

The Marvelous *Turn* in the Accounts of the Magellan Expedition to the Philippines in the 16th Century

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Introduction

IN THE THEODORE De Bry engraving of Magellan (Aughton 69), he put Magellan in the middle of a Spanish galleon, armed with an astrolabe he must have used in his calculations of his position in the seas. Alongside the galleon are the outstanding figures that Magellan ostensibly encountered during his expedition, the Patagonian giant armed with a bow and arrows who inserts an arrow into his mouth, a giant mermaid, strange looking sea creatures, a man and a woman semi-naked save for a band of leaves covering their private parts, two people in the ocean with one holding a hand up towards the direction of the ship, Zeus on a cloud with the wind blowing, and a naked Apollo carrying a lyre looking directly at the viewer. Magellan is alone in the ship, seated on a chair with a table where the tools he used for navigation are found.

He is armed with 3 cannons, a pick axe, a broken mast, rope, a keg and has his own colors flying at the masthead. On the left side is land, the “Tierra del Fuego” or “The Land of the Fire” with smoke rising from the ground, and a flying bird or a garuda carrying an elephant. He is in the south of America, and straight ahead lies a calm ocean up to the end of the horizon,

he names it the “Pacific Ocean” but the sky is cloudy overhead. Although he is killed in Cebu, he shows us that the world is much bigger than the former explorers and mapmakers thought. Magellan is able to reach the East by sailing West. Interestingly, there is no Catholic icon, or symbol of Christianity in the picture. Unless De Bry meant it to be the ship itself as in traditional medieval romance where the Church is compared with a ship “*Eclessia est navis*” (Stevens 155). De Bry also made an engraving of Amerigo Vespucci meeting America that was critiqued by Jesuit historian Michel de Certeau, in the opening of his book, *The Writing of History*. Unlike that of Vespucci who stands over a naked America, here Magellan is alone in his ship, the caravel *Trinidad*. The elements of the marvelous are there, in the strange lands, peoples and unknown creatures he encounters in the periphery of the engraving. The travel accounts of the Magellan expedition mark the beginning of travel writing on the Philippines with a colonial objective.

Early travel accounts of Spanish missionaries and other travelers abound in our history. These early foreign travel accounts in the form of letters, journals and *relacions* have been the basis of historical writing. While oral literature predominated in early Filipino culture, most written records were destroyed by the Spanish colonizers and the ravages of time. These surviving foreign accounts are read most of the time for their descriptive value since there are no records left of life prior to the arrival of the Spaniards. Dominick LaCapra argued that “all forms of historiography might benefit from modes of critical reading based on the conviction that documents are texts that supplement or rework ‘reality’ and not mere sources that divulge facts about reality” (LaCapra 16). Historical texts need to be read beyond their descriptive value or for “filling in the gaps.” William Henry Scott wrote that we must look at “the cracks in the parchment curtain” (1) to see points of resistance or to get a glimpse of the Filipino reaction to the colonizers. Are the travel accounts as innocuous as they seem?

Or did they create a misrepresentation of the Philippines that persists until today? What was the framework of these travel accounts and what were the tropes used to define or create an image of the Philippines? What kind of narrative did these travel writers want to tell? Since historical writing makes use of these primary accounts, the framework and premises of the writers need to be critiqued as well.

Erfindung des Magallanischen Meers.

XV.



FERDINANDUS Magallanus als er von dem König in Portugal beleidigt worden / ist zu Kenfer Carolo dem Fünfften kommen / vñ ihn angezeigt / wie das die Inseln Moluccen den Castiliern zuständig vnd angehörig seyen / er verhoffte / soer gegen Nidergang der Sonnen schiffen sollte / ein Meer in dem Nidergängischen Indien zufinden / dadurch er auff das Mitteltägige Meer zufahren / vñnd von dannen in die Inseln Moluccas zukommen vermeynete / vñ man köndte auff solche weg vnd weis mit geringern Kosten vnd weniger beschwerlichet ein Gevürge vñnd andere Waar auß den Morgenländern herzu führen. Carolus nach Beschluß vnd Meinung deren Rahtleuth so den sachen Indiam betreffende / fůrgesehet / růstet in etliche Schiff zu / darůber er ihn zu einem Obersten machte / Derselbig Ferdinandus als er von Hyspali außgefahen / findet endlich nach langwieriger Schiffahrt ein Meer so sich in die lenge hundert vñnd zehen / aber in die breite zwo / vñnd vñterweilens mehr Meilen erstreckt / welches von seinem Erfinder das Magallanisch Meer ist genennet worden. Cap. 14.

Spanier

This paper analyzes the trope of the marvelous in the travel accounts of the Magellan expedition, as well as some accounts which describe the customs and culture of the early Filipinos. The Magellan expedition accounts will include the following: the earliest travel account published in Europe regarding the Philippines, *De Moluccis Insulis* (Of the Moluccas Islands) by Maximilianus Transylvanus (the Latin name of Max Oberwald) published in 1524, Antonio Pigafetta's account of Magellan's expedition, Fernando Oliviera's account of the Magellan expedition and that by Gines de Mafra, the pilot who wrote an account of the death of Magellan. The second group includes: the *Relacion de las Islas Filipinas* by Fr. Pedro Chirino of the Society of Jesus (Relation of the Filipinas Islands and of what has there been accomplished by the Society of Jesus) published in Rome in 1604, the *Customs of the Tagalogs* (Two Relations) by Fr. Juan de Plasencia, O.S.F., written in 1589, and excerpts of Francisco Colin's *Labor Evangelica*. Most of the texts I will be using are from the Blair and Robertson compilation and the *Documentary Sources of Philippine History* by Gregorio F. Zaide.

The early Spanish accounts showed the "marvelous" as perceived by the early travelers trying to make sense of a reality that was strange and new to them. What did these travelers see about the Philippines then and why did they see these things in particular? What intellectual framework and rhetorical style inform the travelers' text? What codes are used to develop the narrative that the writer wants to tell? What interests bear upon the writing of the text and its reception? How does the political context and/or religious background of the writer influence the writing of the text? These texts were written in the early Renaissance but carried influences from the late Medieval period in the art of letter writing. It is possible that the strain of the marvelous in travel writing is a confluence of two traditions – travel writing from the Greek and Roman period especially that of Pliny the Elder, the element of the marvelous as seen in nature inspiring awe and wonder and that which is inexplicable, to that of the marvelous which is miraculous since it is ascribed as God's handiwork.

The Trope of the *Marvelous*

In his study of medieval romances, Cambridge scholar John Stevens wrote on the three categories of the marvelous:

- (1) The purely *mysterious*—unmotivated, unexplained and inexplicable. Such as the numerous ships without helmsmen, talking animals ... the Flaming Lance in Chretien's *Lancelot*.
- (2) The strictly *magical*—An event is magical ... if it shows the marvelous controlled by man. Rings conferring invisibility or the power of tongues fit in here with magic ointments, swords, and so forth.
- (3) The *miraculous*—that is to say, the marvelous *controlled by God*. Miracles are God's magic, his supernatural interventions in the natural workings of the created world (100-101).

In his book "Marvelous Possessions," Stephen Greenblatt argued that the "marvelous is a central feature in the whole complex system of representation, verbal and visual, philosophical and aesthetic, intellectual and emotional, through which people of the late Middle Ages and the Renaissance apprehended, and thence possessed or discarded, the unfamiliar, the alien, the terrible, the desirable, and the hateful" (22-23). He wrote that the "the early modern discourse of discovery ... is a superbly powerful register of the characteristic claims and limits of European representational practice. The qualities that gave wonder its centrality to this practice also gave its ideological malleability." (Greenblatt 23-24). Greenblatt emphasizes an important distinction: in literature, we are dealing with imagination at play, but in the "early European accounts of the New world, we are dealing with the imagination at work" (23). Writing the marvelous would be a way of taming the strange or making sense of it, thus appropriating it.

Greenblatt cited Aquinas's teacher, Albertus Magnus in his *Commentary on the Metaphysics of Aristotle* on the "internal dynamics of wonder":

Wonder is defined as a constriction and suspension of the heart caused by amazement at the sensible appearance of something so portentous, great, and unusual, that the heart suffers a systole. Hence wonder is something like fear in its effect on the heart. This effect of wonder, then, this constriction ... springs from an

unfulfilled but felt desire to know that cause of that which appears portentous and unusual: so it was in the beginning when men, up to that time unskilled, began to philosophize Now the man who is puzzled and wonders apparently does not know. Hence wonder is the movement of the man who does not know on his way to finding out, to get at the bottom of that at which he wonders and to determine its cause ... such is the origin of philosophy. (Cited in Greenblatt 81)

There is a move from the marvelous – “from the blankness of ignorance to the fullness of understanding” (Greenblatt 81). In response to this, Columbus does “an act closely linked in the Middle Ages and Renaissance to philosophy: the act of naming” (Greenblatt 82). But aside from naming, there was also a tendency for exaggeration. Latin American scholar Felipe Fernandez-Armesto argued that exaggeration and sensationalism in travel writing during the medieval period helped sell the books. He called this aspect of travel writing – “*mirabilia*: prodigies, monsters, enchantments, fabulous people and places, freaks of climate and topography” (99-100).

Writing and describing the marvelous is closely linked to appropriation. Appropriation is when the colonizer “implicitly claims the territory surveyed as the colonizer’s own; the colonizer speaks as an inheritor whose very vision is charged with racial ambition” (Spurr 28). Appropriation is effaced as the colonizer rewrites the situation as something that the colonized wanted. It can be presented as a response “to a putative appeal on the part of the colonized land and people” or the institution of order over chaos, or the application of technology onto “natural abundance” (Spurr 28). The travel narratives of the Magellan expedition show that generally the natives did not object to the arrival and conquest of the Spaniards. In his book, *Content and Form*, Hayden White posited that “narrative is not merely a neutral discursive form that may or not be used to represent real events in their aspect as developmental processes, but rather entail ontological and epistemic choices with distinct ideological and even specifically political implications” (ix). As the travel writer constructs a narrative, he is not simply narrating the events as they unfold. “Events must be registered within the chronological framework of their original occurrence but *narrated* as well, that is to say, revealed as possessing a structure, an order of meaning, that they do not possess as mere

sequence” (White 5). The framework and narrative or story that the writer wanted to tell impinges on the events constructed. The prefigurative approach of the writer determines the so-called facts and events which are considered pertinent to the narrative.

French Jesuit theorist Michel de Certeau believed that an event (*evenement*) recorded and “assumed to be historically valid is shaped from conflicting imagination, at once past and present ... events are often our mental projections bearing strong ideological and even political imprints” (xiv). A recorded event bears the political milieu and ideology of the writer, including one’s religious perspective. As Tom Conley observed Michel de Certeau:

... does not dispute that certain events may have occurred. Rather he emphasizes how events are described, how they are considered meaningful, how they become worthy of record or notice. The eye that recognizes them is necessarily conditioned by the assumptions, and dispositions of the observers and scribes from the past, of the chroniclers who have created the modern historian’s archives. This background inevitably inflects the ways historians select and interpret events. (xv)

What the writer sees, why one sees what one does and how one creates it in writing is determined by one’s political and cultural milieu. Even what is left out or effaced is also determined by the ideology of the writer. The descriptions “congeal into images: like illustrations of photographs in history books.” These become *emblems* that are retained or reproduced (De Certeau xv). In describing an etching by Jan Van der Street of the explorer Amerigo Vespucci in armor and standing upright before a nude Indian woman representing America who is supine in a hammock: “the conqueror will write the body of the other and trace there his own history. From her he will make a historicized body – a blazon of his labor and phantasms. She will be “Latin America” (de Certeau xxv).

This erotic and warlike scene had an almost mythic value. It represents the beginning of a new function of writing in the West. Jan Van der Straet’s staging of the disembarkment surely depicts Vespucci’s surprise as he faces this world, the first to grasp clearly that is a *nuovo terra* not yet existing on maps – an unknown body

destined to bear the name, Amerigo, of its inventor. But what is really initiated here is a colonization of the body by the discourse of power. This is *writing that conquers*. It will use the New World as if it were a blank, “savage” page on which Western desire will be written. It will transform the space of the other into a field of expansion for a system of production. From the moment of a rupture between a subject and an object of the operation, between a *will to write* and a *written body* (or a body to be written), this writing fabricates Western history. (xxv-xxvi)

Latin American historian Rabasa disagreed with De Certeau’s interpretation of the nude woman America as a “blank page.” This does not simply refer to the “Other as absence of culture, but forms an integral condition of the Renaissance.” Rabasa argued that the “proper place of writing” is the blank page, but not in the sense of an absence of history or culture but more of a western desire as the old is transformed or supplanted by the new since “to speak of a European pursuit of a New World that bears the imprint of native and ancient texts whereon the West discovers or fabricates it imperial destiny. The pursuit obviously implies an appropriation of indigenous texts, but that is very different from reducing the encounter to “blank page” versus “Western desire” (42).

The Catholic beliefs and framework of the writers of these travel narratives impinge on the text, as shown in their belief that God controls history, and that the world unfolds according to His plan, even if we may not know or comprehend it at this point. God is everywhere, in language and in nature, and His Being imbues these events and phenomena with a special significance.

Earlier Studies on the Magellan Expedition

For the 500th year commemoration of the arrival of Christopher Columbus in Latin America in 1992, there was a plethora of new studies and critiques regarding the arrival of the Spaniards and the horrible effects of their colonization on the prevalent cultures. Here, not many studies have been done on the arrival of the Spaniards aside from the writings of Dr. Resil Mojares. Dr. Vince Rafael’s *Contracting Colonialism* focuses on how

conversion is negotiated through translation by the natives. Even Fr. Horacio de la Costa's writings on this period focus more on the extent of early conversion and establishment of the newly converted communities under the aegis of the religious orders. William Henry Scott tries to create a picture of the early Filipino through the "cracks in the parchment curtain." Scott writes how we can counter the dominant colonial historiography by reading the texts carefully to see how the early Filipinos responded to colonial authority, how the "cracks" reveal insights on native resistance.

In 1965, the Philippine Historical Committee and the Philippine Chapter of the International Association of Historians of Asia sponsored "A Historical Symposium of the Beginning of Christianity in the Philippines." The objective was to "trace the route of the voyage across the Philippines, pinpointing all the various islands touched upon by the Europeans" ("Introduction ii). It traced the voyages of Magellan, Loaisa, Saavedra, Villalobos and the Legazpi expeditions to the West. Its purpose was to "describe the major activities of the first Europeans in these islands" and to provide a "glimpse of Filipino life and society at the moment of its first contact with the West" (Introduction ii). In the paper presented by Teodoro R. Catindig, he traces the voyage of the Magellan expedition from his arrival in Samar until the Spaniards left the Philippines after Magellan's death. He retells the first sight of Samar, as Magellan and his men "sat up eagerly and gazed with a renewed sense of life at the blue mountains in the distance. This was a significant moment in the history of the Philippines for this was the day she was first *revealed* to the West. This was the day Spain first laid eyes on her" (1). He theorizes why the early Filipinos converted so easily to Christianity. But Catindig remains within his own Catholic subjectivity as he writes that "we can here discuss only the purely human motivations since one can never know the inner workings of God's grace. We are not trying to ignore the efficacy of grace but merely prescinding from it since it transcends history" (Catindig 19). He provides two reasons why the natives converted so easily: the first was "fear, fear that they would all be destroyed should they refuse the Faith of their visitors" and the second was the "hope of deriving material advantages" (Catindig 19-20). The natives had been impressed by the superior firepower of the Spaniards, as Magellan made it a point to fire the cannons in "friendship." This simply scared the natives except for their king, Rajah Humabon. Catindig believes that Magellan wanted to "impress these

unsophisticated natives” by “disclosing himself as a god who could call down lightning and thunder from the heavens” (15).

In 1966, Jesuit Historian Nicholas P. Cushner wrote *The Isles of the West: Early Spanish Voyages to the Philippines, 1521 – 1564* where he recounts the different voyages from Magellan up to Legazpi. In his retelling of the Villalobos expedition, he theorizes why the Spanish shifted their objective from occupying the Moluccas to the Philippines. The Portuguese had occupied the Moluccas so “why not occupy that vast archipelago to the north?” Four reasons seemed good enough: gold was seen on the natives, there were spices and the natives were peaceful and the Islands were not under Portuguese control. These islands could be reached from Mexico, and the most important thing was to establish the route back to Spain and Mexico (Cushner 45).

In the 1993 study by the Philippine Social Science Council on the “History and State of the Art of the Discipline of History or of Historiography,” it noted that the “first historians of the Philippines were the Spanish friar missionaries” (5). It included a listing of early accounts on the Philippines by the different religious orders and foreign visitors. While recognizing our debt to these early historians who carefully noted down “native society, its social structure, religious beliefs and practices, industry, arts, science, culture, customs and traditions,” the study also “noted with irony” that these same friars were responsible for the destruction of any existing native accounts, writings and shrines. The Catholic framework of the writers of the narratives need to be considered since it impinges on the texts (5).

In his essay, “The Islands According to Pigafetta,” Dr. Resil B. Mojares focuses on the “intellectual framework and rhetorical strategies that governed how Pigafetta’s navigational narrative “produced” the Philippines, converting it from the unknown into an object of knowledge for a European readership” (21-22). He cites Renaissance scholar Theodore J. Cachey, Jr. who traces the genealogy of the text that links it to the “Italian *americanista* tradition, on one hand, and the *isolario*, or “Book of Islands” genre in Italian travel writing” (23):

... striking affinities with *Liber Insularum Archipelagi* (Book of the Islands of the Archipelago) (c.a. 1420). *First Voyage* has striking affinities with the *Liber Insularum* in the island subject matter, the first person authorial perspective, a literary treatment

alternating between narrative and expository modes, and the combination of narrative and cartography (in a coffee-table book" format in which the colored maps are embedded in the manuscript and integrated into the narrative) (24).

He links it to the Italian *americanista* tradition such as Boccaccio's *De canaria* and Alvise de Cadamosto's travel letters. This is typified by "an heroic ideological perspective, a relative detachment from national, political, and commercial interests, as well as a paradoxically legitimating utilization of the marvelous." (Mojares 24)

Travel narratives, like stories of heroic adventure, follow a tripartite structure: the setting out and separation from the familiar, the trialsof initiation and adventure, and the hero's return and reintegration into society. This is the archetypal pattern of the rite of passage, in which the hero and his home world are thrown into relief, affirmed or subverted, by a process of radical displacement, the liminal experience of a journey. (Cited in Mojares 26)

Here Pigafetta's initiation and adventure are "embedded in the experience of travel itself" but there is "little information on the narrator (the person *before and after the voyage*)" (Mojares 26-27). The descriptions of the marvelous are in the first section of the account, when they travel through the Americas, but the section with the highest level of human contact is that in the Philippine islands. Mojares believes that Pigafetta's manner of writing, in a genteel, courtly style, is patterned after the "perfect courtier" in Castiglione's *Book of the Courtier*. His "dignity and restraint" show us his "courtliness":

As witness – participant, Pigafetta shows an elegance of demeanor and speech, love of beauty, lack of affectation, discretion, and loyalty to his lord. His gaze is not overtly dominating or acquisitive. He relates his remarkable adventures with what Castiglione calls *sprezzatura*, or a studied nonchalance ("to conceal all art and make whatever is done or said appear to be without effort and almost without any thought about it. (Mojares 41)

Mojares sees "the Philippine discovery [as] a piece of chivalric romance" since "plotting the Philippine discovery experience as a romance meant that

“certain acts were to be performed, certain ends pursued, certain desires fulfilled” (Mojares 43). His descriptions of the natives of the Philippine islands are a “double movement” as he describes their similarities to the Europeans, “their weighing scales, flutes, and the rooms in their houses are “like ours,” and their women are “very beautiful and almost as white as our girls and as large” (Mojares 33). “Likeness suggests that these are a people with whom Europeans can have intercourse; difference demands that they be subjected to the leveling, ‘civilizing’ power of Europe” (Mojares 33). The Spanish crew resorts to baptizing the women before having sex with them, since they were forbidden to have sex with the heathen. While I would agree that Pigafetta follows the norms of medieval letter writing, I would not want to set aside the fact that Pigafetta’s account remains part of a Spanish project: to find a way to the Western isles, the Moluccas, and to claim them as part of Spanish territory as they supposedly fall within *their* part of the world as divided in the Treaty of Tordesillas. As Latin American scholar Jose Rabasa has noted, to emphasize the “good tone and courtly morals” while reading early accounts of Spanish colonization of America would set aside “another mode of violence and conquest”:

If the humanist historiographical model of the 16th century prescribed a providential concept of history, eloquence and good tone, a courtly morality, and an elegant style, to insist too much on these aesthetic formalisms, would lead us to ignore their functions in the providential schemas. (Rabasa 5-6)

Italian scholar Jacob Burckhardt defines two purposes for writing “for which the humanist was as indispensable to the republics as to princes or popes, namely, the official correspondence of the state, and the making of speeches on public and solemn occasions” (Burckhardt 151-152). I would think that Pigafetta and Transylvanus, both as secretaries, were influenced by late medieval writing traditions in the art of letter writing. Both seem well read in their study of the ancients. Both cite the book, *On Natural History* by Pliny the Elder. In his account, *Le Voyage et Navigation Faict par les Espagnols* (French version) Pigafetta cites Pliny:

And in the Great Canaries there is one island that has no water at all that gushes up (i.e. as from a stream or spring), except that at noon a cloud descends from the sky and surrounds a huge tree

on said island, and its leaves and branches distill a great quantity of water, and it gathers at the foot of said tree in the form of a fountain. And from it comes all the water, of which men as well as animals, both domestic and wild, take their fill. (Paige translation 2-3)

This is the “miraculous tree of Hierro” that Cachey emphasizes was a “literary topos, already mentioned by Pliny that typically served as a rhetorical marker in accounts of the passage from the Old World to the New” (cited in Mojares 28). Reading Pigafetta against Pliny, he adopts the same reasonable, logical tone that Pliny uses.

Following Michel Foucault’s notion of “discursive formation,” Jose Rabasa wrote in his study of Latin America that the crucial difference between histories, chronicles and *relaciones* (accounts) is that it determines “who has the authority to speak and what is legitimate knowledge.” The *narrative structure* differentiates the three:

... *relaciones* and chronicles call for a weak plot that highlights the particularity of its contents and, above all, lacks the “moralistic” resolutions that lend universal significations to history. These genres would differ, then, according to how explicit they make their *allegoresis*. That is, the degree to which the historical narrative endows sets of real events with the kinds of meaning found otherwise only in myth and literature. (Rabasa 5)

Rabasa argued that “narrative forms” are not “exclusively aesthetic or rhetorical formulas prevalent in sixteenth century historiography, but also generic strictures determining the kinds of meaning that might be conveyed under specific legal, political, or religious constraints” (5). All these must be read under the framework of a colonial paradigm even if the writer may seem to be following simply the prevalent norms of writing of his time. The codes used in these narratives may be bound within the realms of writing of the period but he warns the reader that we should not forget the colonial framework which underscores this kind of writing:

If the humanist historiographical model in the sixteenth century prescribed a providential concept of history, eloquence and good

tones, a courtly morality, and an elegant style, to insist too much on these aesthetic formalism would lead us to ignore their function within the colonial enterprise: that there are new values, meanings and functions in the providential schemas, for instance, among the millenarian Franciscans, where the ultimate referent of history is no longer Europe, that the good tone and courtly morals convey, beyond rhetorical formulas, another mode of violence and conquest, or that the elegant style implies a cultural appropriation of narrative forms that follow other poetics. At any rate, the tasks would no longer be how or to what degree New World histories approximate the ideals of humanistic historiography, but rather to read them as instances of a colonial process. (Rabasa 5-6 underscoring added)

An example of this is how Pigafetta described Magellan at the time of his death as a “good knight” as he valiantly fought off the “treacherous natives” who were simply defending themselves from this invader who demanded tribute and burned their homes. To limit a reading of Pigafetta’s account as imbued with courtly norms of the time would mean ignoring the overall framework of the voyage.

Recently, Laurence Bergreen wrote a retelling of the Magellan expedition in *Over the Edge of the World: Magellan’s Terrifying Circumnavigation of the Globe*, wherein he argued that “by confronting the intellectual and spiritual limitations of the ancient view of the world, by subjecting its assumptions to the ultimate reality check – traveling around the globe, Magellan looked ahead of his time to the Age of Reason and beyond, to the present” (414).

On the use of the term *Filipino*

While the term *Filipino* was first used to denote the Spaniards who were born here, or the *insulares*, and later on to include all the citizens of the archipelago, I will use the term here interchangeably with *indios*, the so-called Indians or natives of the time. There is a problem to use precisely the terms given by the colonizers to signify the early inhabitants of the islands, but seeing that these are colonial texts, and no earlier text written by the *indios* of the time have been found so far, we will be limited to the use of the name given by the colonizers. Even in the earlier travel accounts written by the Chinese, there is no explicit mention of what the natives called

themselves; we are referred to as the people of *Lucones* or *Ma-I*, or from the Chinese perspective, barbarians. Dr. Zeus Salazar prefers to use the term Malays, since he argued we were a part of a larger Malay configuration in South-east Asia. “Mula sa ika-16 a dt. *Malayos* ang pagkakilala ng mga Kastila at iba pang banyagang Europeo sa mga natagpuang grup ng tao sa diumano’y “archipelago ni Magallanes” o *Filipinas*,” bago sila bansagang “Indios” at “Indios Malayos” (xvii). The most recent study on this period was a paper, “Battle of Mactan and the Indigenous Discourse on War” by Jose Amiel Angeles which focuses on the “people’s discourse of war” as he reconstructs the battle between Lapulapu and Magellan.

God in History

Reading the texts, one cannot help noticing the references to “God’s will.” “It was his will that led us here” or that “He has saved me so that I can do His work.” This is premised on “Augustine’s providential theory of history, namely the assumption that God’s plan had controlled the destinies of pagan empires as well as Jewish and Christian History” (Barnes 49). The writers of these texts see themselves within a larger framework of fulfilling God’s will, even though they may not understand what is happening. Even the fact that they “found” the Philippines instead of the Spice islands is read as God’s will. Their actions fulfill a divine plan that they do not know. Scholar Hans Meyerhoff wrote that “Israel and Christianity” after the “pagan world” imbued history with a “religious significance which it had not had previously.” History was now seen as a “progression” of the “design and direction imposed on it by God’s will” (2). He also noted two features in Augustine’s *City of God* – the notion of a “universal history” as “History is one aspect of the world created by God” and it has an “origin and goal and moves in a linear progression” as events are read in the context of Divine Providence. At the same time, History was an “intelligible process guided by an inherent law or the transcendent design of a Divine intelligence.” It may not be clear to man what God’s plan is, but this is unfolded in the course of “sacred history.” Even in the course of the journey, saints appear:

During these storms the body of St. Anselm appeared to us several times. And among others on a night that was very dark, at a time of bad weather, the said saint appeared in the form of a lighted

torch at the height of the maintop, and remained there more than two hours and a half, to the comfort of us all. For we were in tears, expecting only the hour of death. And when this holy light was about to leave us, it was so bright to the eyes of all that we were for more than a quarter of an hour as blind men calling for mercy ... Be it noted that, whenever this fire which represents St. Anselm appears and descends on a ship (which is in a storm at sea), the ship never perishes. Suddenly the fire vanished, the sea became calm again, and then we saw several birds of diverse kinds. (Pigafetta, Skelton translation 41-42)

God and the Marvelous in Chirino and Plasencia

This section analyzes the tropes of writing used in two primary texts, one by Fr. Pedro Chirino of the Society of Jesus who wrote *Relacion de las Islas Filipinas* (Relation of the Filipinas Islands and of what has there been accomplished by the Society of Jesus) published in Rome in 1604 and the other by Juan de Plasencia, O.S.F., *Customs of the Tagalogs* (Two Relations) written in 1589. The texts I will be using are from the Blair and Robertson compilation. Here we will see how God in history has intervened and brought the Spaniards to the Philippines, in lieu of the Moluccas. All actions are read within the framework of God's will, and even the "marvelous" fall within the ambit of miracles performed in God's name. For Chirino, even nature is transformed when the natives are converted, because in medieval aesthetics, God is in the sunlight, as shown in the use of the stained glass windows in the Middle Ages. As the sunlight shines through the stained glass, that light reflects God. Again, there is appropriation of space, and even that of the native term "simbahan" to denote a place of worship is now used to delineate the Catholic place of worship, the church. The Spanish term *iglesia* is not used to denote the Catholic Church, unlike in Latin America.

In the early accounts of Fr. Pedro Chirino, we can see how a medieval framework and the importance of conversion of the natives framed his report. Fr. Chirino, a Jesuit, came to the Philippines in May 1590 at the age of 33. As Procurator, this account was his report to the Father Claudio Aquaviva, the Superior General of the Jesuit order, and included the "state and condition of our insignificant society in the Filipinas" (175).

He stayed here for 14 years and was a “missionary to the Tagalos and Pintados and was superior of the Jesuit colleges in Manila and Cebu” (175). He studied civil and canon law in Sevilla. He “held missionary posts at Balayan and Taytay in Luzon and at Tigbauan in Panay, and founded at Carigara the first mission on the island of Leyte. In 1595 he was assigned to the Jesuit College in Cebu. (Introduction by Echevarria vii). He visited Mindoro, Marinduque, Samar, Bohol and Mindanao at different times” (Chirino 176). His intent was to “follow that thread of incidents which have befallen the Society in that region and the hardships it has undergone while preaching our holy faith.”

The narrative began from “the time our religion was first established in those islands, treating of the islands themselves, their characteristics, and those of the nations and peoples who inhabit them” (Chirino 176). He did not intend to write a history of the islands since a “complete and copious history” had already been written by Doctor Antonio de Morga. Fr. Chirino wrote “It is neither my obligation nor my profession to write a history; although there certainly are in that land magnificent, singular, and wonderful things, both profitable and pleasing to know” (Chirino 177). He mentioned that the location of Filipinas as “part of the many islands which recent cosmographers consider adjacent to Asia ... between the Malucas and islands of Japon, and it is a thing to be wondered at that the exertions and diligence of the Portuguese who discovered, explored and settled Maluco, China, and Japon, the outermost and peripheral islands should not have discovered the middle part, or center, namely the Filipinas” (Chirino 177). The “discovery” of Filipinas while the Spaniards were in search of the Moluccas was a fortuitous event, it was God who led them here to do his work.

Juan de Plasencia, a Franciscan who came here set the criteria for the writing the “simple truth” – by collecting “Indians from different districts – old men, and those of most capacity, all known to me” (173). His choice of the Indians supported the veracity of his account. He alone determined the “truth” by choosing Indians that he had previously met. He set the criteria for what is “true.” Here we see what is commonly overlooked in the travel accounts, the colonizer alone set the criteria for “truth” and wrote it from his perspective. The eyewitness accounts were important for determining the truth, with the eyewitnesses stating that they were there and they saw these things, thus they could only be telling the “truth.”

Faced with the political system of the natives, he understood the system of the *datos* or chiefs by writing that it “corresponded to our knights” (Plasencia 179). This comparison of a new political system to an order that he is familiar with creates a view on a political system that prevails even up to the present.

Like the Portuguese in search of *Maluco*, the original intent of the Spaniards was the “eager quest of spices and gold.” But God intervened as He “destined them not for Maluco but for the Filipinas, caused them to abandon the thought of Maluco and to settle for the latter islands, thus bringing them to the bosom of the Church and the crown of Castilla; they gave these the name of Filipinas, out of respect to, and to perpetuate the memory of King Filipino Second” (Chirino 178-79). Like Columbus, wonder leads to the act of naming. Aside from appropriation through naming, the Spaniards appropriated space by building their city and fortress over the same location previously occupied by the natives. “The city of the natives in the port of Sebu was at that time so large and populous that it extended a space of more than a *legua* along the beach, on the spot where now stands the city and fortress of the Spaniards.” The precise appropriation of early Filipino sites of power, whether religious or political, was crucial since it supplanted those places with the new political (Kuta ni Rajah Soliman, now Fort Santiago) or sacred places (Churches) within the Catholic tradition. Fr. Chirino also causes the transfer of the town of Taytay to a spot of his choice because of a flood in his old church. He told the four *datos* of the barangay that he would only come back to the town if and when a new chapel is built on the hill where they bury the dead. The whole town abandons the old site, because at “night they were in dread of the devils in the old town, since it was now without church or cross, so that no one dared sleep there (257).

In narrating the first encounter of the Indians and the Spaniards after the death of Magellan, he emphasized the fear of the Indians of the “valor” of the Spaniards and their guilt at the “thought of their treachery in killing Magallanes years before.” While initially offering some resistance, the natives fled inland at the sound of the cannons.

Thereupon our men leaped ashore unimpeded and began to seek food in the houses as is the custom among those who have just disembarked after a long voyage. At this juncture it happened that a Biscayan who was rummaging along the movables and

ornaments of the houses, found in a basket, among other things, a carved image of the holy child Jesus, presumably left as a trophy of the devotion of some good soldier of the first expedition of Magallanes. (181)

He does not present the Spaniards as looters or thieves, simply as those who follow custom by “rummaging through houses.” He creates the image of the Indians who respected and venerated the image, anointing it with oil and making sacrifices to it. So God is merciful towards those who honored Him even though they were ignorant of Him as the natives presumably called the image the “Divata of the Castellians” meaning “God.” Finding an artifact of Catholic belief, he interpreted the situation that God had inspired them to revere and respect the object and gave the hint for its proper name and the site for a church. “The religious at once took possession of the image and devotion to it named the city that they founded Santissimo Nombre de Jesus, and placed the image in a church of their order erected in the city” (Chirino 181). The statue, the object ostensibly of veneration, gives the cue for appropriation of the place for the Spanish city with its new name and church to house the object. Fr. Juan de Plasencia’s often quoted *Customs of the Tagalogs* showed the appropriation of the native term *simbahan* for a place of worship, in lieu of the Spanish term *iglesia* for a place of worship or church (185-86). Colonial appropriation of space and of language was significant since it consolidated political and religious power at the same time.

Baptism as conversion or medicine

One interesting image that comes to mind when one reads a travel account is how the natives exchanged gifts with the Spaniards and how the natives formed long lines to be baptized or converted. One detail that repeats itself in the Chirino account is his retelling of how natives who were sick would ask for baptism, be converted, and either be cured or died (“but the good Lord had waited for the dying person’s conversion before taking him into his arms”). Or how the baptized person was miraculously spat out by a crocodile who had bitten him, upon uttering the name of Jesus. Was baptism truly a conversion or simply seen as medicine? This is similar to the account of Nunez Cabeza de Vaca in Latin America where the natives felt that their

sick relatives were cured through baptism. In the Pigafetta account, he writes that the King of Cebu was asked why they did not destroy and burn their idols as they were supposed to do after their conversion. The King said his brother was sick and that they were making an offering to their “idols” so that his health could be restored. But the Captain said that “if they burned their idols and believed in Jesus Christ and if the sick man wished to be baptized, he would be healed immediately, and that if it turned out otherwise, then they could cut off his head” (Pigafetta, Paige translation 68). After a short procession to the house of the sick man, the rite of baptism for him, his wife and children was performed and the sick man immediately felt better, “by the Grace of God he was well. And this was a manifest miracle in our time” (Pigafetta, Paige translation 69). In Chirino’s account, it seems more like a utilitarian motive for baptism:

The people of Sebu did not remain a long time in retirement. Assured of the good friendship of the Spaniard for them, and that through it they should have many commodities which they needed, together with defense and help against their enemies, and peace in the islands (of which they were so desirous, being weary of the continual and grievous wars and evils with which they had harassed one another, they all repaired to the Spaniards to be baptized, and to offer them their services. They entered, moreover, into such fraternal and confidential relations with the Spaniards that they soon came to long for the honor that might be theirs from association with them, and from serving them with their industry and lands, not only providing them with what was needed for their sustenance, but acting as guides in the exploration and conquest of other islands as far away as Manila, which is the principal and foremost island among them all. (Chirino 184-85)

Chirino wrote that since the natives were convinced of the friendship of the Spaniards, they wanted to be baptized and associated with them. The natives even cooperated as guides in conquering the other islands. Colonial appropriation effaces resistance since it makes it appear that the natives were willing subjects and in fact wanted to be colonized. Plasencia wrote that there was in fact some resistance that was overwhelmed and the *sandugo* method was used to bring the natives under the crown of Spain. “In the beginning, the pacification of the Islands was strongly resisted, and some deaths among

our men ensued; yet in spite of this, those few reduced and subjugated everything and began to establish our holy faith, gently bringing the villages, with their chiefs into obedience to the Church and the crown of Castilla” (Plasencia 17). Baptism is not necessarily seen as conversion, but more of that which can cure the sick and give them protection from their enemies as they early Filipinos allied themselves with the Spaniards.

Transformation of nature because of God

Part of Medieval aesthetics is the belief that God is everywhere, He is in Nature, particularly in the sunlight. Medieval scholar Umberto Eco called this the “aesthetics of light” as “light was the metaphor for spiritual realities.” “The medieval often conceived of God in terms of light” (Eco 46). Chirino found that the Philippines had become a brighter place, even the weather had improved since the natives had converted to Catholicism:

It seems, however, that now since they have become Christians, the seasons are not quite the same, for at Christmas it gets somewhat cooler. The years, since the advent of the Spaniards, have been determined by the latter, and the seasons have been given their proper names, and they have been divided into weeks. (Chirino 190)

Chirino’s belief that the weather has become cooler due to the natives’ conversion is a reinforcement of this belief. Fr. Chirino had an account of how a young boy was saved by saying Jesus’ name. On the way to see him, a crocodile had attacked the boat and was about to drag the boy to the bottom of the river. “The boy, following the pious custom that those people have of invoking Jesus and Mary, when he found himself in the water in the power of the crocodile, cried aloud: “Jesus and Mary, help me! And the *marvelous* thing was the beast at once let him go practically unharmed, except for a few scratches that he had received from the nails that hurt him but little.” The natives’ faith grew as they “praise[d] God for his mercies toward them” (Chirino 192). The mere invocation of God’s name convinces the crocodile to release the boy. This is similar to a medieval belief of taming a snake when the name of God was written on a piece of paper. Another account was that when the priest was called because a ten day old baby was sick. He

could not drink his mother's milk for three days. The parents did not want him to die without being baptized. "The father went, and baptized the child; and the next morning, when he inquired about it, they replied the infant was already well, for holy baptism *had immediately cured it*" (Chirino 192).

Conclusion

In summary, we can see how the marvelous here is not the same as the marvelous associated with Pliny or as used by Greenblatt. The marvelous here is linked with the idea of the omnipresent God, who determines the course of history. Baptism, as the conduit of God's grace, can cure one immediately of any illness, and the invocation of his name can save one from peril. For the friars, the Philippines is a world transformed because God has now come.

While these texts do provide a picture of the Filipinos when the Spaniards arrived, these texts should be read beyond their descriptive value but rather within the framework and narrative that the writers wanted to tell. The tropes used in the Spanish texts recreate the Other, the early Filipino, into an amenable member of the Church and subject of Castille. The accounts of the Magellan expedition and Fr. Chirino's intention to report on the work of the Society of Jesus thus far meant re-creating the events and interpreting the natives' actions to suit the narrative *they* wanted to tell.

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