the modern spirit cult" ("Excelsior" 1901). In his 1902 poem "My People," he echoes José Martí and a modernist vision of the future: "everything progresses, dies and transforms."¹⁹

Rubén Darío's *Azul... (Blue)* was published in 1888 in Valparaíso and *Profane Hymns and Other Poems* in 1896 in Buenos Aires. The book that signaled Darío's arrival and his personal brand of *Modernismo* in Spain was *Songs of Life and Hope*, published in Madrid in 1905. However, the University of Santo Tomas's Catholic newspaper *Libertas* had already published Ruben Darío's poems in 1899. Between these years, from Darío's use of the term *Modernismo* until he became famous in Spain, poetry written in Spanish in the Philippines had already experienced its own *Modernismo*.

Canon shares with Apóstol and Guerrero's generation certain poetic objectives such as precision in form and stylistics, conservation of rhyme, and the ideal of consolidating a country that feels united against foreign cultural elements being imposed upon it. The objective of independence was shared by this generation that had fought in one and then another revolution.

In the generation that followed, other influences were notable, for instance: Darío's *Songs of Life and Hope* from 1905; José Santos Chocano's *The Soul of America* from 1906; Salvador Rueda, on account of his 1914 visit to the Philippines; and the *Modernismo* of the second decade of the 20th century in its reflexive and metaphysical phase.²⁰

Among the "pleiad of young poets," Pellicena (8) mentions Jesús Balmori, born in 1886, who maintained a close rivalry with Cecilio Apóstol in literary competitions (Alinea 111). This second generation consciously inherited the aesthetic of *Modernismo* and the abovementioned poets. Balmori, still very young, published *Rimas malayas* in 1904, according to Martín de la Cámara.²¹ However, his most important poetry collection was *Mi casa de nipa (My Nipa House)* in 1940, in which Balmori resorts to an expansive citation of his forerunners, be it for their names or the symbols from their poetry: Darío's eagles and Chocano's coat of arms.

In *El alma de la raza (The Soul of the People)*, Claro M. Recto, born in 1890, travels through all the sensorial sources searching for symbols and analogies that can shape his country. His poetry was compiled by Pellicena in the book *Bajo los cocoteros (Beneath the Coconut Palms)*, published in 1911. Recto, on the other hand, seemed to not need his literary genealogy and does not mention his references.

The most defiant gesture of these authors was the mere act of writing in Spanish against the gradual imposition of the English language. Jesús Balmori and his fellow poet, Manuel Bernabé, also born in 1890,²² continued to write their collections influenced by the aesthetic of *Modernismo* until the 1940s. The Philippines did not experience avant-garde movements such as those of *Estridentismo* or *Ultraismo*, which in some cases negated the *modernista* and precious aesthetic of Dario's first works.

On one hand, Canon's poem is deeply connected to Spanish *Modernismo*. According to Zojas, two great literary figures stand out in his imagination while reading Canon: Paul Verlaine and Miguel de Unamuno; the former, a great poet of Symbolism and Decadence, and the latter, a literary creator of his own Christ and a theosophist. On the other hand, Zojas denounces his "Classicism," as certainly his style places him between Campoamor's Romanticism and the metric renewal of *Modernismo*.

However, Canon is much more modern than his contemporaries. As study of his poem will reveal, Canon relates to the avant-garde soul. His inventive spirit rejoices in the sciences and the modern, in the search for scientific explanations and progress through invention and technology.

Criticism supports the theories based on the texts being studied. Owing to the theoretical revisions of the last few decades, we are made aware that it can have the effect of isolating those works that defy labels. We examine a text whose peculiarity stimulates the task of relating it with poetry to which it is coeval. In this attempt we discover the difficulties of this contention, given that at the same time it pushes the text to the margins. This poem has no place among the literary canon that Alinea established, which the later criticism has repeated without revising it. Moreover, Alinea's analytical criteria have become obsolete and useless to achieving an understanding of the range of interpretations that Canon's poem could elicit.

The categories that were used to describe Spanish-Philippine literature are insufficient to question the very society and culture that produced those works all throughout the decades. For example, until now the institutions and cultural practices that promoted it have not been studied. Nor has the link with its contemporary cultures and literatures, which identifies it as Philippine, been recognized.

The poem: A la Laguna de Bay

A la Laguna de Bay is a 2340-line narrative poem, published in 1921 by the editor Narciso Rangel, owner of "Cultura Filipina." Although the poem presents links with Spanish *Modernismo* in both its stylistic and thematic features, Canon wrote it with artistic liberty derived from his old age and independence, since as a poet he did not seek recognition nor inclusion in any artistic movement.

It is the fulfillment of the author's childhood promise to Jose Rizal and it involves the collection of hidden and popular wisdom that inspires Philippine history and manifests in its nature, its waters and its caves. The conciliation between the two characters, the traveler who represents what is modern and the rower who has access to mystic experience, is essential to allow the recovery of ancient knowledge from the Laguna de Bay and thus to plan for a future of freedom at the end of the poem.

The poem begins with the traveler whose voice guides throughout the journey: from the narration of his inner thoughts, continuing to the description of the surrounding nature, to the recounting of the tales and underwater adventures he experiences along with the rower. Nevertheless, the poem's leading voice is not clearly defined; often the main protagonist's thoughts get muddled with an outside narrative voice that makes commentaries such as in the following stanza (2):

It is so that at the start of a journey,
Notwithstanding the antipodal current,
The steerer feeling the strength of an army
Shall not think of weariness a deterrent.

Moreover in some cases, the persona becomes that of the poet himself, merging the author's opinions in the poem's contents. When the legend ends, the narrative voice returns to address the Laguna de Bay and praises all the delights found in its waters (74). The traveler, the rower and the alligator's story is written in a forgotten alphabet on a green cliff (75). From this point on, the poet's voice comes forth to reveal that the two men with whom the story begins are the tale's protagonists described to him when he was a child "as an ancestral secret" (76). The ten-line stanzas that constitute the last part are expression of different opinions of the author about various topics. To close the poem, he puts into verse the memory of Rizal's plea to him and to grant to the Laguna a high allegorical value (83):

The border of the ladle, is our Lake
Which symbolizes the initials of ALPHA and OMEGA.

The published poem does not have not explicit divisions, with the exception of the meter, verses between quotation marks, and sometimes lines that delimit the stanzas. At the end of this essay, there is a table identifying the sections, their meters and the locations where they take place. The use and skill that Canon demonstrates in the meter is a significant force. If Canon aims at proportion in prosody, verse and diction, it is because these patterns resemble those of the nature he describes. The kabala of his meter signifies power to control the word, which gives access to the ancient wisdom in the same way the *abraxas* functions.

Fig. 3

This poetic journey through the Laguna de Bay, the island of Talim, found at its heart, and later Mount Banahaw, is a return to the origins of what Canon calls “the primitive Philippine culture” (IV), whose power concentrates and accumulates in this scenery, and can be recovered through the process of initiation the poem narrates (Fig. 3). This landscape shapes one of the most important spiritual geographies in Philippine culture, filled with mystic and religious meanings since the beginning of time.

Canon remembers in his prologue letter to José Bantug that Rizal had requested that the protagonists be Philippine (III-IV). Before Reynaldo C. Ileto brilliantly analyzed, in his book *Pasyon and Revolution: Popular Movements in the Philippines, 1840-1910*, the fundamental role the *Pasyon* played in Philippine culture and especially during the anti-colonial revolutions, Canon and Rizal had discussed in Madrid the characters of *Florante at Laura*²³ and Pilapil's *Pasyon*²⁴ in a similar sense.

Canon recalls in this letter that Rizal had told him about the “sad” fact that Balagtas and Pilapil had to use non-Philippine characters in their poems. However, he continued to say that inevitably, “being unable to distort their own nature and dialect, without wanting to, they transformed Greeks and Jews resulting in their Tagalog adaptation, speaking from the point of view ethnology.” In Ileto's words, “the *pasyon*, an epic that appears to be alien in content, but upon closer examination in

a historical context, reveals the vitality of the Filipino mind" (12). Canon and Rizal used the term "legends," despite referring to the same component that enhances in both cases the "epic" quality that allows communication in a given moment, in a given text, the spirit that moves and inspires a generation.

Canon was answering Rizal's request but this justification has to be interpreted in the literal sense and in terms of a literary strategy. This allowed Canon already in his old age to set what was indeed his desire to compose a legend and epic poem that would carry his ideas and thoughts. Canon offers to his culture a literary manifestation of the collective effort to take over foreign knowledge, on one hand, on the part of the Philippine intellectuals, and on the other, of the wisdom of the illiterate population²⁵ who, unlike the former, holds access to Philippine spirituality. The protagonists, the traveler and the rower, solve this conflict between the groups they represent, like the two brothers in the tale narrated in the poem (49). They are not individual heroes but rather a symbol of continuity through a shared transcendence. They function as the symbol that makes the group; that links history and culture; that constitutes an element of cohesion; that is why they have a personal history without a name of their own. *A la Laguna de Bay* is neither a journey through the human soul nor through the individuality of the main character. As a legend that aims to construct, as a poem, it is a collective medium to transcendental knowledge.

The poem is based on an analogical understanding of the world that originates from traditional Philippine culture; a vision in which a system of correspondences is ever present. It is natural in the sense that it comes from nature, within which the past and the present are connected, product of a concept of circular time that allows for the reiteration of an event with epic value, as everything comes from and goes back to nature.

Intellectuality and Spirituality

The act of narrating the legends in *A la Laguna de Bay* seeks to recover them for the collective memory and in doing so foster the regeneration of that memory, like agents capable of evoking forces that until that moment have remained hidden but can be awakened with the narration. *Pasyon* works the same way, as it is repeated each liturgical cycle, reinvigorating the possibilities of acquiring force through the staging of certain rituals (Ileto 15-22).

The question that Ileto presented at the beginning of his book was whether historical criticism had been able to fully understand the Katipunan and other popular movements (4). He indicated how Agoncillo in *The Revolt of the Masses*, published in 1956, signified a change in the previous trend that considered the revolution only as the result of intellectuals' efforts (4). Agoncillo, in his masterpiece, insisted that the Katipunan movement had its roots in the lower classes. Ileto emphasized the omissions of historiography about the revolution

and independence when he wrote his "history from below," about the popular movements that in connection with the Katipunan lasted until 1910, shortly before Canon started writing his poem.

The separations and disagreements between the group called *Ilustrados*, a name they received in clear reference to the 18th century Enlightenment and in honor of their philosophical, political and scientific knowledge of European origins, and the mostly illiterate populace was fostered through aloud public readings of Catholic religious activities as well as ancient and new legends. The discord took shape throughout the 20th century by a history that frequently condemned those who had sought sources and strategies by means of other languages (especially Spanish) and other thinkers. It is a history that resisted recognizing that this middle class group, the *Ilustrados*, had a very distinct vision about their own experiences and realities from the one with which we may regard that time today.²⁶

The bond between these social groups is the principal argument that inspires Fernando Canon's poem. From his work we are able to examine the *Ilustrados'* point of view and discover that both groups were neither strangers nor incompatible. As Canon proves, *Ilustrados* such as himself existed who also completely participated in the masses' way of understanding the revolution and discerning the world via the popular wisdom and spirituality.

The splendid richness of Canon's poem lies here. He offers us a cultural gem, before the perplexed eyes of history and literary criticism, showing how the *Ilustrado* force was aware of and shared the strength of the masses.

In the initial pages, the character who opens the poem has to undergo an initiation, a ritual similar to those carried out by the Katipunan (Ileto 91 and Richardson). Nevertheless, literary fiction allows for the traveler to directly face nature, which as an active agent provides rites and adequate trials to find out whether his intentions are honorable. The rower, his well-built and illiterate guide, brings him where the boat, left adrift, would enter the "grounds of the fairies" (7) and explains to him that the result of this immersion would depend on his intentions:

"If sublime intentions lead you
 "Or if you desire to be useful to the Motherland
 "There you will obtain the prize of the heroes:
 "The undying exuberance of youth.

"But, if weak determination motivates you,
 "Entering into the aquatic crypt,
 "You will return unhappy and aged
 "With the delirium of lethal insanity.

Similar to what happens in a Katipunan ritual, after the initial warning and once the candidate's intention has been confirmed, a symbolic journey through tunnels

and torrents begins. The next step consists of a meditation area where the sufferings of the lower class under the Spanish colonial government are represented. The traveler tells in the poem that after passing through a tunnel made of plants and flowers, where he got entrapped with roots and flowers, he stops on a mound of earth that appears with the ebb tide. Amid all this nature, the experiences of heroes, of past battles overtake him; he feels the flames and his mind consumed like a volcano (9):

I am moved by the delirium of heroes.
 I am poisoned by the passion of battles.
 The frenzy of triumph incites me,
 My whole flaming being yields
 And trembles in terrible convulsion
 Struggling to come out of those flames.
 From that red environment which transforms
 My brain into a volcano of burning lava.

Canon's poem demonstrates the depth of the Katipunan experience among the *Ilustrados*, who have been isolated by previous historical categories from what was also a key experience for them. Canon expresses through his poem what Isabelo de los Reyes described in his work *Sensacional memoria* (79):

I've said it and I will repeat it a thousand times, that the Katipunan was a plebeian organization, it is true; but I have never meant that it is insignificant. On the contrary, the people barely speak and perhaps they barely think as well, I mean, without those sophisticated complications of a cultured mind: but what little they think of is intense, it is their second nature, and what they believe is faith, it is fanaticism, and faith creates miracles.

Journey to Knowledge

The narration is a journey through the book of nature, through the knowledge that the Laguna de Bay and Mount Banahaw²⁷ possess (Fig. 4). It describes an itinerary that brings to mind Dante's *Divine Comedy*, in addition to other elements that will be discussed later in this article. Its metric harmony is similar to that of the *Divine Comedy*, regarded as an expression of artistic perfection in its use of hendecasyllabic verse and the tercet (Domínguez Caparrós 19). Likewise, the *Divine Comedy* tells of the journey of the human soul from the state of sin to the vision of God (Varela-Portas 179); like a mind's ascend to the truth, *A la Laguna de Bay*, in its composition as in its reading, is an epistemological act. By means of analogy, the poem reproduces Philippine primitive and spiritual wisdom through nature. The adventures the protagonists face have the purpose of consecration,

Fig. 4

given that they are the initial step to entering the experience of the world, of hidden and infinite knowledge, and of access to power and the possession of objects that transmit power and knowledge. This power is similar to that of the revolutionaries' amulets or *anting-anting*, as described by Iletto (22-27) that can win over invasions and chains as told in the story of the Sultana sent by Sandakán to help Agrodino (63-64):

"I send you the most beautiful VIRGIN ...
 "Your enemies will run away like cowards...
 "She handles the talisman MAYPAHO ...
 "She imitates the song of the birds...
 "She removes poison from the serpents...
 "She preserves Gnostic ABRAXAS ...
 "And hoards a radium-bearing amulet

At the beginning of the poem the traveler has an experience of alienation and his digressions revolve around disintegration. The traveler himself articulates his journey along the Laguna de Bay as a search, so modernist, towards finding totality (Jrade), which under *Modernismo* can be achieved through Esotericism and Theosophy (5):

Beginning and end of infinite things,
 The thinking, lucid and sane,
 Which is the summary of the mystical science.
 It is the Faith promulgated by the centuries,
 It is the light where the celestial court moves,
 It is the fluid that runs through my veins.
 It is a whole that says, each day
 When the eternal doubts battle, that
 It is an obsession to think that in a life
 So short and unhappy, a brain,
 Enclosed inside an asymmetrical cranium,
 Could contain infinite horizons
 About sapient matters always united.
 To achieve the complete harmony
 Of the infinite divine creation.

The traveler represents individual aspects of Esotericism in his efforts to obtain hidden knowledge on his own. However, the rower and nature show him that he needs the help of symbols and a guide to reach what is most hidden and interpret the mysteries of knowledge. The traveler using his science confronts the nature surrounding him in the lake as well as the legends that were created to explain the events (13):

"Mermaids invented by ordinary people
 "Which analytic science destroys . . .
 "Look if you are threatened by my solid subject,
 "My awakened reason that challenges and kills you! . . .

Before going out of the "fairy grounds" there is a change in the surroundings: "the vault drops" and turns into a dismal atmosphere. The traveler begins to see skeletons, shrouds and serpents, and he feels suffocated. He reaches the abyss of the waters and the cold takes over his body. He feels as if he were inside his "glacial tomb" (14). Nature answered his desire to exert control over all with his reason, and submerged him in its depths.

After the process of introspection through daydreams and the initiation rites in the green cathedral that the traveler has experienced, when he leaves the vault, freed by the currents of Diablo Pass, he is already able to speak with the rower, the poem's other protagonist, and is able to share with him his story, thus going through the rest of the journey guided by the rower and the alligator.

The boat goes to where the impatient rower is. As soon as the boat is near enough, the rower boards it and tells the traveler that he is bringing him to see "the miracle or the phenomenon of the Lake" (15) to discover its secrets. Once this

phase has passed he would be ready to achieve other esoteric knowledge along with the rower, with whom he will share the experience that would bind them as brothers discovering together the secrets of the past. This would allow them to walk with a new unifying vision.

The rower lets the boat descend in the depths of the waters, reaching an underwater cave. There, the legends the traveler invokes in his dreams are found (16). The path along the lake and its caves, and the alligator that becomes the symbol of mediation, are part of the initiation, meant to be the access to esoteric knowledge and to mystic nature. This is accompanied by the revelation of truths without which this mediation will remain unachievable and mysterious.

The immersion in the cave is an initiatory process to take the traveler through experiences that would bring him closer to the people and the land to which he belongs. Technological advancements are juxtaposed to the marvels of nature and to the hidden treasures of the past. The itinerary serves to bring forward scientific and foreign knowledge that should be adapted and, ultimately, coexist through the friendship that develops between the two characters (16):

*"Come back to me, material notions
 "Those from the sciences are always deduced;
 "I want to conquer the anomalous situation
 "Allowing to shine the growing light
 "From the uncorrupted reason that studies,
 "When appropriate forces are established,
 "The explanation of the legends of the Fatherland
 "That never die in the mind of the people*

From now on the rower becomes the protagonist. He has been able to tame the wild alligator, which entitles him as the agent of mediation to power (28):

At times it serves me
 Like a submissive guide,
 Or I climb fearlessly
 Its burnished back

Granted the recognition of each other's power, they can continue the journey down the depths and thus the traveler responds (35):

*Today you invite me again to the subterranean asylum
 Of secular monsters that come from the sea
 To pursue the hoofmark of an unknown crocodile? . . .
 Wherever you may go, it will follow you peacefully . . .*

Scientific and Technological Knowledge

The fantasy that Canon creates allows for paradox and contradiction within its esotericism as it is not a structured philosophical system. For this reason Canon can compose a body of knowledge in which science and technology converge, like electricity and psychology along with theosophy and Kabala.

The poem provides scientific, paleontological, biological, geological, chemical, and physical explanations about historical and current events. Canon quotes philosophers and scientists, not only key names such as Spencer but also other minor works and studies. The descriptions are often detailed, and technical and scientific vocabulary is very abundant.

The poem manages to translate scientific knowledge into an esoteric framework that acquires meaning in Filipino spirituality. There is no feeling of loss or despair. On the contrary, the poem conveys confidence in the human capacity to be in control be it via science or mystic knowledge. Brimming with optimism and courage, in spite of the difficulties that come their way, the protagonists will know how to overcome them and move forward while helping each other.

At the end of the 19th and the beginning of the 20th century, science had become a new religion. The hopes put in faith were moved to science, as 19th century positivism had begun. The belief that permeates those texts is that science can unravel the great mysteries or deep enigmas, and so with its discoveries the future is guaranteed. The technology and science of the traveler are a representation of the Filipino *Ilustrados* who brought foreign ways and knowledge to nature and the peoples of the Philippines. These are combined with the knowledge of the *rower*, who uses indigenous language and has access to nature through traditional knowledge and other mechanisms.

The traveler analyzes events, objects, and geographical accidents using his modern experience, from which he perceives, manipulates, and possesses. The traveler represents this position initially faced with the esotericism of the *rower*, who in contrast shows his faith in whatever nature reveals, who does not need explanations to the mysteries because he is part of them. This clash is present in the poem. Nevertheless, the author seeks and finds the way to communicate both ways of life and of thought. Through the delusions that he experiences in the Lagoon, his immersion in the caves and his climb to Mount Banahaw, the traveler slowly recognizes the sacred experience, in that a stalactite, as in the following example, reproduces transcendent truth through analogy. As they come out of the cave they discuss scientific explanations on the formation of stalactites, which are also interpreted as symbols. The *rower* then warns the traveler (38):

When a thousand reddish lights shine up there
Be careful with your head . . . those are chisels points
That come down from other worlds bathed in blood . . .

Look at them, there are those . . . that appear changed . . .
Tell me, how do they combine thousands and thousands of colors?

While the traveler contributes its modern scientific vision:

- They are the stalactite of micaceous rocks,
The red litmus of the ferrous biotite,
The transparent quartz of the rosaceous edge,
Of ruby and emeralds are those violet pikes
By the same Sun illuminated through a thousand prisms.

To come to this inspired knowledge, imagination is necessary. Without involving any contradiction, reason and imagination complement each other. The imagination acts as intermediary between the spirit and the body. It is a source of power and of knowledge, says Canon (79):

In all directions
Will follow evolutions
From our imagination.
New dynamism
Of anti-gravitational force
Will be our great guide
In order to travel through spaces
And to inhabit our palaces
Of space ships.

Canon is no longer the romantic poet or the medieval Dante. He is a modern poet, so much so that his imagination is powerful enough to draw the future, and so he adds: "our old ships barely reached 100 tons such as the aeroships today . . . but, the future!" (79).

The final part of the poem, when the narrating voice is restored, could be defined as scientific poetry, similar to the anarchist poetry of the end of the 19th century and early 20th century that were creations of non-professional authors such as Canon (Litvak 303). In these verses, science and poetry complement each other to resolve human doubts and anxieties. Poetry is articulated as a genuine path to develop thinking and ideas. In *A la Laguna de Bay*, science is conceived in evolution, as an entity that can develop in dialectical discourse with other revealed knowledge, such as the abraxas and the kabala, and so it advances to constitute a synthesis and to become instrumental towards a perfect tomorrow.

Canon shares with the avant-garde the adoration for technology and advancements, while the *modernistas* were maintaining a love and hate relationship with the advances and the changes that they were provoking in life and in nature.

In contrast to *modernistas*, Canon does not argue with scientific knowledge (Jrade 165, 183). His criticism is directed against that modernity which is incapable of combining both thoughts. Canon, who finds himself between two generations and is an inventor, brings together elements of both. His rhetoric and style are *modernista*, while his vocabulary and his metaphors are avant-garde. All this is forged in the crucible of the Philippine revolutionary mystique. The reason adheres to the imagination of completing the revelation that occurs as an identifying characteristic of a Filipino way of interpreting and of experiencing the world in this modern age.

Philosophical and Theosophical Knowledge

There is also much vocabulary that is philosophical and theosophical and related to religious knowledge. Some verses lead to philosophical reflection on how to understand the world and human thought through sources ranging from psychology to Pythagoreanism. The mysterious harmony of the cosmos presented is related to pythagoreanism, as well as the idea of the harmony of the spheres. Harmony is a sound generator that gives passage from chaos to cosmos. An example is the esoteric interpretation that is behind this ten-line stanza (80):

And sidereal electrons
From unknown distances
Will bring us harmony
From the primary ideals
That materialized
In rare condensations
Of eternal cyclones
Propelled by comets
To form the planets
Between the Sun and its cations.

In a note, Canon names the following philosophers: Kant, Krause, Leibnitz, Rizal and Descartes. In this philosophical discourse, it is important to note Canon's mention of the German philosopher Krause, whose ideas evolved into Spanish Krausism during the last years of 19th century and the early 20th century and influenced the Filipino ilustrados who were educated in Spain.²⁸ Krausist idealism was adapted to positivism by integrating knowledge of the world and nature to its idealist philosophy. The Harmonious Rationalism and Panentheism of Krausism thus offered a way to reconcile religion and science, a concern that Canon himself expresses in these verses (4):

What delirium matter produces
 When the immortal soul does not illuminate it,
 When body with neither lights nor half-lights
 In the isolated chaos goes crazy, . . .

The poet brings forth a syncretism of "sapient materials" as he mentioned theosophy, phrenology and craneoscopy in his notes (5):

On the pure reason of reasons,
 From the intimate conscience the living light,
 To exalt, until the One and Eternal God,
 Beginning and end of infinite things,
 The thinking, lucid and sane,
 Which is the summary of the mystical science.
 [...]
 Of material sapiens, always united.
 To achieve the complete harmony
 Of the infinite divine creation.

Canon believed these new metaphysical views would lead people to achieve a better world (78):

The world of the human
 Formed in short stages
 Enlarging itself by layers
 Which trivial worms settle.
 The men, their sovereign,
 Already study the constructions
 Depths, and their lessons
 That will tell us the remedies
 In order to obtain other resources
 That bring new perfections.

Nature

The true protagonist of the poem is living nature, one of the fundamental concepts in any esoteric text (Faivre xvi). Various strophes describe Nature's behaviour that calms down after being roused (33-34) :

Nature in those lakes presents itself splendidly
 In all its contrasts of life and expansion,
 [...]

If not, vengeful, enlarging itself and frightening
 Exploiting volcanoes, rowing in the cyclone
 Breaks into precipices, goes over catacombs,
 Gets out of caverns, terrific avalanche,
 Dislocates the mountains and shakes up its heaps
 The formidable turns of the craters and the tombs
 And after. . . it smiles impassively in its quietude.

This nature is not an autonomous or self-sufficient entity, but a reality consecrated by Filipino spirituality, a Theophany, and a system of analogies that the word of the poem is part. Any action of nature is explained in terms of access to hidden and deep knowledge being revealed through the poem as a mirror of the universe. These landforms make sense in that they refer to and reflect the essential and the eternal, the spirit of a people and their history.

The splendor of nature that reflects mental power produces an allegorical vision: an "internal supersensible vision" (56). The traveler calls his friend the rower to decipher the signs with him, the key to all this display of nature: "the genesis of our race" (56). As for Dante in the *Divine Comedy* "nature is the Book of God, the Holy Book which, if one knows how to read reveals the truth; then it is perfectly natural for a book that shows the truth to do it exactly in the same way that nature reveals it" (Varela-Portas 168).

The Laguna de Bay is malleable material, historically molded like clay. It is the incarnate body of the Philippine homeland, on which is printed the history and culture of the people that have lived and live in it and its surroundings. Similarly, Canon seeks that the images of the past will be imprinted on the intellect of the country's modern inhabitants as an indispensable condition for access to knowledge and ultimately to freedom.

Esotericism, Filipino Spirituality and Modernity

A critique of Canon's poem should reveal the combination of these three interwoven components. Each of these aspects allows us to decipher the categories that come into play in the text, and account for the place that Canon wanted this legend to occupy in Philippine society and culture.

The esoteric potential of Spanish-American *Modernismo* operates like the textual framework on which to consolidate the Philippine spiritual substance. The Philippine cultural material is laid on the *modernista* texture. The edifice that Canon raises is restructured at the same time on the base of its personal experiences, which urges him to fuse the power of popular Philippine knowledge with the potency of technological and scientific developments.

Taking into consideration *Modernismo*, such an analysis allows us to think that, like other *modernista* poets, Canon sought out in esoteric doctrines "the lost key to

the radical enigmas of existence: life and death and beyond." There were "multiple possibilities of renewal, and stimuli to the imagination," according to Ricardo Gullón (70-71), who in studies of *Modernismo* and esotericism pointed out some essential aspects, such as "*Modernismo's* will towards liberation." This will was inspired by a theosophy that denied dogma and promoted varieties of religious thinking (71). The *Modernistas'* concept that poetry is in itself a mystery displays, according to Gullón, that "the impulse moving them is both ethical and aesthetic." Gullón also explains that poetry: "It is the path to achieving the supreme harmony of spheres, the unchanging balance of the constellations, hearing in it the celestial music that in some way will later on resonate into the poem, so that people will listen to the whisper of a voice that will help them live and perhaps, forget" (75).

This *Modernismo*, which is connected with Romanticism, recovers a cyclical time that approaches the medieval conception and the analogy of the universe that they had rescued from ancient times. As Octavio Paz wrote in *The Children of The Mire*, modern poetry is articulated around analogy: "the vision of the universe as a system of correspondences and the vision of language as the universe's double" (10).

Canon takes a journey back to his life experience as embodied in the traveler, who stands as a symbolic figure of a character who has traveled through centuries from the Enlightenment's reasoning to technological advances. In the same way that Romanticism and Modernism do, he looks to his ancestral roots for a deeper meaning in all scientific explanations, which are rendered useless to improve humanity without a *raison d'être* and without a motivating spirit. In this discussion of modernity is also the poem, which shows, on the one hand, the brilliance of progress but insists, on the other hand, that without spiritual knowledge it is reduced to nothing (88):

Thus, our nature
 With only five senses
 Do not perceive the throbs
 Of far distant riches,
 Panoramic grandeur
 Of the immense firmament
 That does not measure the thinking
 Where the millenary hours
 Of elliptical comets
 Are sighs of a moment.

In his doctoral dissertation about the poetry of Ruben Darío and Antonio Machado, Frans van den Broek points out that there is a consensus regarding the reasons for which *modernista* authors search for "alternative and unorthodox ways of thinking." He explains that it was "the rejection of or dissatisfaction with the precedence of rationality and the mechanistic view of the universe, as

well as with the prevailing idea of human progress or evolution based solely on scientific advancements, technology and material well-being" (46). This rejection comes with a clash against the imperialism of the United States of America that appears most strongly in the first decades of 20th century Spanish-Philippine poetry. In the Philippines, the hybrid cultural system was falling apart resulting from the imposition of an American cultural system on an existing combination of indigenous and Spanish cultures. This phenomenon further intensified the search for lost spirituality. Poets such as Guerrero, Apóstol and Recto wrote against the US government's neo-colonialism and promoted a worship of the past that included the Spanish period. In the poetry of these three authors, the link that unifies the sister islands of Luzon, the Visayas and Mindanao is emphasized.³⁰

In the case of Canon it is necessary to bear in mind, on the one hand, the rejection of North American imperialism, and on the other hand, Philippine spirituality of access to power and knowledge. As he states in his prologue (IV): "Legend that is worth nothing without deserving the benevolent judgement of the compatriot avenger of the indigenous Filipino culture." Canon, unlike his contemporaries, does not return to the Hispanic past but only to ancient Philippine spirituality.

Poetry is a path to access knowledge but the poet is not the master of revelation. Rather, he is the instrument through which it is conveyed, in his exploration of the metaphysical meaning of the universe. What Canon conveys is the esoteric essential legacy that he had at his disposal to investigate existence and reality: the visionary, mystical and revolutionary experience of the Philippine people. These practices that are genuinely of the Filipino people nurture this poetry: the worship and pilgrimage to Mt. Banahaw,³⁰ Laguna de Bay, Talim Island, esoteric writing in the caves and the experience of the revolution through the poet's own military experience.

A fundamental difference with other *modernista* poets is that Canon poeticizes a mythical but true and real landscape, not distant nor a product of the imagination. It is a geographic territory of the Philippines, even though this place is mythologized in that its description, plants, animals and fairies are allegorical in their interpretation. Thus, Talim Island, located in the center of Laguna Bay, has become a spiritual center that is accessed through initiation, "a sacred value is concentrated in the island and is associated with the notions of temple and shrine, and it can also be an image of the cosmos or a place of science and initiation and wisdom in the midst of the whirlwind ignorance of the world in a state of decline," says Broek in his analysis of the poem *Colloquium of the Centaurs* by Darío (Espéculo, 2006). But while in his poetic imagination Darío's island is an "island of gold" in Canon's poem, Talim Island is tangible, though the goddesses who inhabit it are not.

Antonie Faivre describes in his introduction to *Modern Esoteric Spirituality* six fundamental characteristics that qualify any form of spirituality as esoteric (xv-xx). Four are intrinsic or necessary: correspondences, real or symbolic; living nature;

imagination and mediation; and the experience of transmutation or metamorphosis. The four are useful to unravel the hermeneutic condition in Canon's poem. So far we have proceeded through the paths of correspondences, nature, imagination and mediation. Only the relevance of transmutation is pending.

Access to independence in the Philippine Revolution was understood as a process of transmutation, as a cocoon to a butterfly, that is achieved through a long process of learning, and usually with the help of something or someone that serves as guide and mediates towards knowledge. That is the key to transformation. Ileto emphasizes the relevance of poems and popular songs to interpret the revolution (103-105). In his analysis of a poem attributed to Procopio Bonifacio, he points out that the revolution is understood as a transition between two worlds, or the passage from one condition to another, a metamorphosis that, though painful, will result in a new being or nation.

In *A la Laguna de Bay* the traveler ascends from the worldly to the ethereal, from scientific explanation to the full experience of the mystical tradition, in a physical tour of the lagoon, from underground caves to the summit of Banahaw to see the entire place from a higher perspective. The traveler is able to reach this state of gnosis after leaving his old way of being. Therefore when he narrated his life story to the rower, he changed his name and from that point onwards was called "sailor." Faivre affirms that the notion of initiation is linked to the transmutation, as knowledge cannot be dissociated from inner experience nor intellectual activity from the imagination. The three phases of this mystical journey are purification, illumination and unification (xviii).

This transformation allows the sailor to be part of the same people as the rower, to listen to him, to understand his language, to access his spiritual knowledge and combine them with his own, so that it is, as Ileto explains throughout his book, part of popular mysticism that inspired in the Katipunan the concept of national unity based on the rebirth of each person to a society of *liwanag* ("light") (109) which consists of reaching truths of internal order.

Symbols and Sacred Objects

Inside the cave, the stars in that blue shadow draw the struggles and bring an indomitable spirit to the body. There is the protagonist reading the symbols of his homeland (*A la Laguna de Bay* 16-17).

In the poem's imagery, these are traces, a sign and sacrament of the knowable. There is a dual process in this human learning. The first occurs in an internal sense and consists of exposing what can be seen of its contingency in order to achieve the true nature of the seen (combination of matter and form). The second occurs in the intellect and traces the path from the seen to what is known through reason, will and intelligence (reason improved by the information of intellectual light, which in Canon is not divine but comes from science and is not intuitive but deductive).

If we take into account what the text says that we have to take into account, it will lead us to a higher form of knowledge, that is, its allegorical function.

Symbols can have different meanings, though they are not paradigmatic but syntagmatic. Their interpretation is explained in the context in which they are found and which is offered in the poem. Unlike in Symbolist or *Modernista* poetry, in this poem the symbols are not open to a correlation system wherein the reader can wander freely looking for correspondences. The text establishes its meaning via consistency in the story, so that each symbol can gain one or two interpretation, by the traveler or/and by the rower. In this sense the text is religious. It limits its interpretation to the meaning that these symbols held for ancient Philippine culture. Therefore it is neither polysemous nor allows for creating meaning as an act of interpretation.

As the environment changes, now "phosphorus / yellow ozone" (18), the traveler finds symbols associated with seals and amulets from the Katipunan,³¹ such as the suns joined in rays and an equilateral triangle inside a circle that is described as a pyramid:

. . . It denotes the base
Of an eternal equilibrium . . .

This is part of the process of the initiation of the traveler, who feels that there is a deviation from ordinary life. Perhaps science is not sufficient to explain this "delirium." These symbols, suns and triangle, are called "arcane" by the rower, who asks the traveler whether his science is capable of explaining what they see (19):

"Can your science explain
The cause or principles
Of secrets which lie
In this ground?

The traveler's answer is that science makes comparisons. He explains what they have seen in the cave (20):

The two of us witness
A simple fact
That explains the Physics
In our space:
A Leyden flask

This is one of the issues that concerns the traveler from the beginning, as he usually tries to explain from a scientific perspective the events that happened to him and that he observed, whereas the rower faces this scientific vision with

esoteric knowledge. For example, the Taal Volcano that is located on the other lake would have been the cause of the formation and separation of both lakes, but the esoteric explanation is:

Maybe it is the center,
The magic symbol
That marks in the waters
The submerged portico
Of immense treasures
Which the fluids keep
Of the legendary sea,

The traveler himself adds the geological explanation (25):

Maybe it is the limit
Of sunken abysses
In large strata
Curved, molten,
By the lavas that sunk
The highest mountains
Forming the vaults
That cover the isthmus
That cross two lakes
In deep paths

The Crocodile

The figure of a crocodile acts as a tunnel between both lakes through underground caves that unite them, and follows the movements of the planets and constellations (26).

This animal is mentioned in three different words, to a certain extent synonymous, these are: lizard, alligator and crocodile. It is also named using other terms related to paleontology, as towards the end of the poem the fossil of the crocodile in the cliff of the Talim Island is described as Ichthyosaur and Iguanodon.³²

Through his connection with the crocodile, the rower can be identified as an alter ego of "The Pilot," a name given to the character Elias, who, in Chapter 23 (entitled "Fishing") of Rizal's novel *Noli me Tangere*, jumps into the pen to kill the crocodile that is trapped in nets and had eaten all the fish. Just as that crocodile (Noli 122) opened its jaws showing "its long fangs," Canon's lizard appears in the eyes of the traveler with open jaws, but the rower knows him well and how to soothe his spirit (28):

Of the great crocodile . . .
 I always know
 Its rare instincts.
 Its open jaws
 Waiting for my indulgences.
 You will see how it awaits; . . .

The rower tames the crocodile by feeding it. It thus serves him to travel through the lagoon and the underground caves until they reach the Pacific. He calls it "my great crocodile." This is an experience against which the traveler's sciences are rendered useless (30):

Do not attempt with your sciences
 Your wise schemes,
 To break those teeth
 Of the grand crocodile . . .

To continue their journey, they tie the boat to the "back of the crocodile" and the rower explains its esoteric meaning (36):

"This gigantic monster of unbreakable armor
 A wise man who came by here told me, when he saw it,
 Will live while the Legend lives on in your race
 That reigns in this lake and refuses slavery
 Inflaming patriotic frenzy in its towns."

This wise man told the rower that the crocodile scales are "readable symbols of unknown things", because among them he could find "lost materials." The wise man disappeared and the rower dared to look between the crocodile's scales and found "a petrified closed box." In order to remove the box the rower had to tame the animal with food (37). Upon taming it, he removed the mother-of-pearl box bejeweled with threadings that come off at the slightest touch, and among the precious stones he found a book with "rare writings."

The crocodile is a very important animal in Philippine folklore. Almost the entire country has stories in which an animal, a crocodile very similar to the one in the poem, appears. One of the Maranao epic tales in the south of the archipelago chronicles the battle between Madali and a lizard as large as a mountain that Madali is able to control after jumping on its neck. After this defeat, the humanized crocodile talks to him and is subjected to become his guardian. The crocodile is discovered as his twin spirit, born at the same time as the human baby. This belief is common to Muslim folklore and present as well in other Filipino spiritual beliefs (McKaugh 18-19).

This story reflects not only a specific vision of the world and represents an example of friendship and hospitality but also points to the elements of spirituality surrounding the Laguna de Bay: the taming of this powerful force turns the rower into a source of power.

This bond between human beings and nature through the crocodile is a metaphor of recognition despite the differences and clashes, which must be experienced by the traveler and the rower. Another example comes from a tale of two brothers. In the book that was kept at the back of the crocodile, the old characters of "ancient Filipino language" (49) narrate a legend that turns out to be a "deadly revenge tragedy":

"A fisherman and a mountaineer fought
Disputing boundaries of A DOMAIN.

In this fight, each one with a "dagger and harpoon," neither is defeated. Finally, through the mystical inscriptions of both weapons they realize that they are "brothers" and build a large village in the Talim Island in the middle of the Laguna de Bay (50).

Other Sacred Objects

The main characters walk, run, climb and descend mountains, go through forests and arrive at the summit of the Banahaw where they expect to see the two lakes. A well appears from which "horrific bugs rise" with poisons that are fatal. The sailor, formerly the traveler, is attacked by one of them and goes into "feverish spasm" and in "a kind of delirium" (47). He awakens from this lethargy:

Upon feeling the effects
Of some bitter potion.
I see clearly and correctly ahead
Objects of rare archaeology,

These objects that the rower kept, he sees upon awakening: "a bouquet of the '*ideal flower*' of March," "an islet composed of quarry stones," "a dagger" with a symbolic design made of rich pearl shells, and a "mysterious book" that contains layered images that "form a prodigious spectrum" (48).

While the sailor was deciphering the legend of two brothers reading the mysterious book, the rower continued in his search and, digging, found the entrance of a "dark cavern" (51) with deathly smells and colossal lizards. He arrived to where the chest was, extracted it from the wall and with it went out of the cave. His face showing evident panic, he told the sailor that he had felt a big force on having moved the chest and "he announced a cataclysm" because "the mountain

was shaking" (51). The traveler tried "to analyze closely these wonders," those that were said to be traces of tales about nature and its interpretation as unfathomable marvel. But at the same time, he proceeded to give a scientific explanation to what it was happening in the cave: with an entryway now opened, the air enters these deep enclosures and makes a fireplace, provoking the movement of underground gases, which can go so far as to prompt the exit of the lava of the volcanoes. Invoking the rower with the following verses, the traveler urges him to close the entrance (53-54):

Let us cover this entrance to the secret
That awakens the roar of the volcanoes
Oh, unschooled, ingenuous rower
You who have the Titans' vigor!
Your instinct surpasses all sciences
As you govern the extraordinary energy
Of the cosmic forces
Like the gods of ancient Olympus

Working together, they return the stones to their position and thus end the feeling produced by the flowing crosswind in the cave. The fraternity between the two occurs finally on both a cognitive and practical level.

Abraxas

On page 77 a prose passage appears in gnostic writing that is reproduced below:

Gnostic writings ABRAXAS of Talim

MAY TALAGANG BINYAGA'T AKLAT HANDOG

SA PAUNANG SARILING NG BAYAN

The Spanish translation provided is the following: "*Existen espontáneamente un bautisterio y un texto ofrendados al primitivo propio pueblo*" ("Naturally there exist a baptistry and a text offered to their own primitive people"). The system of correspondences that runs throughout the entire poem finds its height with the abraxas, designed to highlight what is similar, the transcendent, the symbolic. The abraxas can be read in different ways at different times (77):

Depending on when it is read at different epochs, those fissures appear with letters or tagalog words covered by plants and shellfish resulting in new aphorisms or sentences or simple words that, occasionally, they can be read together or on their own in different times.

This magical inscription is an abraxas because Canon interprets that 364 words can be obtained with the changes in time. And later he applies Kabbalistic operations to come to the conclusion that he can disclose "numbers that, cabalistically, represent key events" (77):

The date of arrival of SANDAKAN'S granddaughter
 The number of the Christian population
 The number of the non-Christian population.
 The number of inhabitants of the Philippine Archipelago
 Probable date of the appearance of the Japanese pirate SIOCO³³
 Also the probable date of the appearance of the Japanese pirate TAISIFU³⁴

It represents a primeval concept of time, as the multiplicity of readings is a ritual that allows continuous reincarnation of a past event, which by this legendary quality can happen again at any given time. This possibility of cyclical time, which allows for a connection with the past, is a primal concept that precedes the Christian era, that unifies the community in eternity but in the future.³⁵ The changes that accompanied modern times in the 19th century developed a linear and accelerated concept of time that allows a community to act to improve their future, but without repeating the past, since with modernity each moment is unique. For this reason the Katipunan reiterates the ritual of searching for the cave of Bernardo Carpio (Ileto 99), one of the Filipino legends that build confidence that the time of freedom, union and peace can be restored. For Canon, this temporal conception of Filipino spirituality, however, should coexist and be reconciled with modern times as modern times mean progress and improvement.³⁶

A Unifying Vision

The following verses, placed towards the middle of the poem, represent the main goal that is to discover "the native legends." The traveler pronounces them when they begin to join efforts, although they still have a long way to go. Succeeding would be impossible if they do not make it together (33):

- Rower, let us proceed in mutual understanding
 To explain mysteries that increase the faith
 Alive in splendor in the Fatherland's legends
 Of the hidden cave and in your rare existence
 Which I observed with amazement when I entered your boat.

Let us unite forces, let us exchange impressions,
 Let us abandon forever the disdainful manner;
 Before the altar of the People let us gather the coats of arms
 Thus if I live among the bullets and monstrous cannons
 You run to the caverns of a sleeping volcano.

This is a vision of the people in syncretism with Filipino spirituality. "The altar of the people" is the symbolic point where the earthly communicates with the heavenly. It therefore requires fraternal efforts, each contributing from their position: the traveler is close to the battles, while the rower is closest to nature. And each one has different means:

You ride in the dorsum of natural monsters,
 I travel in the entrails of an atrocious submarine,

Fraternity is found in several of the stories: the process of mutual understanding that takes place between the traveler and the rower; the connection that exists between the rower and the crocodile; the legend in which the fisherman and the mountaineer discover through the inscriptions on their respective weapons that they are brothers (49); a seismic event that relates to fratricidal strife between brothers who were disputing over inheritance (57); and the help that Sandakan sends to Agrodino to defend against the invading forces when he recognizes him as his grandson (63). As can be seen, the objective of the tales reaches a significance that lies in the transmission of a fundamental pillar of Filipino spirituality.

This fraternity can be interpreted in relation to popular revolutionary movements and independence. Thus, for example, Iletto describes the emphasis in the union that conveyed the teachings of Apolinario to the Brotherhood in 1840: the union of the people in the light, or *liwanag*, is when the individual finds its full potential (54-55). This is the literal meaning of the word 'Katipunan': 'society', and the essence of the association of people for a common struggle (Iletto 117). This unit is achieved through the transformation of each person through an inner experience guided toward the struggle. Therefore, the rites of initiation were related to the battles.

However, the fraternity that Canon proposes repeatedly goes beyond the association, which links with the idea of 'pakikisama', which Iletto translates as "mutual cooperation" (9). Canon versifies fraternity at a much higher level, a stage of recognition and enlightenment of the other person as an equal that involves a

treatment of the other person within her / his dignity and identity. This concept corresponds to 'pakikipagkapwa,' considered as one of the key values in social relationships and the Philippine psychology (Enríquez 41-47).

This insistence of Canon on fraternity implies a criticism of those who provoked the confrontation between different social and cultural components in the Philippines. Canon made very clear that, from his point of view, this connection between people who defended either past or modern cultures and spiritualities was essential for developing the future of the Philippines.

Through *Modernista* esotericism, Canon could reach beyond Philippine revolutionary spirituality. It does not limit his poem, although its presence is pervasive. Departing from his esotericism, Canon embraced a syncretism that allows for modern science, technology and philosophy coming from other places to be recognized as sources of knowledge in Filipino spirituality, transformed through the interpretations of the traveler. The result is not an adaptation of the traveler to the esoteric knowledge, but the integration of all the knowledge he carries with him, and the traditional spirituality, so that it is improved, amplified, and prepared for modernity.

In connection with the concept of '*pakikipagkapwa*,' it means that the result is of a higher order, neither one nor the other. According to Enríquez (45), 'kapwa' covers both he who is 'other' (from the outside 'ibang tao') and who 'belongs to the group' ('hindi ibang tao'); and therefore leads to the recognition of a shared identity. In the poem of Canon, this is expressed through a supersensible inner knowledge shared by the traveler and the rower and expressed through the Laguna de Bay, its legends and scientific interpretations in the poem of Canon.

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Notes

1. The information for this biography was taken from sources specifically cited in the bibliography and consultation with his granddaughter Teresa Canon, whose collaboration in this article is much appreciated.
2. Castor-oil plant: *Ricinus communis*.
3. News taken from *La Solidaridad* (III, No.69, December 15, 1891)
4. Spelled kudyapi in modern Filipino.
5. Only one citation of Canon as a poet was found in Edmundo Farolan's article "Twentieth Century Spanish Philippine Literature", published in several internet sites.
6. *La Solidaridad* I, No. 3. English translation in Tiongson 183.
7. Incorporated in the 1957 curriculum after the expansion of obligatory Spanish classes at university level under the Cuenca Law (Republic Act No. 1881).
8. Several studies can be added, such as those of Mariñas and Veyra, as well as scattered articles in academic magazines of the University of the Philippines' College of Arts and Letters or other unpublished presentations in conferences in recent years.

Jaime de Veyra had previously written the chapter "The Hispanic Culture in the Philippines", part of the book *Historia general de las Literaturas Hispánicas* edited by Guillermo Díaz-Plaja and published in 1958.

Father Miguel A. Bernad SJ had given a lecture at Yale University in 1961 entitled "A Twofold Renaissance in Philippine Literature", a classic reference, as well as his essays in the book *Brown Heritage: Essays on Philippine Cultural Tradition and Literature* (editor A. Manuud, Ateneo de Manila UP, 1967). When in 1998 Bernad published his latest essays in the book *The King's Phrase* he promised, in spite of his age, a book entirely about Spanish-Philippines literature.

Luis Mariñas published his book in 1974, it has 87 pages: *Literatura filipina en castellano* (Philippine Literature in Spanish). His discussions are more contextualized and thoughtful. Nevertheless, he gathers the information basically from *Alinea*, and, unfortunately has some erroneous information (Madrid: Editorial Nacional).

The articles by Wystan de la Peña, "Fil-Hispanic Literary Studies: Current Trends and Challenges in the 21st Century" (2000), and "¿Dónde se encuentran las letras fil-hispánicas en el canon de los estudios literarios filipinos?" (What is the position of Spanish-Philippine Literature within the canon of Philippine Literary Studies?) (2009), display a survey of most recent studies, also including these and dissertations.

The visibility of Spanish-Philippine literature is in the process of recovering, thanks to many efforts; one of them is the series 'Clásicos Hispanofilipinos' by the Instituto Cervantes in Manila, which has inspired new studies.

9. Unfortunately, no substantial information is available on Renan de Zojas except that in 1931 he submitted a work entitled Dior, Dion, Dan & Co. to the Zobel Prize (Brillantes 104).
10. In his book, Luis Mariñas insists on the influence of Modernismo as much as from Spanish America as from Spain, but in a general manner as he has no opportunity to develop the idea (60). A more in-depth analysis can be found in a Masteral thesis by my former professor, the late Reynaldo D. Coronel, from the Department of European Languages in the University of the Philippines, in which he discussed Modernismo in Jesús Balmori's poems (1986) as well as a semiotic study about Balmori's lyric poetry for his dissertation (1994).
11. The 1906 and 1910 editions of Santos Chocano's poems are available in the private libraries of Lopez-Bantug and Araneta-Zaragoza. Also available are books by Rubén Darío published in 1889 and subsequent years as well as an important collection of Enrique Gómez Carrillo's works, one of which is *El Modernismo*, published in 1914. Fortunately, these libraries have been conserved as collections in the De La Salle University in Manila.
12. The University of the Philippines began operations in 1908. The *College Folio* started publication in 1910 in order to foster the use of English language. For a complete discussion about these literary movements and their consequences and influences on Philippine literature in Tagalog, refer to *Balagtasismo versus Modernismo. Panulaang Tagalog sa Ika-20 Siglo* by Virgilio S. Almario. For poetry in English: *Our Scene so Fair. Filipino Poetry in English, 1905 to 1955* by Gémino G. Abad.
13. Reference taken from the classic work by Octavio Paz *The Children of the Mire* (90).
14. A great amount of work still has to be done about this generation despite the detailed study of Resil B. Mojares in *Brains of the Nation*. Figures such as Fernando Canon have yet to receive an adequate study on their life and works. "Cerebro del país" or "brain of the nation" is an expression taken from the second part of Rizal's essay "The Philippines a Century Hence" published on October 31 1889 in *La Solidaridad*.
15. In his letter to José Bantug, Canon claims that it took him nine years to finish the poem (III).
16. Our study of this poetry was delivered at the International Conference "Localities of Nationhood," organized by the Ateneo De Manila University in 2000.
17. All quotations from the poem *A la Laguna de Bay* retain the original format, be it in quotation marks, italics or simple format. Orthography rules were updated and typos were corrected.
18. Poems taken from the typewritten manuscript of his book *Crisálidas* in the Filipiniana Section of the University of the Philippines Library. The book was edited in 1952 by the Philippine Education Foundation.
19. The poems were published in magazines or typewritten. They were compiled by Jaime C. de Veyra in the book *Pentélicas* in 1941.

20. Joaquin Pellicena explains in his essay "Spanish Philippine Poets," published in 1910 in the first issue of *Cultura Filipina*, *Revista mensual de artes y ciencias*, that Rubén Darío and Santos Chocano had a strong influence on Filipino poets.
21. His anthology, *Parnaso filipino*, is the origin of the usual references in secondary sources.
22. They shared the 1926 Zobel Prize for their poetic tournament, which they entitled *Balagtas* in honor of the great poet Francisco Balagtas (Brillantes 69).
23. Narrative poem written in Tagalog by Francisco Balagtas in 1838.
24. This work was then known as *Pasyon Pilapil*, although as Ileto states, *Bienvenido Lumbera's* research in 1969 showed that Mariano Pilapil was the editor in 1814 but not its author (Ileto 12).
25. As such the rower is described (*A la Laguna de Bay* 53):

Oh, unschooled, ingenuous rower
 You who have the Titans' vigor!
 Your instinct surpasses all sciences
 As you govern the extraordinary energy
26. Literature about the topic is very vast, from the studies by Agoncillo and Constantino to Fast & Richardson and Ileto, to the most recent by the previously cited Mojares.
27. The spelling used in the poem is kept. In modern Filipino writing it is spelled as *Banahaw*. We consider the relevance of retaining the way Spanish was used and spoken in the Philippines, and so how Filipino names were Hispanicized.
28. Unfortunately, we can only point out in passing here the relevance of the Spanish Krausism in understanding the process of intellectual training of the *Ilustrado*, with no room to explain the poem's connections with this philosophical trend. See the author's dissertation: *Literature and Krausism in La Solidaridad*, University of the Philippines, 2004.
29. 29 Guerrero's poem written in 1909 is titled "The Sister Islands":

A link stronger
 than Caesar's fist, than death herself,
 makes the Three Islands only one heart,
 who will, in happiness, have the same smile,
 and, in a time of adversity, will know how to fling one's dress clothes
 with one resolute, united effort.

30. See Ileto's explanation regarding its symbolism (68 et seq.)
31. 31 Ancient Philippine culture had written in the caves and walls of the mountains its history, which the popular movements and the Katipunan also did. Ileto narrates Bonifacio and his companions' ascent of Mount Tapusi during Holy week. In the cave of the mountain he left the inscription: "*Panahon na! Mabuhay ang Kalayaan!*" ("It is time!" Long Live Freedom!"). Ileto described the sense of "*panahon*" as the beginning of a new era, an irreversible transformation (102-103).

32. The ichthyosaur is a prehistoric animal that belongs to the order of marine reptiles, similar in appearance to a dolphin. Iguanodon is also a prehistoric animal but of another order, as it is a herbivorous dinosaur.
33. This event was recorded by Guido de Lavezares, who was then the Spanish Governor, and stood for his participation in the fighting against Sioco, deputy to the Japanese pirate Limahon (Maura).
34. The Japanese corsair, known as "Taisifu," also written as "Tayzufu," caused great devastation in Luzon, and was expelled during the time of Governor Gonzalo Ronquillo between 1580 and 1583.
35. This is one of the ideas developed by Ileta as he explains the *Pasyon*. Catholic authorities sought to convey the concept of a future time in eternity and through this strategy keep people immobilized in earthly life. The reiteration of the ritual of resurrection of Jesus Christ revives and sustains the ancient conception of time, allowing the reincarnation of the past in a present time through the ritual itself.
36. We have no more space in this article to develop another important aspect of the modernity of Canon, which is the participation of women in knowledge. The female character, the Sultana granddaughter of Sandakan, though she does not have a proper name, manages an amulet that destroys the warrior heart, and above all dominates the "gnostic abraxas" (63). It is very significant that a woman has access and is a mediator of the esoteric knowledge since, though women do practice this mediation in reality, they are usually absent in the literary representations.

At the end of the poem, Canon writes a few verses in defense of women's participation in knowledge. He records in a note 50 names of his contemporary women as proof of their excellence and makes this comment (78): "as evidence that the poet's allusions with regard to the beautiful Philippine sex voiced by Sandakan as he weighs the wonderful virtues of his granddaughter and our future achievements in Science, Fine Arts and Liberal Arts are not excessively paradoxical."

Appendix

Sections identified in the poem *A la Laguna de Bay*.

	Pages:	Meter:	Rhyme or rhythm:
A)	1 to 16	Hendecasyllable	Prevalence of the amphibrach rhythm.
		Content Division:	Location:
A.1)	1 to 5	Daydreams	Bank of the Laguna de Bay
A.2)	6 to 11	Green cathedral	Talim Island
A.3)	11 to 16	Vault	Diablo Pass
B)	16 to 33	Hexasyllabic	Amphibrach rhythm
		Content Division:	Location:
		Symbols	La Laguna's Surface
C)	33 to 45	Alexandrine: grouped in quintets.	Consonant rhyme.
		Content Division:	Location:
	33 to 50	Brotherhood	Underwater cave and arrival at the Pacific Ocean
D)	45 to 56	Silva	Meter, rhyme and varied strophes
		Content Division:	Location:
	51 to 56	Sacred Objects	Mt. Banahao, surroundings and cave
E)	56 to 67	Hendecasyllable	Several consonant and assonant rhymes.
		Content Division:	Location:
	56 to 73	The Tale of Agrodino	Luzon Island
F)	67 to 83	Tenths: octosyllabic in ten verse strophes	Consonant rhyme
		Content Division:	
	67 to 73	Agrodino's Chant	
	74 to 76	Song to the Laguna de Bay	
	77 to 78	Abraxas in prose	
	78 to 83	Poet's Opinions	