MODERNISMO AND THE DREAM OF A NATIONAL LANGUAGE IN RECTO'S 'BAJO DE LOS COCOTEROS'

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ABSTRACT

Claro M. Recto's *Bajo los Cocoteros* (1911) reveals an early vision for Philippine nationhood rooted in linguistic identity. In *La Lengua del Terruño* and *Celia*, Recto, despite his mastery of Spanish and English, anticipates the necessity of a national language formed from Tagalog and the major Philippine vernaculars. This study situates his *Modernismo* poetics within the broader discourse of national formation, aligning with Benedict Anderson's argument that nations emerge through shared linguistic and cultural identity.

Through *La Lengua del Terruño*, Recto presents language as the soul of a people, essential to historical memory and self-definition. His *Modernista* aesthetics, rich in metaphor and synesthetic imagery, elevate vernacular languages as integral to national consciousness. *Celia*, similarly, embodies the yearning for linguistic and cultural authenticity, suggesting that true independence requires linguistic self-determination. These poems, written when Recto was only 21, foreshadow his role as president of the 1935 Constitutional Convention, which institutionalized the development of a national language from the archipelago's indigenous tongues.

This study employs Roman Jakobson's distinctions between metaphor and metonymy to examine how Recto's poetic language bridges abstract

nationalism with practical nation-building. By foregrounding the poetic interplay between Spanish and the vernaculars, Recto's vision aligns with Anderson's concept of *imagined communities*, where language is central to nationhood. His work underscores that beyond political independence, cultural sovereignty requires a linguistic foundation reflective of the Filipino people.

Ultimately, *Bajo los Cocoteros* demonstrates that Recto's nationalism was not merely political but also linguistic and cultural. His *Modernismo* poetry serves as both a critique of colonial linguistic hegemony and a prophetic call for a national language, positioning him as an intellectual architect of Philippine nationhood decades before its formalization in the 1935 Constitution.

KEY WORDS: *Modernismo, metaphor-metonymy, imagined communities, print culture, print capitalism*

Because Claro M. Recto (1890-1960) is firmly etched in Philippine historical and popular consciousness as nationalist, statesman, orator, legislator, jurist, and president of the 1935 Constitutional Convention—and his is nothing less than the name of the principal commercial thoroughfare in north-central Manila, where Divisoria, the country's biggest flea market, is located—his reputation as a poet, dramatist, essayist, and literary stylist particularly in Spanish is often overlooked, if not entirely forgotten. But before he joined politics, Recto had been a supreme poet and dramatist, in the league of Fernando Ma. Guerrero and Cecilio Apostól, the two greatest poets in Spanish-Philippine letters, both of whom wrote laudatory introductions to Recto's only poetry collection, *Bajo de los cocoteros*,[1] published in 1911

[1] Recto, Claro M. *Bajo los Cocoteros: Almas y Panoramas*. Manila: Libreria Manila Filatelica, 1911.

when he was only 21! (That year, too, he won the grand prize in the poetry writing contest to commemorate the tricentenary of the foundation of the University of Santo Tomas, where Recto was taking up law. [2])

The collection was well received, but by 1914, according to Jaime de Veyra, "Recto had set aside his poetic lyre" to join politics. [3] He continued writing occasional poetry the most distinguished of which was "Mi Choza de Nipa"; and he wrote the introductions to Manuel Bernabe's *Cantos del Tropico* (1929) and *Perfil de Cresta* (1958), both introductions displaying his grasp of poetics, notably Modernismo. But by and large, his poetic pen had become dormant and this remained the case till his untimely death in 1960 in Rome on his way to Madrid. Irony of all ironies, the supreme paragon of *Hispanidad* in Philippine letters and statesmanship never made it to the country and civilization that fired his imagination, animated his soul, and mothered his nation.

It would be a sweeping generalization, if not a hyperbole, for Recto to be called a *modernista*. In fact, except perhaps for the early Jesús Balmori, there was never a *modernista cerrado* in Spanish Philippine letters. Like Guerrero and perhaps Apostól, Recto's poetry was patriotic but laced with modernista elements. In *La Hispanidad en Filipinas*, Jaime de Veyra excludes Recto and Apostol from Guerrero and the other modernistas, arguing that their "classical education shielded them from the novelties of modernismo." But De Veyra admits they felt Modernismo's impact. [4] Moreover among

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2 Recto's winning poem is "A Benavides." Full text of the poem is in *Alma Mater: The University of Santo Tomas as Seen by its Own Poets*, edited and introduced by Fr. Fidel Villarroel, OP. Manila: UST Publishing House and Spanish Program for Cultural Cooperation, 2009.

3 De Veyra, Jaime. *La Hispanidad en Filipinas*. Madrid: Publicaciones del Círculo Filipino, 1961; page 72.

4 De Veyra, pages 69-70.

few poems that Apostol wrote in the vein of Modernismo, De Veyra cites "Elogio del Poeta," which is a poetic tribute to Recto. (The poem is going to be discussed below.) Alfred S. Veloso goes as far as to declare Recto as "the link between the classicists and the modernists." [5] But reviewing *Bajo de los cocoteros* now, one finds its patriotic poems infused with the spirit of Modernismo. And outside of its patriotic sub-divisions (*Del Libro de la Patria*, *Salmos al Patriota*, and *Clarines de Combate*), the rest of the volume contains many poems that are unmistakably modernista: their titles alone, such as "Rosas de Carne" and "De la Vida Bohemia," should indicate that.

Moreover, the advance discourses of Recto, Guerrero, and Apostól ahead of the poems in the book, and much later, the epilogues by Teodoro M. Kalaw and Recto, clearly betray the volume's modernista influence. All these discourses should constitute a tentative poetics of Philippine Modernismo.

Modernismo was the literary movement that originated in Hispanic America through the poetry collection *Azul,* written by the Nicaraguan poet Ruben Dario (1867-1917), who by critical consensus, is the most important poet in Spanish in the 20th century and perhaps, even in the new century. Influenced by French Parnassianism and the Symbolist movement, Modernismo is characterized by aestheticism, cosmopolitanism, exoticism, and mysticism. Modernismo should not be confused with Anglo-American modernism which came much later. The fact that it originated in Hispanic America, many of whose countries were newly liberated from Spanish colonialism, but not much later faced the threat of North American expansionism, should underscore its nationalist spirit and independent drive. According to Guillermo Diaz-Plaja in his history of Spanish literature,

[5] Veloso, Alfredo S. *Anguish, Fulness, Nirvana: Collection of Famous Poems in Spanish Written by Filipino Writers and with Corresponding Translations in English*. Quezon City: Asvel Publishing Co., 1960; page 60.

"Modernism was primarily a Spanish-American literary phenomenon, introduced to Continental Spain by a poet from America." [6]

Modernismo was already the toast of the Spanish-Philippine culturati even before the revolution and Rizal's execution in 1986. In 1894, Guerrero addressed the opening of Club Euterpo, by all indications, a literary salon that gathered the young turks in poetry, such as Apostól (only seventeen then), Epifanio de los Santos Cristobal, Jose Abreu, Clemente Zulueta, and many others. This was the generation that followed the *propagandistas*.

If the Propaganda Movement were the interregnum in the country's history between the execution of the three martyr-priests (secular Fathers Jose Burgos, Mariano Gomez and Jacinto Zamora) and the Revolution of 1896, during which a "nationalist ideology" was developed, based on " a consciousness of national identity of being one people," [7] the Modernista generation of Guerrero and Apostól, through their poetry, consolidated the national imaginary; they carried on the work of forging a national ideology.

As it would turn out, Recto, with his powerful oratory and brilliant prose in both Spanish and English, would later provide a firmer configuration of that national ideology. But he wasn't a member of Club Euterpe, for he should be only four years old in 1894 (he was born in 1890). He was almost a generation younger than Guerrero and Apostól, but just as gifted and brilliant in the classic education which he had also learned from the Jesuits and the Dominicans. A young man in a hurry, he got published as an author of a book of poems even ahead of Guerrero, whose *Crisalidas* came out in 1914, and Apostól, whose *Pentelicas* was published but only posthumously in 1941.

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6 Diaz-Plaza, Guillermo. *A History of Spanish Literature*. New York: New York University Press, 1971; page 324.

7 Schumacher, John N., SJ. *The Propaganda Movement, 1880-1895. The Creation of a Filipino Consciousness, the Making of a Revolution*. Quezon City: Ateneo de Manila UP, 1997.

Published in 1911, Recto's *Bajo de los Cocoteros* remains a publishing and literary milestone: it carries illustrations by Fabian de la Rosa, Fernando Amorsolo, and Jorge Pineda, the masters of Philippine art, whose images help consolidate the national imaginary after the foundational images of Juan V. Luna's and Felix Resurreccion Hidalgo's. The book likewise carries the *"rasgos musicales"* (musical features) of composers Juan Hernandez and Antonio Escamilla. The latter wrote "Himno de Balintawak," which could have been the national anthem had Emilio Aguinaldo not found it too elaborate, so that it was replaced by "Marcha Nacional Filipino" by Julian Felipe. Escamilla wrote "Potpourri of Popular Airs," perhaps the most popular band work that incorporates a number of very popular folk songs. As can be gleaned from the lineup of artists mustered by Recto for the book, *Bajo de los cocoteros* is a nationalist showcase: a tour de force of nationalism, calculated to both raise the Philippine flag while evading the eye of lynx-eyed American censors. In fact, the first suite of poems, *Del Libro de la Patria*, is preceded by an illustration of Pineda with the caption "*Bajo la bandera revolucionaria*," showing Philippine revolutionaries charging against which enemy—Spain or North America? It does not say. The charge is led by the flag without color or image (obviously to evade the Flag Law during the American colonial era that banned the flying of the Philippine or the Katipunan flag). And perhaps to show that he's on the side of the law, Recto dedicates *Del Libro dela Patria* to Sergio Osmeña, the speaker of the House of Representatives and the most pre-eminent Philippine leader and statesman at that time. In his dedication, Recto calls Osmeña *"el simbolo de nacionalismo."* Not surprisingly the caption of the illustration is the poem of the same title, included in the penultimate suite of poems that ends the collection, *Clarines de combate* ("bugles of combat"). True enough the eponymous poem is dedicated to Pineda, making Recto's nationalistic motive very clear.

Because all four major writers—Guerrero, Apostól, Kalaw, and Recto—provide discourses on Modernismo (some of them incidental,

admittedly), modernista aesthetics in the context of Spanish-Philippine letters, as it is expatiated in *Bajo de los cocoteros*, will be tackled in this essay. Afterward, the first suite of poems in the collection, *Del Libro de la Patria*, will be analyzed so as to draw its modernista elements along with the nationalist allegories and tropes that have been largely culled from modernista aesthetics. Finally, we will focus on the allegories and tropes employed by Recto so as to prefigure the need for a "national language," which he suggests in poems such as *"La Lengua Terruño"* and *"Celia,"* in which he invokes the memory of the Father of Tagalog Poetry, Francisco Balagtas. This dovetails with the thesis of *Imagined Communities*, in which Benedict Anderson examines how 19th-century European nationalism was closely tied to language and how "national print-languages" helped shaped national identities.

Recto's 'Offertorio'

In his "Ofertorio," or dedication to Don Gregorio Aguilera y Solis" of Lipa, Batangas (apparently his literary patron), Recto initially shows a profound sense of patriotism, a defining feature of his poetic identity. He writes, *"Dedico estos cantos humildes a mi patria adorada, a Filipinas..."* ("I dedicate these humble songs to my beloved country, the Philippines..."). This statement situates Recto firmly within the romanticist tradition of patriotic poetry, emphasizing love of country as a central theme. However, the dedication also introduces Modernista elements, such as his description of the collection as a *"jardín de ensueños"* ("garden of dreams"). The phrase reflects a quintessential modernista fascination with dreams, imagination, and the transcendence of mundane reality. By framing his poems as a garden, Recto invokes nature as a space of wonder and enchantment, aligning his work with the modernista aesthetic.

One of the defining traits of Modernismo is its preference for elaborate and refined imagery, often drawn from nature and mythology. Recto's dedication is suffused with floral metaphors, particularly the imagery of roses. The roses in "Ofertorio" are not mere decorative elements; they are imbued with deep symbolic significance, representing artistic creation, suffering, and fleeting beauty. He describes them as *"pálidas, demasiado tristes,"* (pale and very sad) suggesting the fragility of inspiration and the inevitable decay of artistic ideals. The roses, *"que se emborracharon de sol y tuvieron confidencias íntimas con la luna"* ("that are drunk with the sun and had intimate confidences with the moon") reflect the quintessential modernista fascination with celestial elements and the blending of the natural with the mystical.

Another hallmark of Modernismo is its emphasis on musicality and rhythm. Recto's prose flows with a lyrical quality, enhanced by alliteration, assonance, and carefully measured cadences. Phrases like *"rosas mañaneras de mi jardín enfermo, muy enfermo, acaso muerto ya"* (morning roses from my sick garden, very sick, perhaps already dead), carry a melancholic, almost hypnotic resonance, reinforcing the theme of decline and lost beauty. The interplay of light and darkness, day and night, further accentuates this musicality, creating a dynamic contrast between the vibrant moment of artistic creation and its inevitable decay.

Modernista literature often explores themes of existential anguish, artistic suffering, and the fleeting nature of beauty. Recto's reference to the roses dying *"antes de ponerse el sol"* ("before the sun sets") encapsulates this theme, portraying the ephemerality of artistic inspiration and the inevitability of creative exhaustion. The dedication also conveys a sense of spiritual and artistic communion, as seen in the imagery of *"dos corazones"* ("two hearts") consuming the *"Hostia"* ("sacred host") of Art and drinking the *"licor divino y generoso"* ("divine and generous wine") of Friendship. This sacramental

language elevates the artistic experience to a near-religious level, another common trait in modernista poetry.

The synesthetic blending of senses—sight, smell, and touch—adds another layer of modernista aesthetics. Recto describes the roses not only by their visual traits but also by their scent, which *"huelen á corazón, á corazón atormentado"* ("they smell like a heart, like a tormented heart") merging the sensory with the emotional. This interplay of perception and sentiment enhances the highly aestheticized, almost dreamlike quality of the text, reflecting the modernista pursuit of beauty beyond the tangible world.

Finally, the dedication concludes with a grand, almost ritualistic gesture: the offering of the roses to a sacred artistic altar, invoking divine fire to consume them in a final act of aesthetic sacrifice. This theatrical and mystical conclusion aligns with Modernismo's preoccupation with the sacredness of art and the transcendence of artistic expression. In sum, Recto's *Ofertorio* is a quintessential modernista text, rich in ornate imagery, musicality, and symbolism. It captures the movement's core preoccupations with beauty, transience, and artistic devotion.

Guerrero's 'Introit'

After "Ofertorio," the ritual element of the advanced discourses is continued in Guerrero's foreword, titled "Introit." Guerrero likewise extends the garden metaphor of Recto's dedication and writes:

> *En este jardín de ensueños, las flores cantan, los pájaros rezan, y el aire lleva perfumes que embriagan el alma. Es un mundo aparte, donde el idealismo y el misticismo se entrelazan para dar vida a versos que parecen susurros del infinito.*
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> In this garden of dreams, the flowers sing, the birds pray, and the air carries perfumes that intoxicate the soul. It is a world

apart, where idealism and mysticism intertwine to give life to verses that seem like whispers of the infinite. [8]

Guerrero's description underscores the modernista emphasis on beauty, mysticism, and the transcendence of reality. The imagery of singing flowers and praying birds transforms nature into a mystical, enchanted realm, mirroring the modernista penchant for creating idealized, otherworldly landscapes. This mystical quality permeates Recto's poetry, where nature serves not merely as a backdrop but as an active participant in the expression of profound truths.

Guerrero's introduction immediately situates Recto's poetry within a sacred poetic tradition. His invocation of Henry Wadsworth Longfellow's "This is the forest primeval" is both ironic and anachronistic: Longfellow had died in 1882, long before Rubén Darío's *Azul* was published in 1888 and launched the Modernismo movement. Moreover, even in 1911, there was hardly any modernist movement to speak of in Anglo-American letters. Clearly, Guerrero's use of the familiar line from Longfellow's *Evangeline* was intended to showcase his command of American poetry and perhaps to flatter the American establishment—possibly as a strategic gesture to shield Recto's patriotic collection and lower the guard of censors. At the same time, it serves to establish a literary genealogy that places Recto within a lineage of great poets. This reverence for poetry as an almost divine art form is central to Modernismo, which sought to elevate poetry beyond mere didacticism and imbue it with transcendental significance. Guerrero's reference to the poet's youth—Recto was only 21 years old when *Bajo los Cocoteros* was published—suggests a Romantic ideal of the young poet as an inspired visionary, a concept frequently celebrated in Modernismo.

The introduction also presents poetry as a necessary antidote to the mundane, materialistic concerns of modern life. Guerrero laments the

[8] Recto, pages xi-xvii.

dominance of utilitarianism, likening the world's obsession with pragmatism and commerce to a sickness that only poetry can heal. His allusion to Percy Bysshe Shelley's assertion, that poetry redeems humanity from its spiritual failings, echoes the Modernista belief in poetry's redemptive power. For Guerrero, Recto's verses offer an immersion into beauty, an escape from the *"prosaísmos de esta edad del dólar, del 'trust' y de la praxis"* [9] (the prosaic nature of this age of the dollar, of the trust, and of pragmatism). This modern disillusionment, contrasted with poetry's luminous and purifying effect, is a key theme in Modernismo.

One of the defining features of Modernismo is its luxurious and highly aestheticized language, which Guerrero employs throughout the introduction. His prose is replete with musicality and rhythm, characteristics that he also praises in Recto's poetry. He describes Recto's verses as *"rosas gráciles, balsámicas y hechiceras"* [10](graceful, balsamic, and bewitching roses), illustrating how the poet's words bloom into delicate and enchanting beauty. This use of floral and sensory imagery is a hallmark of Modernismo, which sought to create a poetic language that was as ornamental and evocative as possible.

Another central element of Modernismo in Guerrero's introduction is the fusion of natural and artistic imagery. He portrays poetry as an enchanted forest and describes the act of writing verse as a sacred ritual performed in the *"basílica del Arte"* [11] (basilica of Art). By blending nature with sacred architecture, Guerrero reflects the Modernista inclination toward synesthetic descriptions, where visual, tactile, and auditory elements merge into a single, heightened aesthetic experience.

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[9] Recto, page xi.

[10] Ibid.

[11] Ibid.

A significant portion of the introduction is dedicated to tracing Recto's evolution as a poet. Guerrero acknowledges that Recto's early compositions were constrained by classical rigidity owing to his class discipline in the schools of the Jesuits and Dominicans, but he celebrates the poet's eventual liberation from these strictures. The transition from rigid classicism to a freer, more expressive style mirrors the broader shift that Modernismo represented in Spanish-language poetry. Guerrero describes Recto's poetic growth as a shedding of schoolroom conventions in favor of artistic individualism and emotional depth. This emphasis on personal expression, originality, and formal innovation aligns with Modernismo's literary agenda.

Moreover, Guerrero lauds Recto's ability to synthesize subjective emotion with external reality—a key trait of Modernismo. He argues that Recto does not merely use symbols as cryptic veils for his meaning but instead integrates them harmoniously into his poetic vision. Guerrero insists that Recto's poetry avoids the excessive obscurity that some critics associate with Modernismo; instead, it achieves a clarity that makes his artistic and emotional intentions accessible to the reader. This balance between aesthetic complexity and expressive transparency is crucial to Modernismo's success as a movement.

One of the most striking Modernista aspects of Guerrero's introduction is his discussion of rhythm and musicality in Recto's verse. He extols the poet's mastery of cadence, his ability to make verse "flexible as silk," and his preference for expansive, sonorous meters like the Alexandrine. Guerrero's detailed discussion of verse structure reflects Modernismo's preoccupation with form, particularly its desire to imbue poetry with the musicality of song. The emphasis on harmonious sound patterns, deliberate metric choices, and fluidity of expression showcases Modernismo's devotion to the "music" of poetry.

But by and large, Guerrero's introduction balances Modernismo aesthetics with traditional patriotic poetry.

Guerrero also highlights Recto's thematic shift from early exoticism to a more localized, Philippine-centered imagery. Initially influenced by classical models and foreign literary traditions, Recto gradually embraced themes inspired by his native land. This transition marks a significant point of convergence between Modernismo and the emerging nationalist consciousness in Philippine literature. Guerrero recognizes that Recto, like other Modernista poets, uses the aesthetics of beauty and idealism, not just for escapism, but also as a means of reimagining national identity. By anchoring his poetry in the richness of the Filipino landscape and its emotional resonances, Recto follows the Modernista path of synthesizing cosmopolitan elegance with indigenous authenticity.

It must be pointed out, however, that Claro M. Recto's poetry, as presented by Guerrero in his "Introit," demonstrates a nuanced relationship with Modernismo. While Guerrero acknowledges Recto's adoption of certain stylistic and thematic elements characteristic of Modernismo, he ultimately situates Recto within a broader poetic tradition that balances modernist innovation with classical structures, particularly in his handling of patriotic themes.

Guerrero situates Recto's poetry within the enchanted realm of beauty and art: *"estamos, lector discretísimo y amable, en plena floresta poética"* [12]("we are, most discreet and kind reader, in a full poetic forest"). This metaphor of poetry as a lush and vibrant forest aligns with Modernismo's aestheticism, its preoccupation with beauty, and its opposition to utilitarianism. However, Guerrero is quick to differentiate Recto's poetic evolution from a complete immersion in the modernist movement. He notes that, while Recto initially

[12] Ibid., page 11.

adhered to classical and Jesuit-influenced structures—*"medio anquilosadas por las rigideces clásicas y los tópicos del santoral y el martirologio"* [13] ("somewhat stiffened by classical rigidities and the topoi of the hagiography and martyrology")—he later developed a poetic voice that blended modernist refinement with nationalist commitment.

One of the key characteristics of Modernismo is its preference for exoticism, musicality, and a highly stylized approach to language. Guerrero acknowledges that Recto possesses these elements, particularly in his flexible verse forms and lush imagery: *"El verso de este poeta lírico es de una flexibilidad maravillante"* [14] ("The verse of this lyrical poet possesses a marvelous flexibility"). This characteristic aligns with modernist ideals, as does Recto's ability to evoke the Philippine landscape with a sensory richness that departs from purely European influences. Guerrero describes this shift as an emancipation from *"rutinas paleontológicas"*[15] ("paleontological routines"), signifying Recto's move beyond rigid classical constraints toward a freer poetic mode.

However, Guerrero makes a crucial distinction in describing Recto's poetic method. Unlike some modernistas who indulge in obscure symbolism, Recto maintains a clear and direct engagement with reality. Guerrero states: **"***No pone en el escarceo neurológico la característica del verso de estos días, ni trata de embozar lo que piensa y siente."*[16] ("He does not place the hallmark of contemporary verse in neurological agitation, nor does he seek to conceal what he thinks and feels.") This clarity in Recto's verse suggests a resistance to the excesses of Modernismo, instead favoring a more direct and engaged poetic voice.

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13 Ibid., page 14.

14 Ibid.

15 Ibid.

16 Ibid., page 15.

This engagement is most evident in Recto's patriotic themes. Guerrero describes Recto's nationalism as deeply ingrained in his poetic consciousness: *"Nada tan plausible en la copiosa labor de este joven poeta, como su idolatría... por aquellos que le llevan al oído... la voz íntima y materna de esta Patria triste"* [17]("Nothing is as commendable in the abundant work of this young poet as his devotion... to those themes that bring to his ear... the intimate and maternal voice of this sorrowful Homeland"). This passage underscores how Recto's poetry, despite its modernist elements, remains fundamentally tied to the national struggle.

Guerrero further reinforces this idea by quoting Percy Bysshe Shelley: *"Las estancias de Recto son, según la frase de Shelley, trompetas que llaman a la batalla"* [18] ("Recto's stanzas are, in Shelley's words, trumpets calling to battle"). This invocation of poetry as a call to arms underscores how Recto's work transcends aestheticism to fulfill a social and political function. In this regard, Recto diverges from Modernismo's emphasis on the individual's interiority, and instead aligns his poetry with the collective aspirations of the Filipino people.

Thus, while Recto employs modernist techniques—such as musicality, vibrant imagery, and a refined lyrical voice—his poetry ultimately serves a higher purpose that aligns with traditional and nationalist ideals. Guerrero's introduction suggests that Recto's poetic identity is one of synthesis rather than adherence to a single school. He embraces the beauty and innovation of Modernismo while ensuring that his work remains accessible and committed to patriotic expression.

Therefore, Recto's poetry, as presented in *Bajo los Cocoteros*, does not fully conform to Modernismo, but rather balances modernist elements

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[17] Ibid., page xviii.

[18] Ibid., page xii.

with traditional and nationalist concerns. Guerrero's "Introit" acknowledges Recto's evolution from rigid classical influences to a more liberated poetic form, while emphasizing his unwavering commitment to the Philippine national identity. Ultimately, Recto's poetry serves as a bridge between aesthetic refinement and patriotic duty, demonstrating how poetry can be both beautiful and politically resonant.

Apóstol's 'Elogio'

If in the two initial paratexts, Recto makes an "Ofertorio" and Guerrera intones an "Introit," the ritual is continued by Apostól, with his "Elogio del Poeta," [19] that is, "Praise of the Poet."

Apóstol's eulogy further illuminates the modernista dimensions of Recto's work. In his tribute, Apóstol writes: "*Plenos rosales en este volumen / brindan al alma sus rosas de ensueño, / y nos evocan, por arte del numen, / los hiperbóreos espacios del sueño.*" [20] ("Full-bloomed roses in this volume / offer the soul their dreamlike petals, / and through the art of inspiration evoke for us / the boundless expanses of dreams.")

This passage captures the essence of modernismo with its focus on the dreamlike and the transcendent. Apóstol's reference to *"hiperbóreos espacios del sueño"* [21]("boundless expanses of dreams") reflects the modernista fascination with exploring realms beyond the physical, echoing Darío's vision of poetry as a gateway to the infinite. Additionally, Apóstol's invocation of Ariel, from the famous essay by José Enrique Rodó, [22]in which the Uruguayan

[19] Ibid., page xxiii.

[20] Ibid.

[21] Ibid.

[22] Rodó, José Enrique. *Ariel*. Tr. by Margaret Sayers Peden. University of Texas Press, Austin, 1988.

modernista poet reimagines the famous character of Shakespeare in *The Tempest*, and makes him a symbol of Latin American cultural identity, aligns Recto's poetry with the modernista critique of North American utilitarianism and the modernista defense of a unique cultural essence. Apóstol writes: "*Pára, que á medro dispone tus ocios / en este oasis Ariel el divino*"[23] ("Pause, for here Ariel the divine offers your rest a fruitful oasis").

The image of Ariel's oasis symbolizes a sanctuary for the soul, a space where art and culture flourish amidst the encroachments of utilitarian values. This vision resonates with the modernista aspiration to elevate the spirit through beauty and transcendence.

Similarly, Recto's poetry can be seen as a defense of Filipino cultural identity, celebrating the nation's natural beauty and spiritual essence. His patriotic themes, while rooted in romanticism, are elevated by modernista elements that imbue them with universal resonance.

Kalaw's 'Itte, missa est'

At the end of the collection, Teodoro M. Kalaw contributes his own paratext that continues with the eucharistic metaphor of the initial paratexts. Titled "Ite, Missa est," the declaration intoned by the celebrant-priest in the traditional Latin Mass that "The Mass is over," Kalaw's essay [24]consolidates the view that the collection is one that allegorizes the nation by making allusions to Philippine landscapes and literary authors and characters.

Kalaw's epilogue to *Bajo los cocoteros* highlights the poet's engagement with modernista aesthetics while affirming his patriotic devotion. Kalaw

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[23] Ibid., page 14.

[24] Recto, page 225-231.

underscores how Recto, despite being immersed in the poetic currents of his time, resists complete absorption into modernity's sweeping influence. Instead, he channels his literary prowess into celebrating the Philippine landscape and national spirit. Kalaw writes:

> *Algo hay que decir, repito, de este Recto, porque, aunque sea poeta de nuestra época, poeta nuevo, nos ofrece el edificante ejemplo—tan raro en muchos—de no dejarse perder ni ahogar en esa ola de modernidad que viene de tierras lejanas y que parece transformarlo todo. Conserva, a diferencia de tantos, su propia individualidad, formada en la atmósfera del país, y procura emplear sus facultades en una noble misión poética, en una gallarda empresa de patriotismo y amor: en cantar y exaltar el alma y el paisaje de Filipinas.* [25]
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> Something must be said, I repeat, about this Recto, for though he is a poet of our time, a new poet, he brings us the edifying example—so rare among many—of refusing to let his emerging and already vigorous literary personality be lost and drowned in that wave of modernity sweeping in from distant lands, a wave that seems to transform everything. Unlike many, he preserves his individuality, formed within the country's atmosphere, and seeks to employ his faculties in a noble poetic mission, in a gallant endeavor of patriotism and love: in singing of and exalting the soul and landscape of the Philippines.

Kalaw's observation reflects a fundamental tension in Recto's poetry—his engagement with modernismo, the fin-de-siècle literary

[25] Ibid., page 226.

movement, characterized by sensual imagery, musicality, and cosmopolitan refinement, while remaining rooted in nationalist themes. Modernismo in Hispanic poetry emphasizes aesthetic sophistication and international sensibilities. Recto, too, employs the movement's stylistic flourishes—his verse is rich in metaphor, rhythm, and evocative landscapes—yet, as Kalaw insists, his art serves a higher purpose than mere aesthetic indulgence.

Unlike other poets, who embraced Modernismo as an escape into exoticism, Recto harnesses its stylistic innovations to magnify Filipino identity. He elevates native landscapes, cultural motifs, and the patriotic soul, ensuring that his poetry, while modern in form, remains resolutely nationalist in substance. This balance, as Kalaw suggests, distinguishes Recto's literary vision: he navigates modern currents without surrendering to them, using his artistry to exalt the Philippines. Thus, *Bajo los cocoteros* stands as both a testament to modernista refinement and an assertion of national pride, embodying the poet's dual commitment to literary excellence and patriotic duty.

Kalaw's epilogue provides a compelling analysis of the nationalist tropes embedded in the collection. Kalaw's reflections on Recto's poetry highlight themes of patriotism, cultural identity, and historical consciousness. Through literary allusions, symbolic landscapes, and historical figures, Recto constructs a poetic vision of the Filipino nation that is both a lament for what has been lost and a call to preserve what remains.

Kalaw emphasizes Recto's deep engagement with the Filipino landscape, presenting it as a crucial element of national identity. He writes:

> *Después de todo, las bellezas del paisaje, las flores sin par de nuestro terruño, nuestros lagos maravillosos, nuestras montañas gigantes, la hermosura de nuestras mujeres, la intrepidez*

> *y bizarría de nuestros héroes, son siempre lo que nos queda a nosotros. ¡Todo nos lo quitan ya: hasta la lengua!* [26]
>
> After all, the beauty of the landscape, the peerless flowers of our land, our marvelous lakes, our towering mountains, the loveliness of our women, the boldness and gallantry of our heroes—these are what remain to us. Everything else is taken away—even our language!

Here, Kalaw underscores the idea that even as colonization erodes cultural and linguistic sovereignty, the Filipino landscape and its symbolic representations remain as repositories of national identity. Recto's descriptions of mountains, lakes, and forests serve as metaphors for the endurance of the Filipino spirit. In particular, Mount Banahaw is presented not just as a geographical feature but as a sacred space of resistance: *"Al ejército bravo, hostil y temerario/ de Hermano Apolinario/ tu sombra en mil combates sirvió de pabellón."* [27] (*"*To the brave, hostile, and daring army of Brother Apolinario, your shadow, in a thousand battles, served as their banner.")

Mount Banahaw, long associated with mystical and revolutionary traditions, is transformed into a living symbol of the Filipino struggle against oppression. By embedding these landscapes in his poetry, Recto reinforces the connection between the land and the historical sacrifices made by those who fought for national liberation.

Kalaw's analysis also highlights Recto's use of literary and historical figures to construct a nationalist narrative. The earlier reference to Tomás Pinpin, the early Filipino printer, is particularly striking: *"Buscador de la aurora,/ rival de Gutenberg,/ hermano de Florante, Burgos, Gómez, Zamora,/*

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[26] Ibid., 228.

[27] "Banahaw" poem in Recto, pages 74-76.

Del Pilar, Panganiban, López Jaena, Luna..." [28] (*"Seeker* of the dawn, rival of Gutenberg, brother of Florante, Burgos, Gómez, Zamora, Del Pilar, Panganiban, López Jaena, Luna...")

By situating Pinpin among heroes of the Philippine Revolution, Recto elevates his contributions to print culture as foundational to the development of Filipino consciousness. Similarly, the invocation of María Clara, the tragic heroine of *Noli Me Tangere*, serves to remind readers of the oppressive colonial structures that defined the Filipino experience: *"Dulce impúber del trópico, espiritual, soñadora, Encarnación legítima de la tierna tagala, mil ilang-ilangs, mil sampaguitas."* [29] (Sweet maiden of the tropics, spiritual, dreamy, legitimate incarnation of the gentle Tagala, a thousand ilang-ilangs, a thousand sampaguitas.)

María Clara, once an idealized figure of virtue, becomes a symbol of colonial victimization. Yet, Kalaw interprets Recto's depiction of María Clara as part of a broader nationalist project—one that seeks to reclaim the historical and literary figures of the past to inspire contemporary resistance.

Language as a site of struggle

One of the most poignant themes in Kalaw's epilogue is the role of language in national identity. He acknowledges the decline of Spanish in the Philippines, recognizing that newer generations are shifting toward English. However, he also argues that the true essence of nationalism lies, not in the language used, but in the purpose it serves:

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[28] "Tomas Pinpin," Ibid., pages 23-25.

[29] "Rosas a Maria," ibid., page 36.

Porque importa poco la lengua... la cuestión es tener consagrados el pensamiento y la labor al servicio de una idea. [30]

Because the language matters little... the question is to dedicate thought and labor to the service of an idea.

Recto's decision to write in Spanish, then, is not a contradiction of nationalism but a strategic choice. His mastery of the language allows him to preserve a literary tradition that connects the Philippines to its past, even as the nation faces new linguistic realities.

Kalaw's analysis in *Ite, missa est* ultimately frames Recto's *Bajo los Cocoteros* as a work of cultural reclamation. Through evocative landscapes, historical and literary allusions, and reflections on language, Recto crafts a poetic nationalism that mourns colonial losses while affirming Filipino resilience. Kalaw's final exhortation to Recto captures this spirit:

Bienhayas, poeta, que llegas a tiempo para ensalzar lo nuestro. Sirve de guía a tu generación.[31]

Well done, poet, for arriving just in time to exalt what is ours. Be a guide to your generation.

In positioning Recto as both poet and patriot, Kalaw affirms the enduring power of literature as a tool for nation-building. Even as the political landscape shifts, the themes explored in *Bajo los Cocoteros* continue to resonate, reminding us of the central role of cultural identity in the struggle for self-determination.

To wrap up the collection, Recto does his own epilogue after that of Kalaw's, in which he somehow reveals his role as a bridge between

[30] Ibid., page 226.

[31] Ibid., page 228.

Modernismo and patriotic poetry. While he embraced the aesthetic ideals of Modernismo, inspired by Rubén Darío, he also infused his poetry with themes of freedom and national identity, culminating in a voice of protest and indignation.

In his epilogue, Recto describes his Muse as a divine presence accompanying him through landscapes bathed in moonlight, mirroring the *Modernista* preoccupation with dreamlike and exotic settings. His longing for new sensations reflects the movement's aestheticist tendencies, where art is pursued for its own sake. However, like Darío's poetry that became stridently political as signaled by *A Roosevelt* in 1904, Recto's poetry has also become a vehicle for "protest."

The final lines of the epilogue mark a departure from pure aestheticism and affirm Recto's commitment to patriotic poetry. He declares: "*Y que el alarido y reto de mi alma melancólica y rebelde repercuta fibra le en todos tos oídos—amigos y enemigos, como palabra eterna de gratitud, de amor, de cordialidad, de indignación y de protesta...*" [32] ("And may the cry and challenge of my melancholic and rebellious soul resound with eternal force in all ears—friend and foe alike—as a lasting word of gratitude, of love, of camaraderie, of indignation, and of protest.") Here, his poetry transforms into a vehicle for nationalistic expression. The invocation of indignation (*indignación*) and protest (*protesta*) signals his awareness of the sociopolitical struggles of his time. His work, therefore, does not merely indulge in beauty but serves a higher purpose: awakening national consciousness.

Thus, Recto's poetry stands at the intersection of *Modernismo* and patriotic literature. While his style remains rooted in the former, his thematic concerns align with the latter, proving that art can be both beautiful and political.

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[32] Ibid., page 238.

Modernismo in Recto's patriotic poetry

The first suite of poems in *Bajo de los cocoteros* signals Recto's nationalist vision. Titled *Del Libro de la Patria,* the suite consists of several poems that are clearly patriotic but whose modernista aesthetics are very clear. They are examples of how Recto and Philippine poets use historical figures and literary characters, as well as Philippine landscapes and cultural landmarks or icons, as nationalist allegories and patriotic tropes.

Among the poems in the suite is *La Lengua del Terruño*, a significant work that encapsulates the essence of Modernismo while simultaneously functioning as a nationalist manifesto. The poem, written in 1909, reflects a literary movement that sought to refine Spanish-language poetry in the Philippines by infusing it with European sophistication and stylistic innovation, all while asserting a distinctively Filipino cultural identity. Recto achieves this through his use of highly ornate language, musicality, sensual imagery, and the evocation of national symbols that serve as allegories for the Filipino struggle against colonial rule.

There should be no doubt that *La Lengua del Terruño* [33] employs modernista aesthetics: *Bajo de los cocoteros* situates the poem as having been delivered in praise of Manila Carnival Queen candidate Josefina Ocampo in 1909 during the *"velada inaugural" or* "inaugural event" of Club Euterpe, the salon of moderninsta poets in Manila. In the poem, Recto employs this modernista style through his lyrical language and meticulous use of sound. His verses exhibit a rhythmic quality that enhances the poem's emotional and evocative power, evident in lines such as:

> *Es el murmullo suave del florestal sonoro que estremece la brisa cuando sus rosas de oro deshoja el sol que muere con languidez sutil.*

[33] Ibid., pages 7-8.

> It is the gentle murmur of the resounding forest, which the breeze stirs when the sun, dying with subtle languor, scatters its golden roses.

These lines demonstrate the *modernista* penchant for musicality and evocative, dreamlike imagery. The emphasis on nature, particularly in the form of forests, breezes, and the golden roses of the sun, reflects the influence of French Symbolism, a hallmark of modernismo. Moreover, the reference to "*languidez sutil*" (subtle languor) is reminiscent of the *fin de siècle* aesthetic, which revels in melancholic beauty.

Another key aspect of *modernismo* present in the poem is its synesthetic approach, wherein different senses are blended to create a heightened poetic experience. Recto intertwines sound, sight, and touch to produce a lush and immersive depiction of the Filipino language:

> *Es el alma doliente que llora su infortunio, cuando, al amor romántico de un claro plenilunio, piensa que para ella también hubo un abril.*
>
> It is the sorrowful soul that weeps for its misfortune, when, in the romantic glow of a bright full moon, it remembers that it, too, once had an April.

The moonlight ("*plenilunio*"), sorrowful soul ("*alma doliente*"), and nostalgic love ("*amor romántico*") create a synesthetic effect that enhances the poem's emotional depth. This melancholic and nostalgic tone aligns with modernista themes of yearning for an idealized past and lamenting the loss of innocence or purity, which in Recto's case, is intrinsically linked to the fate of the Filipino nation.

While *modernismo* provides the aesthetic framework for the poem, *La Lengua del Terruño* is ultimately a nationalist text that champions the

resilience of the Filipino identity. The poem's central motif—the Filipino language—is transformed into a symbol of cultural resistance against colonial oppression. Recto traces its historical legacy, linking it to pre-Hispanic rulers and warriors:

> *Es la lengua sagrada de rajás y sultanes, de régulos que alzaban su trono en los volcanes y enviaban sus guerreras piraguas a la mar.*
>
> It is the sacred language of rajahs and sultans, of chieftains who raised their thrones upon volcanoes and sent their warrior canoes to the sea.

By invoking the *rajás* and *sultanes* (native rulers), Recto elevates the Filipino language to a divine and noble status. This historical reference underscores the continuity of Filipino sovereignty prior to Spanish colonization, reinforcing the notion that the language—and by extension, the Filipino people—possesses an inherent dignity and resilience.

The poem further envisions the Filipino language as an instrument of rebellion and assertion of freedom:

> *En ella himnos cantaban los héroes de mi tierra, cuando osados y fuertes marchaban a la guerra, predicando a los vientos la santa Rebelión.*
>
> In it, the heroes of my land sang hymns, when, bold and strong, they marched to war, proclaiming to the winds the sacred Rebellion.

Here, the act of speaking in one's native tongue becomes a form of defiance against oppression, a means by which Filipinos "preach to the winds"

the sacred cause of rebellion. Recto suggests that language is not merely a tool of communication but a vessel of national consciousness and historical memory.

The final stanzas reinforce the idea that the Filipino language is eternal, much like the struggle for freedom:

> *Ella encarna la patria, sus glorias ella encierra, por eso, ella es eterna, como eterna es mi tierra, y eternos son los héroes de nuestra libertad...*
>
> She embodies the homeland, she holds its glories, that is why she is eternal, as eternal as my land, and eternal are the heroes of our freedom...

This culmination serves as a definitive statement that links the survival of the Filipino language to the survival of the nation itself. Recto's poetic vision asserts that as long as the Filipino people preserve their language, they safeguard their identity and sovereignty.

Balagtas' muse Celia as allegory of national language

Philippine language as a means of cultural resistance against North American imperialism is also evident in "Celia," [34] in which, at first blush, the aesthetic and artistic hallmarks of early Modernismo are evident. Like the works of Darío, "Celia" employs a refined, musical diction that enhances its evocative power. Recto's lines are rich with harmony and elegance, mirroring the movement's emphasis on exquisite beauty. For instance, the opening stanza introduces Celia as a vision of art and dream:

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[34] Ibid., pages 21-22.

Vedla pasar, dolorosa, llena de unción eucarística, cual para oficiar en ritos de prístinas paganías, visión de arte, amor y ensueño, encendida rosa mística de los vergeles cerrados del buen tiempo de hidalguías.

Watch her pass by, sorrowing, full of eucharistic unction,
As though to officiate at rites of pristine paganism,
Vision of art, love and dream, lighted mystic rose
Of the closed gardens in the good era of chivalry.

Here, Recto draws on the refined language and synesthetic imagery characteristic of early Modernismo. The juxtaposition of Christian *"unción eucarística"* ("eucharistic unction") and pagan rituals demonstrates the movement's fascination with exotic and mystical themes, blending sacred and profane elements to create an otherworldly atmosphere. Celia is likened to a *"rosa mística"* ("mystical rose"), a symbol of purity and transcendence, and her connection to the *"vergeles cerrados"* ("closed gardens") evokes a sense of nostalgia for an idealized past—a recurring theme in early Modernismo.

The poem's focus on beauty and harmony extends to its imagery of nature and flowers. Celia carries flowers with *"fragancias milenarias"* ("millennial fragrance"), a phrase that captures Modernismo's aesthetic sophistication while imbuing the flowers with timeless significance.

While "Celia" retains the aestheticism of early Modernismo, it also reflects the movement's transition toward a more socially conscious poetry. This shift is evident in the poem's celebration of Francisco Balagtas (1788-1862), who is described as a *"príncipe... de los Tagalog poetas"* ("prince... of Tagalog poets"). "Celia" in fact is the Hispanicized "Selya" of Balagtas to whom he dedicates his immortal *awit* (metric tale), *Florante at Laura*, arguably the most influential if not the greatest Philippine poem in the vernacular. It may be called the Philippine *Aeneid* or *Pan Tadeusz*.

Celia's mourning for Balagtas symbolizes not only personal grief but also a collective yearning for cultural pride and identity. In the second stanza, Recto writes:

> *Vedla portar en sus manos, señoriles y morenas, flores que alegraron sendas en las marchas libertarias; cuidadas con santo celo por las mismas hadas buenas que sus pétalos colmaron de fragancias milenarias.*
>
> Behold her carrying in her hands, stately and brown, flowers that once brightened paths in the marches of freedom; tended with sacred care by the very kind-hearted fairies who have graced their petals with fragrances of ages past.

The reference to *"marchas libertarias"* ("freedom marches") situates Celia's actions within a nationalist context, linking her mourning to the struggles for independence and freedom. The flowers she carries, infused with *"fragancias milenarias"* (millennial fragrances") serve as symbols of cultural resilience and heritage, connecting the past to the present. This emphasis on identity and tradition marks a departure from the purely European influences of early Modernismo, reflecting the growing desire to assert the uniqueness of Latin American (and, in this case, Filipino) culture.

Moreover, Balagtas's role as a cultural figure is elevated to that of a national symbol, embodying the aspirations and struggles of the Tagalog people. Celia's act of mourning becomes a sacred ritual, affirming the importance of preserving the poet's legacy and, by extension, the cultural identity he represents.

Though "Celia" is primarily an elegy, it also carries subtle traces of the politicized Modernismo that emerged in the early 20th century. Recto's lamentation for the Tagalog poet can be interpreted as a critique of colonial

legacies and a call for cultural preservation. The poet's death is not merely a personal loss but a symbol of the challenges faced by a nation striving to assert its identity in the face of external influences. This theme is underscored in the final stanzas, where Celia's grief is mirrored by the sorrow of creation itself:

> *La creación está triste… Y en el alma de las cosas deja saudades el ósculo de crepusculares brisas, y el hada de los consuelos, en su columpio de rosas, siente helarse entre sus labios, en un adiós, las sonrisas.*
>
> Creation is sad… And in the soul of things Sad recollections the kiss of twilight breezes leaves, And the nymph of consolations, in her swing of roses, Feels smiles turn cold between her lips in an adieu.

The melancholic tone of these lines reflects the broader struggles of a nation mourning its past while grappling with an uncertain future. The reference to *"crepusculares brisas"* (twilight breezes) and *"saudades"* (a Portuguese word for a deep, nostalgic longing) evokes a sense of loss that transcends the individual, suggesting a collective yearning for cultural and spiritual renewal.

Although "Celia" does not explicitly address anti-imperialist themes, its focus on preserving the memory of a Tagalog poet can be seen as an act of cultural resistance. By elevating the poet to a quasi-mythical status, Recto asserts the value of Filipino cultural contributions in a world still shaped by colonial hierarchies. This aligns with the politicized Modernismo of figures like Darío and the Cuban José Martí, who used poetry to critique imperialism and champion cultural independence.

"Celia" is a richly layered poem that reflects the evolution of Modernismo from its aestheticist beginnings to its more socially engaged and politicized phases. Through its refined language, exquisite imagery, and symbolic depth, the poem embodies the artistic ideals of early Modernismo. At the same time, its focus on cultural identity, collective memory, and the legacy of a Tagalog poet aligns with the movement's transitional and politicized characteristics.

"Celia" is ultimately a testament to the enduring power of art and memory in the face of loss and change. By mourning the poet and celebrating his contributions, Recto affirms the importance of preserving cultural heritage and resisting the forces that threaten to erase it. In this way, "Celia" exemplifies the fusion of aesthetic beauty and social consciousness that defines the modernista spirit.

The paradox of and necessity for a national language

Evident in such poems as "La Lengua del Teruno" and "Celia" is the paradox of language. Language has always been central to the formation of national consciousness. Despite the dominance of Spanish among the early Filipino intellectuals, their works reflect a strong advocacy for a national identity rooted in local languages. "Celia" and "La Lengua del Terruño," as well as Kalaw's epilogue, "Ite, Missa Est," in *Bajo los Cocoteros*, highlight the complex relationship between colonial languages and vernacular tongues. These texts suggest that while intellectuals like Recto and Kalaw wrote in Spanish, they understood the necessity of a national language or, at the very least, the preservation of vernaculars. This paradox illustrates a broader historical trend wherein national movements often emerge through the medium of a foreign tongue, only to champion the reclamation of indigenous linguistic traditions.

In the fifth chapter of *Imagined Communities*, intriguingly titled "Old Languages, New Models," Benedict Anderson explores how the concept of nationalism in 19th-century Europe was deeply tied to language and how emerging nations drew inspiration from earlier revolutionary movements. Anderson contrasts European nationalism with that of the Americas, emphasizing the role of "national print-languages" [35] in shaping new identities. Unlike the Americas, where Spanish and English were already dominant and not contested, European nationalisms between 1820 and 1920 were built on "national print-languages".[36] Johann Gottfried von Herder's assertion that "each nation has its own particular education just as it has its own language"[37] reflects a European conception of nationhood that closely tied linguistic identity to cultural and political sovereignty.

Moreover, nationalism in Europe did not emerge organically but was "consciously aspired to" by elites who borrowed ideas from previous movements, particularly those in the Americas and revolutionary France. The concept of the nation "became available for pirating" by various groups, meaning it was not the exclusive invention of one place or people but could be adapted in different ways.[38]

In addition, according to Anderson, the rise of philology contributed to national consciousness. The 19th century saw the rise of lexicographers, grammarians, and philologists who played a critical role in shaping European national identities. Monolingual dictionaries, such as Czech-German bilingual dictionaries, implied an equality among languages, even when

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35 Anderson, Benedict. *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*. London: Verso, 1983; page 67.

36 Ibid.

37 Ibid.

38 Ibid.

political realities suggested otherwise.[39] Universities became centers for nationalist consciousness, as education in national languages reinforced a sense of shared identity. [40]

While Anderson does not explicitly discuss the Philippines, his analysis of how European nationalisms relied on language resonates with the Filipino experience. The rise of *Tagalogismo* in the late 19th century and the role of *La Solidaridad* in shaping a national consciousness can be seen as an example of how language-based nationalism played a role in the anti-colonial struggle. The adoption of *Filipino* (based on Tagalog) as the national language in the 20th century mirrors the European trend of codifying vernaculars to solidify national identity. In "Old Languages, New Models," Anderson demonstrates how nationalism in 19th-century Europe was largely constructed through linguistic identity, a contrast to the Americas where political sovereignty was the primary concern. He argues that national print-languages were critical in shaping modern nation-states and that nationalism spread as an adaptable model across the world. The Philippines' experience with language-based nationalism aligns with Anderson's thesis, particularly in the role of *Tagalogismo* and Filipino print culture in the struggle for independence.

It seems propitious that while paying tribute to Balagtas as prince of Tagalog poets, Recto should appropriate his Muse, "Selya," to whom Balagtas dedicated his most important extant work, *Florante at Laura,* practically the Bible of Tagalog poetry. Even more propitious, Recto would later on become the president of the constitutional convention that would draft the 1935 Philippine Constitution, which mandated the development and adoption of a national language based on one of the existing native languages, with "Tagalog" eventually chosen as the primary basis for this national language.

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[39] Ibid., page 71.

[40] Ibid., page 72.

Similarly, in "La Lengua del Terruño" (The Language of the Homeland), Recto pays homage to the Tagalog language as a sacred and eternal vessel of the nation's soul, history, and identity. When he references *Florante at Laura*, he highlights Francisco Balagtas as *"el bardo de inspiración gigante"* (the bard of giant inspiration), elevating him to a figure of literary and national immortality:

> *Ella bulle en los versos del glorioso Florante, que á Balagtás, el bardo de inspiración gigante, elevó á las alturas de la inmortalidad.*
>
> It resounds in the verses of the glorious Florante, which raised Balagtás, the bard of giant inspiration, to the heights of immortality.

Recto underscores Balagtas's role in solidifying Tagalog poetry as a vehicle for both artistic expression and patriotic sentiment. By linking *Florante at Laura* to the grandeur and eternity of the homeland, Recto suggests that Balagtas was not merely a poet but a national visionary whose works embody the struggles, dreams, and cultural pride of the Filipino people.

The mention of *Florante* in the same breath as revolutionary hymns and patriotic fervor positions Balagtas's poetry as a cornerstone of national consciousness:

> *En ella himnos cantaban los héroes de mi tierra, cuando osados y fuertes marchaban á la guerra, predicando á los vientos la santa Rebelión.*
>
> In it, hymns were sung by the heroes of my land, when, bold and strong, they marched to war, proclaiming the holy Rebellion to the winds.

Through this, Recto affirms that Balagtas's legacy transcends time, as his words continue to "vibrate" in the nation's collective memory, much like the old church bells that summon people in the morning—a metaphor for his enduring influence on Philippine identity and literature:

> *Ella vibra en los ecos de la vieja campana que llama en los albores rubios de la mañana al hombre, cual si fuese la voz de Jehová.*
>
> It vibrates in the echoes of the old bell that calls in the golden dawn of the morning to man, as if it were the voice of Jehovah.

By anchoring Balagtas's *Florante at Laura* on this grand vision of the Philippine language and heritage, Recto emphasizes its role in shaping national consciousness, ensuring that both the poet and his work remain immortal in the cultural and historical imagination of the Filipino people.

Recto recognizes language as an intimate, almost sacred inheritance—one passed from mother to child. This maternal connection suggests that the loss of vernaculars severs an essential cultural bond. Spanish, though the medium of intellectual discourse, remains an imposed language, unable to replace the authenticity of native speech. (The same could be said of English, the language of the new colonizers.) The poem becomes a plea for linguistic preservation, underscoring the argument that a national language, drawn from indigenous tongues, is essential for national identity.

A similar theme emerges in "Celia," where Recto's poetic voice longs for an idealized past, lamenting how colonial influences have disrupted the purity of indigenous culture. He writes of a lost golden age where the Philippines flourished in its own voice, before foreign domination stifled it. These sentiments reinforce the idea that the imposition of a colonial language, while beneficial for political and intellectual engagement at the time, ultimately alienates a people from their true identity.

In his epilogue for Recto's collection, "Ite, Missa Est," Kalaw provides a historical perspective on the decline of Spanish in the Philippines. The title itself of the essay, which is what the priest tells the people in the old Latin Mass ("Go, the Mass is ended"), carries symbolic weight, suggesting both the conclusion of an era and the beginning of another. Kalaw acknowledges the paradox that Filipino intellectuals, himself included, articulated nationalist thought through Spanish but insists that the future lies in the embrace of native tongues: *"Los filipinos han hecho del español un vehículo de su emancipación, pero no de su perpetua expresión."* [41] ("Filipinos have made Spanish a vehicle for their emancipation, but not for their perpetual expression.")

This statement highlights a crucial argument: Spanish was instrumental in forming Filipino national consciousness, but it was never meant to be the language of the people in perpetuity. Kalaw anticipates a linguistic shift wherein the Filipino masses will speak and think in a language that truly belongs to them. He does not necessarily advocate for a single national language, but acknowledges the need to elevate vernaculars as part of the national discourse.

Anderson's "Old Languages, New Models" situates the Philippine linguistic debate within a broader historical context. He argues that nationalism flourishes when print capitalism promotes vernacular languages, enabling large groups of people to imagine themselves as part of a shared community. He notes: "An illiterate nobility could still act as a nobility. But the bourgeoisie? Here was a class which, figuratively speaking, came into being as a class only in so many replications." [42]

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[41] Ibid., page 226.

[42] Anderson, page 81)

This insight applies directly to the Philippines. While the ilustrados used Spanish as a means of resistance, the true birth of a national consciousness required the participation of the wider Filipino public, who spoke Tagalog, Cebuano, Ilocano, and other native languages. Anderson's discussion of the rise of vernacular print media in other nationalist movements—such as the adoption of Turkish over Ottoman—demonstrates that a national identity is most effectively cultivated through a language that resonates with the majority.

Spanish, in this sense, was a linguistic bridge rather than a destination. The push for a national language, particularly in the 20th century with the establishment of Filipino based on Tagalog, mirrors similar transitions in post-colonial nations worldwide. The use of a familiar language allows nationalism to extend beyond elite intellectual circles and into the broader consciousness of the people.

Given these perspectives, the argument for a national language or the preservation of vernaculars becomes undeniable. Recto's poetic lament, Kalaw's historical reflection, and Anderson's theoretical framework converge on the idea that language is fundamental to identity. However, their works also acknowledge the unavoidable historical reality that foreign languages, particularly Spanish, played an intermediary role in developing Filipino nationalism.

Thus, the task is not to erase the contributions of Spanish or English but to ensure that indigenous languages do not suffer the same fate that befell Latin in medieval Europe—becoming the domain of an elite few while the masses speak a different tongue. The establishment of Filipino as the national language, though contested, follows the historical trajectory Anderson outlines: a movement away from the imposed tongue and toward a language that fosters a truly imagined community.

While Recto and Kalaw wrote in Spanish, their works echo the necessity of returning to the native tongue. Anderson's analysis provides a broader theoretical justification for why national languages emerge and how they enable the formation of a national identity. The Filipino experience reflects this pattern: Spanish was once the language of resistance, but it could never be the language of the people. The preservation of vernaculars and the establishment of a national language are thus not merely cultural choices but essential acts of self-determination.

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