




Metaphors in Juan Luna's Works: A Semiotic-Hermeneutic Analysis

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ABSTRACT

Juan Luna was a major force in the painting tradition in the Philippines, particularly in the late 19th Century. Like his colorful paintings, his life was also interestingly complicated, which scholars and historians were fond of studying. His paintings are known to be packed with symbolism. In this study, I tried to interpret the painter's works and the intricacies of his life as a nationalist and as a private person. By employing semiotic-hermeneutic interpretation, an exposition of various symbols embedded in his works and what they signify was made. As gleaned from the works interpreted, messages and contents were conveyed and made powerful through his visual metaphors. Apparently, Luna concealed his nationalistic ideas and his innermost feelings in his works.

RESUMO

Juan Luna foi uma grande força da tradição da pintura nas Filipinas, particularmente no final do século XIX. Como suas pinturas coloridas, sua vida também foi curiosamente complicada, sobre a qual estudiosos e historiadores gostavam de estudar. Suas pinturas são conhecidas por serem repletas de simbolismo. Neste estudo, procurei interpretar a obra do pintor e os meandros de sua vida como nacionalista e como pessoa privada. Por meio da interpretação semiótico-hermenêutica, foi feita uma exposição dos vários símbolos embutidos em suas obras e o que eles significam. De acordo com as obras interpretadas, mensagens e conteúdos foram transmitidos e tornados poderosos por meio de suas metáforas visuais. Aparentemente, Luna escondeu suas idéias nacionalistas e seus sentimentos mais íntimos em seu trabalho.

ARTICLE INFORMATION

Article process:

Submitted: 21/05/2023

Approved: 02/07/2023

Published: 17/07/2023



Keywords:

Juan Luna, semiotic-hermeneutic, painting, nationalism

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Introduction

Juan Luna shocked the world when his mammoth painting entitled *Spoliarium* won gold in the prestigious *Exposición Nacional de Bellas Artes* in 1884 (Gaceta de Madrid, 1884). He was the first Filipino to achieve international success. His name became synonymous with Filipino genius and creativity. Even the national hero Jose Rizal recognized this during his homage to Luna and Hidalgo on June 25, 1884, at the Restaurant Ingles in Madrid. Rizal said, "Creative genius does not manifest itself solely within the borders of a specific country; it sprouts everywhere; it is like light and air; it belongs to everyone; it is cosmopolitan like space, life, and God" (Guerrero, 1974, p. 112).

He was here referring to the genius of the two Filipino artists. Rizal believes that Luna's and Hidalgo's works can truly be compared with those of other world-renown European artists of their time. Here he points out that genius knows no territory. The Philippines, no matter how humble and crude it is perceived to be, can produce geniuses like Luna and Hidalgo.

The popularity of Luna pervaded the 19th-century Philippines. With this popularity, he was perhaps the Manny Pacquiao of his generation. But he was not only known for his paintings; he was also a known propagandist. He was also famed for being a compatriot to propagandist writers like Rizal, Del Pilar, and Lopez Jaena. Luna's approach was different; his was not through and by the power of his pen, like that of his Filipino compatriots, but through the subtlety of his brush and the genius of his artistic mind.

This paper tries to critically interpret four major works of the artist, which are as follows: *Spoliarium* (1884), *Parisian Life* (1892), *Espana Y Filipinas* (1886), and *the Death of Cleopatra* (1881). The symbolisms that are strongly suggested in the works are revealed, which are expected to galvanize Luna's deep-seated and colorful nationalism as juxtaposed with his own gloomy life.

This paper is organized as follows: Section 2 presents Luna's short biographical sketch and the social milieu he was born into and/or the circumstances with which he had to contend. In Section 3, the development of semiotics, on which the semiological analyses are crudely based, was explained. In the same section, I also briefly discussed the basic principles of hermeneutics. In Section 4, the pre-selected paintings are presented and briefly described. Section 5 presented *Spoliarium* and how it portrays the Philippines as the bloodied or dead gladiators. In section 6, discussion is made on the enigmatic gazes of the propagandists (including Luna) and other symbolic elements in the painting *Parisian Life*. In Section 7, an analysis of the *Espana Y Filipinas* and how it manifested the purported intention of Mother Spain in her conquest of the Islands. Section 8 was devoted to the *Death of Cleopatra* and how it reflected the hope and possibility of the ultimate end of the nation's horrors. Finally, the points of this paper are summarized in the last section.

Juan Luna and his Milieu

Juan Luna is a Filipino who excelled in his field. He is an artist par excellence, whose artistic genius "proclaimed his arrival on the world scene" (Joaquin, 1980, p. 13). In Madrid, he stood alongside the Queen Regent Maria Cristina and sat side by side with princes and dukes during the inauguration of his painting *La Batalla de Lepanto* in 1887. He became friends with the Queen Regent. The latter even ordered the release of Antonio Luna from prison through Juan's intercession in 1897. He was personally congratulated by the King of Spain upon winning a gold prize for his *Spoliarium* in 1884 (Joaquin, 1980). All this he did during the mighty Spanish occupation of the Philippines, and Filipinos were colonial subjects. While he enjoys the company of the who's who in European society, in his home country, the *Indios* continue to experience exploitation and maltreatment at the hands of their colonial masters.

Prior to Luna's popularity, the fear of exploitation drove many young *ilustrados* to travel to Europe to study and later form movements to alleviate their country from its ordeals. The names of Jose Rizal, Graciano Lopez Jaena, Marcelo H. Del Pilar, Valentin Ventura, Trinidad Pardo de Tavera, and Luna, among others, became synonymous with the propaganda movement. Their flight was a reaction to the church's and the state's repression of their artistic, scientific, and intellectual pursuits. The Filipino masses at that time felt disconnected from these *ilustrados* because of their belief that these propagandists were only fighting for the gains and privileges of their class (Joaquin, 1980).

The facts, however, proved the selfish image of the *ilustrados* wrong. Juan Luna, for example, capitalized on his fame in Europe to put across his partiality towards the masses. His work, *People and Kings*, for instance, portrays the revolutions of the masses against their royal oppressors. He painted the conditions of the masses; "he painted proletarian subjects: a jobless laborer, children in an orphanage, a rag-picker, a pregnant Cockney girl shivering in the London cold." (Joaquin, 1980, p. 15). He agreed to illustrate some portions of Jose Rizal's *Noli Me Tangere* with the intention of moving the masses and making the novel understandable even to children. He was already a known painter at that time, but he offered his services for free. This proves that, at least in Luna, the Filipino *ilustrado* is not a selfish class indifferent to the masses (Joaquin, 1980).

In 1881, *The Death of Cleopatra* (La Muerte de Cleopatra) won Luna his first major prize at the Exposition of Fine Arts in Madrid. It was the start of the artist's fascination with international competitions. Being a Spanish subject, Luna had to forestall comments disparaging his works that might influence the jurors prior to judging. His works were kept in secrecy before being entered in the competition (Pilar, 1980). The news about his victory was not made known to Manila deliberately, as evidenced by a report in *El Comercio* on July 16, 1881 (Pilar, 1980). It was only on October 15, 1881, that a Philippine creole and Luna's long-time friend, Javier Gomez de la Serna, reported his triumph at the *El Comercio*. In fact, no

official recognition from the Spanish government in the Philippines was ever made until eight months later, when Governor-General Primo de Rivera granted the artist an annual pension to support his studies in Rome (Pilar, 1980).

In 1884, *Spoliarium* won the *Medalla de Primera Clase* in the *Exposition de Bellas Artes* in Madrid (Gaceta de Madrid, 1884). Unlike *La Muerte*, *Spoliarium* invited a lot of attention from journalists, reviewers, and art enthusiasts from around Europe. Photographs of the work reached Manila on May 8, 1884, through the international boat *Asia*, prior to the opening of the exhibition. With *Spoliarium*, Luna's popularity spread far and wide, not only in Madrid but in most regions of Europe and Asia.

A year later, the artist fell in love with Paz Pardo de Tavera. Juan and Paz developed admiration for each other during the months that the *Pacto de Sangre* was being painted, with Trinidad Pardo de Tavera standing as Legazpi and Rizal as *Sikatuna*. Paz was impressed with Luna's self-confidence, intelligence, and gentleness (Pilar, 1980). Paz's admiration for the artist flattered him. He (being an *Indio*) could not believe a woman from an old Spanish aristocratic lineage loved him. For her part, Paz felt privileged to be wooed by Europe's renowned visual artist. On December 8, 1886, the couple tied the knot in a church ceremony in Paris. Soon after, their son Andres came and brought ecstasy and excitement to the genius native.

During the last months of 1887, the same year *Noli Me Tangere* of Rizal was published, the widow of Alfonso XII, Queen Regent Maria Cristina, and Infanta Isabel unveiled *La Batalla de Lepanto*, with Luna assisting them at the Spanish Senate. At the invitation of the Queen, Luna attended the opening session of the Senate and sat in a seat reserved for nobility. This was reported in January 1888 on *El Comercio*, highlighting Luna's unique friendship with the Queen.

Possibly believing in the improving impression of Filipinos (courtesy of Juan Luna) before European eyes, especially of the royalties and officers of the colonial power, expatriates like Antonio Luna, Jose Rizal, Mariano Ponce, and Marcelo del Pilar established *La Solidaridad*. Other members of the association were Juan Luna, Pedro Paterno, Felix Hidalgo, and Jose Ma. Panganiban, among many others. The association's primary aim is to promote better relations between Spain and the Philippines (Schumacher, 1973).

The ideals of *La Solidaridad* are believed to have been captured by a painting done by Luna for Pedro Paterno entitled *Espana Y Filipinas* (1886) and its later version entitled *Espana Guiando a Filipinas en el Camino de Progreso* (1888). Since the earlier version of *Espana Y Filipinas*, life has been hard for the painter. His paintings were no longer attracting crowds as they were before, and sales, despite good reviews from Javier Gomez, remained stagnant. With his dwindling finances, the proud Luna had to depend on his wife, Paz, for sustenance. In 1888, Dona Julia Gorricho, the Pardo de Tavera matriarch, realized the family situation. And since Paz's brother Felix had just married, she convinced the couple to live with her at 26 Villa Dupont, 48 Rue Pergolese.

In 1889, Rizal noticed that Luna's works were beginning to embrace social realism, which was far from his previous works (*Epistolario Rizalino*, nd). Luna's involvement in *La Solidaridad*, *Los Indios Bravos*, and *Club Kidlat* strengthened the impression that Luna was becoming more of a patriot than an artist. In 1890, Luna joined a group of artists in France called the *Societe Nationale des Beaux-Arts*, an organization strongly associated with the Socialist Party of France. His works became more political than academic (Pilar, 1980).

Not long after, Paz's health deteriorated, which caused the abortion of the second child. The incident infuriated Juan Luna. His already strained marriage began to fall apart, partially because of the growing suspicion and paranoia. In September 1892, the marriage was violently ended by a carnage that left Julia and Paz dead. Luna was tried and jailed for a while, but because of his connections in the officialdom and his temporary insanity plea, he was set free for a penalty amounting to 1650 francs and 80 cents. Months prior to the domestic violence, Luna gifted Ariston Bautista Lin a small painting entitled *Parisian Life*.

He died in 1899 in Hong Kong of a massive heart attack, the same year Antonio, his beloved young brother, died.

Semiotics and Hermeneutics

Semiotics is a powerful framework employed in interpreting and understanding artworks, visual images, and literary texts. The works of Ferdinand de Saussure, Charles Sanders Peirce, and Roland Barthes defined this framework (Krampen, 1987). Social and cultural practices play an important role in Saussure's semiotics. Signification is where meaning-making rests. This signification is a combination of both the signifier and the signified. The signifier refers to the physical and material elements of the texts, such as images, sounds, words, letters, lines, and movements. The signified, on the other hand, refers to the mental concepts and associated or allied ideas representing the sign. The signifier is the medium or channel of meaning, and the signified is the meaning itself. Saussure presents two orders of signification: the first and second orders of signification. The first-order signification is called denotation. Denotation is the simple combination of the signified and the signifier. It has an objective meaning. The second-order signification is connotation. It refers to mental and subjective meaning (Krampen, 1987). On the other hand, Peirce's semiotics is known for his concepts of sign and its signifying elements. For him, in meaning-making, it is the signifying elements that are important. These elements are as follows: *representamen*, interpretation, and object (Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy). Apparently, Peirce's *representamen* is Saussure's sign, while Saussure's Signifier-Signified is Peirce's interpretation.

Roland Barthes systematically reconciled the above theories. The first order of signification (denotation) refers to Saussure's signifier and/or Peirce's sign or representation, while the second order of signification (connotation) involves Saussure's combination of signified-signifier and/or Peirce's Interpretation. With influence from Louis Althusser, Barthes adds another concept to the second order of signification. This concept is myth and

ideology, or ethos. According to Barthes, myth is culturally bound. It flows through various mediums in different ways. It is a kind of speech trick that presents an ideology, value, or ethos as a natural state of affairs when it is in fact a man-made or socially constructed meaning or perspective (Barthes, 1986).

In addition to the framework of semiotics, I also employed the hermeneutics of Friedrich Daniel Ernst Schleiermacher in this article. The philosopher believes that the meaning of a text can be reconstructed through a systematic method of interpretation. The interpretation must be so polished and logical that it even surpasses the interpretation by the author himself. It is clear to Schleiermacher that a text follows conventions such as the rules of language, time, and culture that constitute the context of the work. These rules and conventions are either known or unknown to the writer (Demeterio, 2011). A reader who belongs to a different language, time, and culture needs to be aware not only of the known conventions but also of those that are unknown to the writer. The reader is even given a better opportunity than the writer to interpret the work because he sees all the circumstances, conventions, and contexts surrounding the text (Demeterio, 2011). According to Schleiermacher, the meaning of a text is the meaning in the mind of the writer when the text is being written (Demeterio, 2011). As elaborated by Hans Georg Gadamer, understanding is not only concerned with the exact words but also their objective meaning and the individuality of the author. He believes that the reader must be able to understand both the linguistic and psychological contexts of the text to interpret its meaning.

The reader must be able to reconstruct meaning in two ways: grammatical reconstruction and psychological reconstruction. Grammatical reconstruction involves linguistic interpretation, while psychological reconstruction is the process of understanding the psychological make-up of the individual writer through his intentions and concrete biographies. These reconstructions will give the text a context that will facilitate interpretation and understanding.

Luna's Paintings Pre-Selected for this Study

The author took the liberty of selecting Luna's paintings for this paper. The following factors were considered in the selection: popularity, preconceived relevance to Philippine history, biography of Luna, and preconceived relevance to Luna's political leanings.

a. Dimension(s) and Location

Spoliarium. The work was first conceived in 1881, during Luna's apprenticeship with Alejo Vera in Rome. He was inspired by Charles Louis Dezobry's novel entitled *Rome in the Time of Augustus: Adventures of a Gaul in Rome*. The painting was finished in March of 1884. It was exhibited at that year's *Exposicion de Bellas Artes* in Madrid. The huge painting received critical acclaim and won Luna the highest award in the said *exhibition*. The official dimension of the painting is 7.75 m by 4.25 m (Pilar, 1980). The medium used is oil. It now

occupies a huge space in the National Museum of Fine Arts in Manila, sharing a hall with an equally important work entitled *La Tragedia de Governor Bustamante* by Felix Resurrecion Hidalgo.

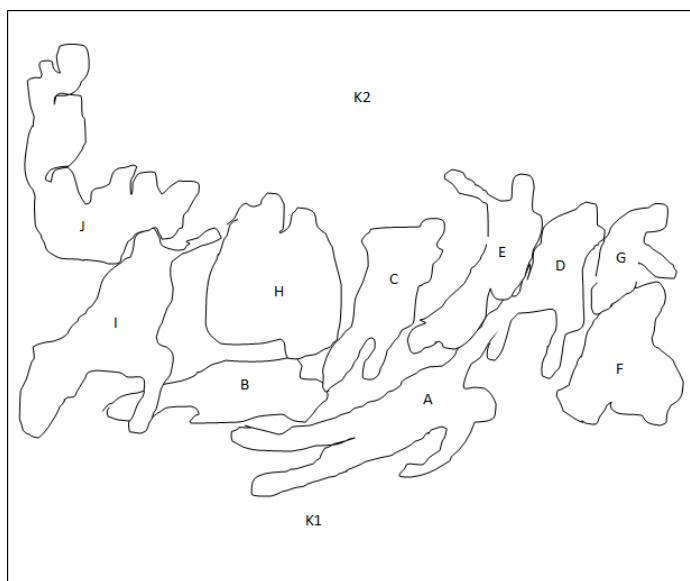
Parisian Life. The *Parisian Life* was originally given to Dr. Ariston Bautista Lin, a wealthy doctor, inventor, and propagandist. For years, the painting adorned the walls of the Nakpil House (the residence of Lin) in Quiapo until it was lost and later reemerged at Christie's auction in Hong Kong in 2002. The Government Security and Insurance Service (GSIS), through GSIS Museum curator Prof. Eric Zerrudo, participated in the auction and acquired the oil painting for HK\$ 2,000,000 (Flores, nd). The painting is measured at 57 cm by 79 cm. It can be viewed in the master's halls of the National Museum of Fine Arts in Manila.

Espana Y Filipinas (1886). As there are versions of the painting, I decided to focus on the one located at the Lopez Museum. The record shows that there are several copies of *Espana Y Filipinas*, and two are extant today. The other one belongs to the National Gallery of Singapore, which was *Espana Y Filipinas* (1884). Approximately, the Luna versions are both the same in size at 229.5 cm by 79.5 cm.

Death of Cleopatra. The painting was Luna's entry to the *National Exhibition of Bellas Artes in Madrid* in 1881. It won the silver award in the said exhibition. Done in oil, the painting is roughly measured at 4 m by 7 m. In the early quarter of 2018, the painting traveled from its original location, the Prado Museum of Madrid, to the National Gallery of Singapore for a special exhibition where many Filipinos marveled at its exquisite beauty. After the exhibition, the piece went back to the Prado.

b. Explicit Visual Elements.

Figure 1. Visual Map of *Spoliarium*



Source: Juan Luna (1884)

The painting is unusually huge in size. Luna featured two dead gladiators (A and B) being brought towards the darkest and most dreaded part of the Roman Colosseum. The scene appears to be an ordinary event for the Roman Soldiers (C, D) who dragged the lifeless bodies. The Filipino genius manipulated dark shades of red, brown, and ochre to convey the brutality of the game and to evoke powerful emotions of anguish and pity, as can be gleaned on the walls (K2) and the Pavement (K1). The melancholic hues are also applied in varying combinations and textures to the overall look of the painting. The use of diagonal lines gracefully journeying across the humungous canvas creates the illusion of theatrical movement. This technique adds dramatic impact to the overall visual effect of the painting. The portrayal of sobbing women (F) likewise adds a feeling of torment to the audience (J) as they witness the tragic outcome of the game. While the scavengers (H, I) are surveying and plotting to strip the cadavers of any valuable possessions. They are vultures waiting to devour the carcasses. A man who looks like a priest (E) appears to be murmuring prayers for the souls of gladiators who perished. A friend or a relative (G) in the corner is seen searching for a dead loved one.

Figure 2. Visual Map of Parisian Life

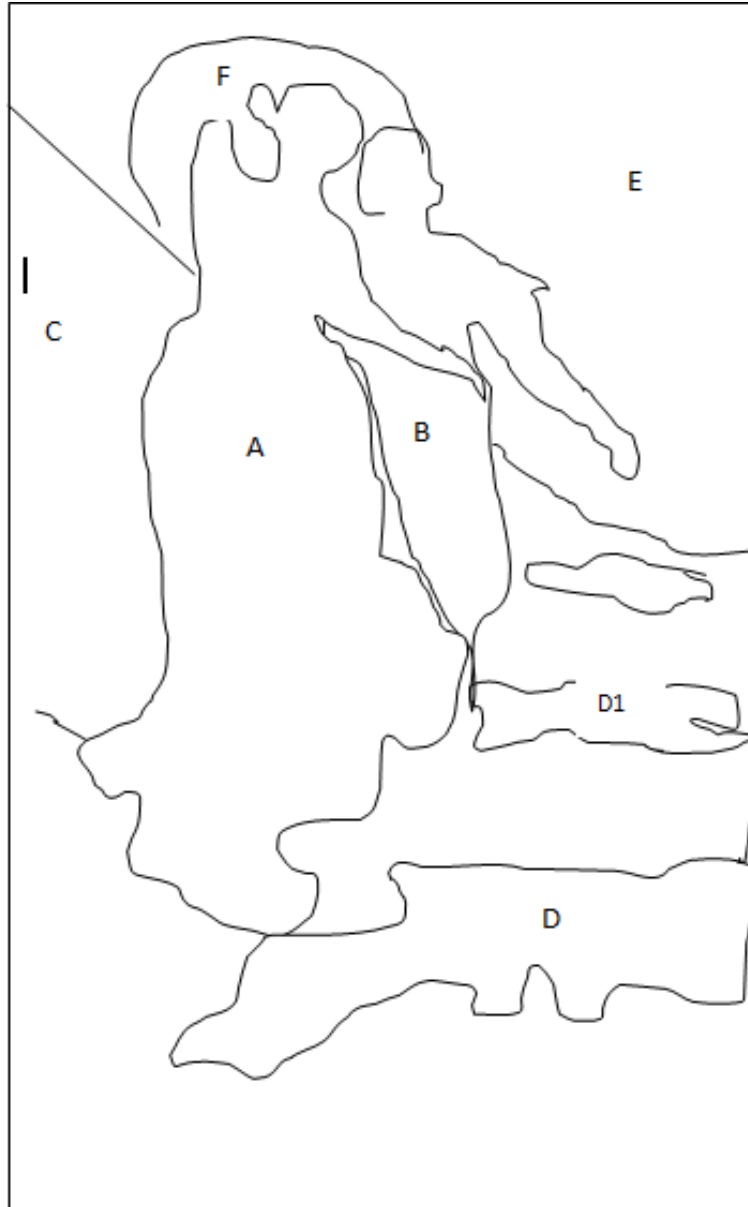


Source: Juan Luna (1892).

The painting features the banality of everyday life for three propagandists (D, E, and F) in Paris. On the surface, there is nothing extraordinary about the central feminine figure (A). But upon closely examining the lady's posture, proportion, and overall demeanor, a sight of awkwardness suddenly emerges. The lady is uncomfortably seated on a long-cushioned sofa (I), which connects her to D, E, and F. Carefully placed just beside the central figure is an

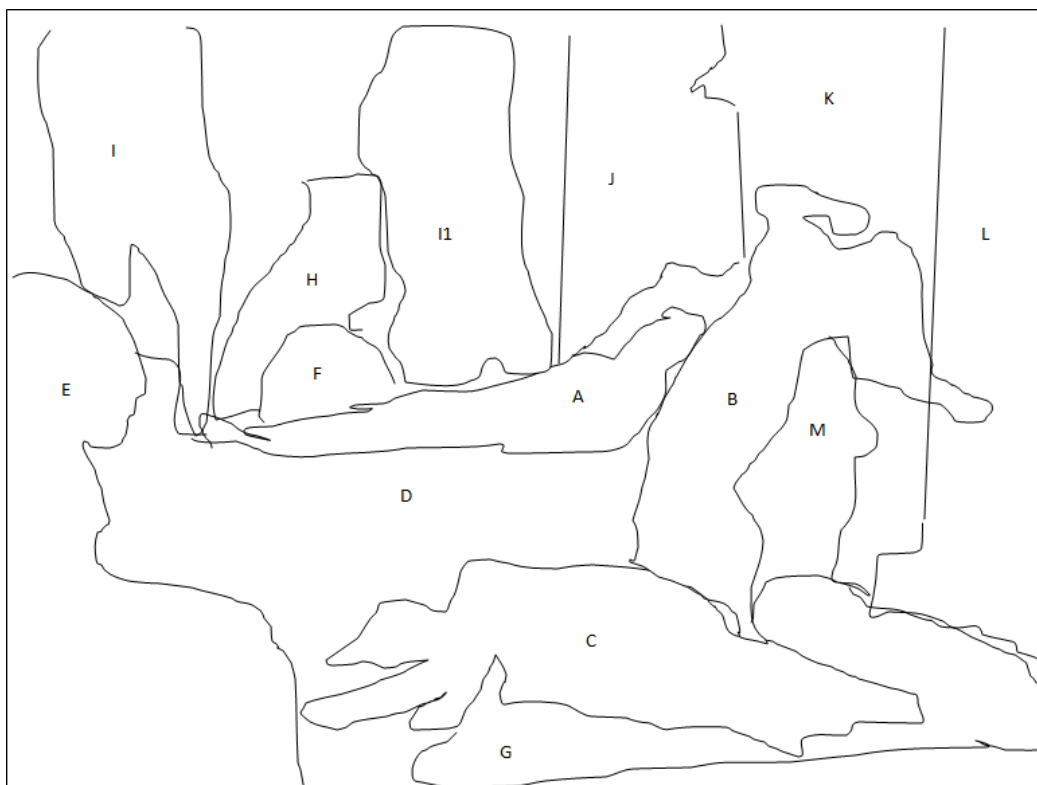
elegant European Hat (C) atop an overcoat (B) with a checkered printed lining. An empty wooden chair (G) boringly faces the central figure. In front of the lady is a table (H), and on it are two glasses (O, P) of wine. The upper portion of the painting adds to the overall composition the window (M), the window joint (N), a wooden ornament (k), and a vase with a bouquet of blue or violet roses (L).

Figure 3. Visual Map of *Espana Y Filipinas*



Source: Juan Luna (1886)

The painting is an allegory of Spain (A) guiding her colonial subject Philippines (B), towards the light (F) while navigating a set of concrete stairs on which flowers (D1, D) are scattered and in disarray. The sky (E) appears to illuminate the journey.

Figure 4. Visual Map of Death of Cleopatra.

Source: Juan Luna (1884)

In another dramatic fashion, Luna here theatrically portrays a very important event in history. The death of the central feminine figure, Cleopatra (A). The lady is lying in tranquility on a beautifully and elaborately decorated bed (D) surrounded by her most loyal servants or slaves (B, C). The entire composition is contextualized by the room's decorations—the still decors and ancient ornaments: Sphynx (E), Egyptian Monster figure (F), Fur Carpet (G), gigantic armored soldier sculptures (I, I1). The entire room is held together by two large Egyptian columns (J and L). Incense smoke (H) appears to float and add an air of gloominess to the scene.

Spolarium: The Analogy of Dead Gladiators

The *Spolarium* shows dead gladiators being dragged towards the darkest portion of the canvas, which appears to be a place where corpses are stocked like useless waste. The scene is so dramatic that it could be mistaken for a moving theatrical tragedy. Drops of blood splattered on the ragged pavements. The gladiators are beaten with punctured skin where tissues and flesh seem to burst out. Ladies produce howling cries in one corner, while priests say silent prayers in another. It is a gloomy sight. It is even more depressing than that of

Caravaggio's *The Beheading of St. John the Baptist* (1608).

In 1884, the same year *Spoliarium* won the prize, the Philippines and its people had been through a lot of pain, exploitation, and struggles since the Spaniards arrived on their shores. In fact, with the escalating disgust of the people, sporadic uprisings were already initiated within the decades prior. The most popular and bloody was perhaps the Cavite Mutiny of 1872 (Foreman, 1906).

Undoubtedly, Luna was cognizant of the ominous situation that the archipelago was in (courtesy of the Spanish colonizers). He was already of age when the mutiny happened and during the time when most of the mutineers were executed on the grounds of *Bagong Bayan* (Luneta).

Luna's use of gladiators is a poetic yet tragic metaphor. The dead gladiators may be likened to Filipino natives and, broadly, to the entire Archipelago. In an earlier essay, I claimed

The Philippines could also be likened to dead gladiators whose beaten and bloodied bodies are dragged on the ragged pavement of the *Spoliarium*. After a gladiator has satisfied and entertained the roaring Roman crowd, the gladiator is castoff as a piece of trash, belonging to his own class of crushed and deserted players. This was exactly what Luna had in mind. It was Luna's prediction that the Philippines, like a gladiator, would be forsaken and left in a very miserable plight after satisfying its Spanish masters. (Viray, 2014, p. 4-5)

Here, Luna used the *Spoliarium* to convey what he felt about his country and his people. The painting was his medium to reach his countrymen and the global audience. He wanted the world to know that in this huge Roman Coliseum named after the Spanish King Philip, suffering and tears inundate its oceans. Obviously, "the scene is an allusion to the deplorable state of Spanish rule in the Philippines" (Pilar, 1980, p. 52).

Luna implicitly conveys here the metaphors of the certainty of death, man's inhumanity to man, and the metaphor of a dying nation. Should the archipelago remain in its current plight, the country is a gladiator that faces the barbarism of its masters, the abuse of its resources until they are drained, and the certainty of its impending death. The patriots and the nationalists would just be like that woman and that pained relative, wailing for the loss of their beloved country. The vultures waiting to benefit from the demise of the country are those Filipinos who are waiting to gain from the death of the collective aspirations of the nation. And that crowd, indifferent and apathetic, is even more guilty as they remain complacent and nonchalant while the resources of their country are being drained, abused, and exploited.

During a celebration in *Restaurante Ingles* that served as a tribute to the winners, Rizal and Lopez Jaena, albeit in different fashions, asserted the national importance of Luna's *Spoliarium*. Rizal said: "Genius has no country; genius burst forth everywhere; genius is, like a light and air, the patrimony of all" (Quoted in Pilar, 1980, p. 59). He also continued, "*Spoliarium* is a reflection of the spirit of our social, moral, and spiritual life: humanity

subjected to trials unredeemed, reason in open fight with prejudice, fanaticism, and injustice" (Pilar, 1980). For Lopez Jaena, "The Philippines is more than a veritable *Spoliarium* with all its horrors! There lies in mangled fragments, humanity massacred, the rights of man perverted! There is no semblance of justice for the common man, and liberty is cinders, ashes, and dust!" (Pilar, 1980).

The painting is also Luna's channel to publicly mourn the loss of his beloved brother Manuel, whom he spent his childhood with in Intramuros. He is somehow the relative weeping by the coliseum's wayside, and he is also the priest reciting prayers for the soul of his beloved Manuel.

The painting is Luna's medium to show both his political and personal thoughts. His brushstrokes, so vivid and strong, are mirrors of his steadfastness to alleviate the situation of his country and countrymen, and his manipulation of shadows and light represents his ways to gracefully swim along the horrors and tribulations of life.

Parisian Life: the *Nationalist Gaze* and Luna's Call for Temperance

The *Parisian Life* (1892) was a gift by the artist to Dr. Ariston Bautista-Lin, a Filipino doctor who was one of the most generous financiers of Philippine propaganda in Europe. The painting was done months prior to the gruesome murders at 26 Villa Dupont and 48 Rue Pergolese in Paris, where Luna shot to death his wife Paz and his mother-in-law Julia Gorricho. The various symbols of death and suffering appearing in the painting may perhaps, among others, reflect the artist's temperament and his bleak household during that fateful year.

The painting shows a Parisian lady sitting nonchalantly at a café. Not far from her are three well-dressed gentlemen, throwing meaningful gazes. Obviously, the three men appear to be Juan Luna himself, Jose Rizal, and the Chinese-looking guy, the propagandist doctor Lin.

It is palpable that this masterpiece is far from what it appears on the surface. The painting is full of symbolic elements, which the artist is known for. The following are just a few: the evocative gazes of the propagandists; the black rope that seems to hang the lady; the huge vase with blue-violet roses on the interior sill; the half-empty glass atop the table fronting the Parisian lady; and, of course, the lady herself.

The gazes thrown at the lady appear to be intrusive, inquisitive, and (yet) emancipative. Juan Luna's gaze is intrusive. It obviously causes discomfort for the lady. That of Bautista-Lin is more inquiring than an expression of distrust. And Rizal's is subtle and indirect. Despite the variety of meanings that these gazes might evoke, there is an overriding intention (albeit inconclusively) if they are to be taken from the overall context of the artwork—that is, gloom and death. Note that the blue-violet flowers and the imperceptible rope represent death.

The inquisitive gaze of Lin may perhaps suggest his sincere intention to know the reasons why the lady (Philippines) is drowning in a murky situation. Why is the country in a

quagmire? Are the energy and resources she possessed (contained in the half-empty glass) being siphoned off by her imaginary (momentarily absent) companion (a European, as evidenced by a checkered overcoat on the cushioned sofa)? These nationalistic ideas, though not profound, are appropriated by Luna in the eyes of Lin.

Luna's gazes are so direct and intrusive, possibly because of his strong and resolute intention to think of ways to free the lady from her sufferings. How can a propagandist like him and the rest of the Filipino scholars in Europe (symbolically situated at another table) emancipate the Parisian lady from her bondage?

Rizal's delicate and stealthy gazes show the hero's calculating and perhaps cunning approach to the revolution. Luna, a close friend, may have known Rizal's strategy even prior to the latter's establishment of *La Liga Filipina* in 1892. To stress, *La Liga Filipina* is Rizal's model of government, where principles of social reform, equality, justice, and progress were laid down.

The nationalistic fervor of the three heroes could be gleaned from the gazes that they threw towards the lady. Gazes that try to inquire, intrude, and emancipate. The painting uses symbolism to convey its otherwise explicit import.

Another likely interpretation is perhaps more personal than nationalistic. I would like to focus on the work's purpose as a warning to Paz Pardo de Tavera. Paz would not have died, and the gruesome event on September 22, 1892, would not have occurred had Bautista-Lin understood his friend's call for temperance. Remember that it was only months after the work was finished and given to Bautista-Lin that the bloody event happened. Possibly, Luna tried to restrain himself by communicating, albeit symbolically, his state of mind to Bautista-Lin, to whom the painting was given. But Luna's wealthy friend was not able to grasp the message and just dismissed the painting as an ordinary painting by an extraordinary painter. He never expected his friend to be a painter of such virtuosity. He was on the edge of insanity and despair. Despite Luna's violent tendencies, Bautista-Lin never imagined that the artist could murder his own wife and the mother of his beloved son, Andrés. Lin was obviously mistaken. He did not comprehend the painting.

Let us focus on some visual elements of the painting that could prove this point. Prominent personalities who are obviously portrayed in the painting are Jose Rizal, the artist, and Ariston Bautista Lin. Other than their very apparent physical features, their mannerisms and postures seemed to have been captured so accurately. The artist and Lin-Bautista directly stare in the direction of the Parisian lady, who appears to be inconvenienced by the accusing glances. Rizal, as gentle as he was, seemed to avoid contact with the lady. Obviously, the lady does not resemble Paz. The soft features of the woman are far from Paz's rigid and firm profile. It would have been easy for Lin to crack the cryptic code in the painting if Paz's face had perfectly matched that of the lady.

The Parisian lady appears to be in the company of a European man, as evidenced by the overcoat on the cushioned seat just beside her, the slightly misplaced wooden seat, the full

glass across the lady's haft empty wineglass, and the European hat placed deliberately on the table. Apparently, the lady is not comfortable seeing the guys at the other table. She seems very worried that these people could catch her red-handed. Her reaction suggests guilt, fear, and worry.

Luna might have projected Paz through the Parisian lady. Suspicions of his wife's adulterous relationship, at least in his mind, were confirmed. It should be noted that there is no concrete evidence in history that points to Paz's adulterous relationship. But in Luna's mind, there was a fixation. He had already created an adulterous monster out of his wife. His jealousy was so strong that reason could no longer permeate.

Luna knew how intelligent his doctor friends were. He perhaps expected them to discover the messages hidden in the work. Obviously, Lin and Rizal failed to read his mind or his psyche; hence, the tragedy.

España y Filipinas: A Guide to Enlightenment

España y Filipinas portrays two ladies at the topmost step of a slightly winding staircase. A lady who appears to be of European descent (as evidenced by her dress and bearing) and another whose appearance likely represents a Filipina native are staring at the horizon. The European points to a distant direction while she embraces the Filipina in a caring yet authoritative manner.

The artist here shows the following symbolism: First, the set of stairs represents progress. Second, the European lady is Mother Spain, guiding her ward, the *Saya* Clad Philippines. The horizon symbolizes the future and/or enlightenment.

On the surface, the artist advocates and promotes the sacred intentions of the colonizers. It somehow reenacts the arbitrary invasion of scientific, cultural, and technological ideas that the country is compelled to absorb. The European colonizers projected themselves to be so superior in all aspects, while the Filipino civilization remained crude and unsophisticated, aching for enlightenment. The colonizers appear as saviors from the evils of ignorance, affirming their messianic complex.

Quite the contrary, I believe that Luna's intention was to inform his countrymen about the dangers of this purported colonial assimilation. The danger lies at the edge of the stairs. It is too risky for the Filipina native to stand side by side with the colonizers on that ledge. The caring embrace could at any time be a deadly mechanistic push, which would leave the native (Philippines) in a free fall.

This manifests Luna's tendency to doubt things that appear to be beautiful and ideal. The scenario in the painting suggests beauty, as white roses are scattered on the stairs. A deceitful feeling of comfort may be generated. But behind that beauty lies danger. Remember that roses do not only represent beauty; they also represent pain because of their sharp thorns. In the event of a misstep, the Filipina would have to endure thorn injuries. As can be

noticed, all the roses are on the side of the Filipina, and almost nothing is on the pathway of the European lady.

The flowers scattered on the staircase represent the ambivalence of the journey, which is sweet and yet thorny. In some versions of *Espana Y Filipinas*, especially that one that belongs to the National Gallery of Singapore, the flowers are accompanied by the colors of mother Spain, as if suggesting that the ambivalence of the journey is the latter's making. And the intentions of guiding the country to enlightenment could be subject to doubt and scrutiny.

La Muerte de Cleopatra: The Metaphor of a Dwindling Power

The central figure in the painting obviously represents the power and wealth of Mother Spain. Though surrounded by her riches, the royal was not able to escape the inevitable end. Her death is reflective of Spain's eventual demise. Luna may be indicating the loss of royalty to the country. Or an equally valid interpretation could be that Luna believes that the exploitation and abuse of officialdom (as personified by Cleopatra) in the Philippines may soon meet their poisonous snake.

The slaves, especially the black one, may be interpreted as the natives, who may have an enigmatic reaction to the death. She represents the natives' possible reaction once Spain withdraws from the country or loses its grip. The natives may have varied reactions. Others may be joyful and rejoiceful, while some may feel disgusted and concerned.

The presence of the sculpture of armored soldiers surrounding the prostrate body of Cleopatra may indicate Spain's military power, which may seem to be a warning to the colonial subjects—that the death is just a bodily death. And that the real power of Spain rests in the military and in classic religion as represented by symbols of antiquity that dominate the entire stage—the sphynx, the monster, smoke, and the columns that hold the edifice together.

Conclusion

In the works above interpreted, messages and contents were conveyed in symbolic manners. Luna seemed to have hidden his nationalistic ideas behind symbols. The artist is perhaps one of those propagandists who tried to expose and educate his people about the real situation of the country: how the colonizers continue to exploit our natural resources and how they enjoy inflicting suffering on the poor natives. If Rizal's contribution to the revolution, among others, was the publication of his two popular novels, Luna's may perhaps be these paintings.

The idea of nationalism in Luna may not be as explicit as those of his compatriots in Europe, as decoding symbols is necessary, but his nationalistic fervor could not be discounted.

In the above works, it can be deduced that Luna used symbolic elements to portray his

sincere and deep-seated nationalism. His *Spoliarium* is a metaphor that likens the country to a gladiator whose energy and resources have been drained by his Roman (Spanish) master, leaving her bloodied, dead, and useless. The *Parisian Life* presents a condition of the archipelago that necessitates emancipation. The *Death of Cleopatra* represents the aspirations of Filipinos to alleviate their conditions and mirrors their hope to finally put an end to all the exploitations and abuses that *Indios* suffer. And finally, *Espana y Filipina* implicitly portrays the cunning and deceitful ways of the colonizers that put the country on the brink of a sudden fall.

It can also be gleaned from the discussion above that Luna's works have a point of commonality. *Spoliarium* and *Death of Cleopatra* are both set against a gloomy backdrop. The *Espana Y Filipina* and *Parisian Life*, though not evidently dark, predict something so deadly. Luna's inclination towards the dark, depressing, and gloomy might perhaps have originated from his own personal experiences, as he himself hurdled life's challenges in the most difficult and thorny ways. But evidently, his nationalism remains ever-burning despite these personal challenges.

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