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Eugenio Matibag

Iowa State University, ematibag@iastate.edu

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Abstract

Near the beginning of a prolific and productive career as a writer and statesman, Claro M. Recto (1890-1960) authored two prize-winning dramas that were performed at the Manila Grand Opera House. Each of the plays—*La ruta de Damasco* (1913) and *Solo entre las sombras* (1917)—is a drama that represents the interactions of an ilustrado family in its relationship to the imposition of cultural practices and power structures under American rule. This essay proposes that in these dramas written by an ilustrado and performed for an interpellated ilustrado audience, the ilustrado home stands as a metonym of the nation, its family a synecdoche of the national community. As such, whereas the plays express the nationalist stance identified with members of the ilustrado class of educated elite, the dialogic enactment of tensions and conflicts among their ilustrado characters serves to work out the contradictions within the class and at the same time to legitimate the class's hegemony and accommodationism in a Philippine society subjected to American colonial rule. The protagonists of *La ruta* are nationalist newspapermen who, facing persecution and censorship under the colonial government, are offered the choice between collaborating and resisting. The central character of *Solo* is a medical doctor who, in his struggles to conceal the fact of an adulterous relationship, reveals the effects of a "violent saxonization" that has undermined Philippine custom and identity. Both dramas thus complicate the post-1899 reimagining of the Philippine nation: as a community to be represented and led by what Osmeña called the "directing class," which would declare nationalist objectives and defend the notion of a "Philippines for the Filipinos" while testing the limits of resistance to the American colonial institutions and registering the effects of their newly introduced values and practices on Philippine society during a time that saw the rise of the Partido Nacionalista of Osmeña, Quezon and Recto.

Keywords

Nationalism, ilustrado hegemony, American colonial rule

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**STAGING THE NATION:
CLARO M. RECTO'S DOMESTIC DRAMAS**

Eugenio Matibag
Iowa State University
ematibag@iastate.edu

Abstract

Near the beginning of a prolific and productive career as a writer and statesman, Claro M. Recto (1890-1960) authored two prize-winning dramas that were performed at the Manila Grand Opera House. Each of the plays—*La ruta de Damasco* (1913) and *Solo entre las sombras* (1917)—is a drama that represents the interactions of an ilustrado family in its relationship to the imposition of cultural practices and power structures under American rule. This essay proposes that in these dramas written by an ilustrado and performed for an interpellated ilustrado audience, the ilustrado home stands as a metonym of the nation, its family a synecdoche of the national community. As such, whereas the plays express the nationalist stance identified with members of the ilustrado class of educated elite, the dialogic enactment of tensions and conflicts among their ilustrado characters serves to work out the contradictions within the class and at the same time to legitimate the class's hegemony and accommodationism in a Philippine society subjected to American colonial rule.

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About the Author

Eugenio Matibag, professor of Spanish in Iowa State University's Department of World Languages and Cultures, was born in Cavite and grew up in Southern California. He has published research on Latin American and Philippine literatures in the journals *Revista Hispánica Moderna*, *Humanities Diliman*, *Catauro*, *Postmodern Culture*, *The Journal of Caribbean Studies*, *Dispositio*, *Hispamérica*, and various anthologies and encyclopedias. His two books are *Afro-Cuban Religious Experience* (1996) and *Haitian-Dominican Counterpoint* (2003). He is currently at work on a study that examines the discourse of nineteenth-century Philippine nationalism.

Está ya muerto el presente...
 Libertarlo es imposible, porque ha sido condenado.
 Pues, entonces, libertemos el futuro, custodiando la simiente
 que han echado
 en el surco de las almas
 nuestros heroes que murieron, conquistando eternas palmas.
 --Claro M. Recto, "Epopeya de la raza" (1910)

ON THE NIGHT OF JULY 5, 1913, AT THE MANILA GRAND OPERA, members of the amateur dramatic society "Aficionados de Talía" performed *La ruta de Damasco*, a drama authored in Spanish by the twenty-two-year-old Tayabas-born Claro Mayo Recto (Fig. 1). "The Road to Damascus" had won for the playwright a first prize of P500 in the contest sponsored by the newspaper *El Renacimiento Filipino* in commemoration of its third anniversary.¹ Recto's comedia drew public acclaim and critical commentary, signaling therewith the resurgence of Philippine drama (Medina and Feliciano 223).² Recto would repeat this triumph some four years later, by winning the award for best tragedy of the Talía competition in 1917. His prize-winning entry on that occasion was *Solo entre las sombras* (Alone Among the Shadows).

The period of rapid change in which Recto's plays debuted saw both the deepening of American colonial rule and the emergence of the ilustrado elites as a native political class. For this was the time in which the ilustrados could come into their own as the "directing class" of Philippine society, as Sergio Osmeña would refer to his own oligarchical group (Cullinane 339). What was at stake on the political stage at this juncture, and what was left unsaid but implicit on the



Fig. 2

¹ The rules of the contest were simple: they required that all submissions (1) fit the format of a single act, (2) last for an hour's duration in performance, and (3) call for no change of scenery.

² From *The Complete Works of Claro M. Recto, Volume 1 (Literary Works 1909-1918)*, compiled and annotated by Isagani R. Medina and Myrna S. Feliciano (Centennial Edition, Pasay City, Metro Manila, Claro M. Recto Memorial Foundation, 1990). Parenthetical references to Recto's works of this edition will be indicated hereinafter with the abbreviation CW. Citations of editorial annotations and supplemental materials such as critical pieces included in this volume will be indicated by the last names of the authors and identified accordingly in the Works Cited section.

dramatic one, was the ilustrados' role within the larger society, and what was being contested on both stages was the ilustrados' right to speak for the whole Philippine nation. Even a cursory glance at Recto's two plays, for two is all he ever wrote in his prolific writing career, will reveal that both are definitely ilustrado affairs: their characters belong to that stratum of the Filipino elite and educated called ilustrados, and the author as well as the audience in attendance at their performance belonged to that ilustrado class or had affiliations to it.³ Belonging as they did to the more privileged sectors of Filipino society, the characters, author, and audience of those plays, despite differences of wealth, social prominence, and ideology among the members of this group, all shared in common their access to European or American higher education, which gave them access to the Spanish language, and a particular intimacy of relationship with the colonial regime, whether the Spanish one of the latter part of the nineteenth century, or the American one of first decades of the twentieth, or both. Inclusive both of the wealthy aristocratic layer or the more professionalized middle sectors, the ilustrado elite composed the privileged 10 percent of the population who enjoyed significantly more wealth, status and opportunity than the urban laborers and the masses of peasantry from which they stood apart (Cullinane 331).

Thanks to the intermediary role of the ilustrados in the Philippine society of the time, a dependent nationalism under ilustrado politicians was taking shape as the destiny of the Philippines under American hegemony. Recto's two domestic dramas, each in its way, rehearsed complexities of this paradoxical situation whose issues come to bear profoundly and intimately upon the household dynamics. *La ruta's* character Doña Irene, cast in the role of a wealthy antagonist opposite the crusading nationalist newspapermen of her sister's family, embodies the ilustrado accommodation, adaptation, and conformity to the American regime, but she also stands as living proof of the benefits of "Filipinization"—at least for the enterprising sector of the ilustrado elite who had cooperated with the American administration and served as its link to the middle sectors and the masses of folk or people regarded collectively as the *tao*. "¿Qué ocurre en esta casa?" asks Doña Irene, disdainful of the journalists' inability to provide resources sufficient to guarantee the wellbeing of their families (CW 246). What indeed is happening in the house is the question this drama of ilustrados posed for ilustrados, and the answer mattered to an interpellated ilustrado audience to whom the drama held up a mirror of their rapidly changing political culture, with the ilustrado home as a metonym of the nation, its family a synecdoche of the national community.

³ It is important to note that the ilustrados could not collectively be regarded as a socioeconomic class according to the Marxist definition of the term, since they composed a group that was, and continues to be, internally stratified and fragmented. Yet the denomination of "class" can fill in to designate the group as distinct and in significant ways positioned in contradistinction to the masses of the peasantry and urban proletariat. Cullinane bases his analysis of the ilustrados fineseulares on the identification of "four overlapping and internally differentiated socioeconomic categories: (1) municipal elite, (2) provincial elite, (3) urban elite, and (4) urban middle sector" (Cullinane 19).

Implicit in this identification of Recto's dramas as "ilustrado theater" are implications sufficient to complicate the Andersonian conception of the "imagined community," of which the Philippine society of the later nineteenth century, reconceived in the "national imagination" of José Rizal's *Noli me tangere*, was the exemplary case.⁴ If the vehicle of imagining a nation is printing and publishing, and if printing and publishing were the domains of the ilustrado class, the interests and worldviews of those ilustrados who managed both the medium and the message should not go without being examined. Class differences among the ilustrados further problematized the ilustrados' project of nation-building, given the disagreements—adumbrated in the rivalry between Bonifacio and Aguinaldo, repeated perhaps in the opposition between Nacionalistas and Federalistas—that threatened to undermine and collapse it from within. A reading cognizant of Recto's ambivalent comedy and tragedy should therefore account for the ideological function they performed in their production: that is, for the way in which they worked through the tensions and antagonisms inherent in the ilustrados' self-identification, making their case for a kind of Philippine nationalism in which the ilustrado assumes a leading role, and in the process guaranteeing their worthiness for assuming this responsibility. This political and economic leadership would draw from the upper and middle-class Filipinos, including the landed elite, who enjoyed the exclusive privilege of suffrage, and who would fulfill the role of intermediaries between the new colonizers and the rest of the colonized. Under an American administration avid of "Filipinizing" the government bureaucracy, a homegrown style of caciquism emerged and developed under the guise of democratic self-rule. It was the ilustrado class, now coming into its own as intermediaries and *compradores*, who facilitated the entry of American interests into their economy as they prevailed on American colonial officials to create policy that advanced their own economic and political goals (Constantino 1975: 312; 319-320). What follows will be a critical analysis of Recto's plays that will attempt to account for the manner in which they stage the drama of a Philippine nation in search of a national destiny, but a national destiny that was allowed to unfold under the protagonism of the ilustrados and the tutelage of the Americans. Insofar as both of Recto's plays can be considered "ilustrado drama," since the plot of each one centers on the conflicts that occur within an ilustrado household, it turns out that the ilustrado home is where the meaning of Philippine nationhood works itself out for the ilustrado as Filipino.

In staging a spectacle imitative of his own ilustrado class's activities, Recto in his dramas undertook the task of naturalizing their privileged access to power and thus legitimizing their circumscribed hegemony in the colonial state of the post-Malolos era. Etienne Balibar's concept of "nation form" helps to elucidate way that Recto's dramas represented a bounded nationhood that sought its collective

⁴ See Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* 26-27 and 30.

identity under American colonialism. Making implicit reference to Benedict Anderson, Balibar explains how the production of a nation as a “people” according to the nation form is always imaginary, insofar as “every social community reproduced by the functioning of institutions is imaginary” (Balibar 93). For in general terms, the self-identification of a people as a people has already begun with its recognition by and self-recognition in the institutions of its state and in the identification of the state in opposition to other states.⁵ Recto’s nation of Filipinos is a nation imagined by, but mostly for, a community still in gestation at the global periphery and subjected to the form-giving authority of American colonial institutions. The particular forces that formed this community, however, go beyond the American mold, insofar as they include the Hispanic patrimony, with its legacy of religion, custom, and language imposed during more than three hundred years of Spanish colonialism. The language of the erstwhile colonizers was of course a legacy mastered by the members of the educated elite and deployed in the literature written by members of the ilustrado intelligentsia. These traced their genealogy to the municipal principalia at home and to the journalists and essayists of the nineteenth century propagandistas who wrote and published abroad: a group of ilustrados whose history has been treated at great length.⁶

Recto came of age as a writer in the years of Woodrow Wilson’s presidency, when the United States could apply the lessons that it had learned in the process of disciplining the Latin American republics as unequal partners in America’s business. Recto’s Philippines, like the Latin American republics in the nineteenth century, was seeking its own cultural identity, but for Recto’s generation, unlike such intransigents as Macario Sakay and Artemio Ricarte who had led the struggle in 1896 and 1899, identity no longer meant independence, at least not while the Americans were in charge.

For resistance to American rule was severely punished during the first decade of the twentieth century. When the military offensive against the resistance fighters during the Philippine-American War had ended, the colonial administration laid down the laws that criminalized all overt opposition. In 1901, the Sedition Law threatened with pain of death or imprisonment any who advocated rebellion, insurrection or the overthrow of the colonial government, thus holding public advocacy of independence in check. This legislation was followed by the Brigandage Act of 1902, which labeled any guerrillas as *bandoleros* or *tulisanes*, deeming their activities punishable by the same penalties laid upon those convicted of sedition. Also known as the Bandolerismo Statute, the Brigandage Act classified all anti-colonial resistance as criminal acts of *tulisanes*, bandits (Zwick

⁵ In the Philippines during the first two decades of American dominance, the colonial state preceded the nation: nationhood is still in gestation; statehood, albeit according to a colonial template or module imposed in the global periphery, has adumbrated its form (see Wallerstein 81). If *La ruta de Damasco* has as subtext the narrative of a nation, it is that of a nation interrupted, waylaid, blindsided—Floro Quibuyen (1999) has said “aborted”—by American intervention. In this time of moving foundations and shifting allegiances, the question is posed: Who is the nation, and how is this agency to be represented?

⁶ See for example Rafael (1995), Jolipa (1996), Schumacher (1997), Roces (2006) and Mojares (2006).

39). The Reconcentration Act, approved in the following year, forced villagers in the rural zones of the Philippines, much as had occurred in Cuba under General Weyler during the 1898 war, to be uprooted from their homes and resettled in enclosed areas, thus preventing them from participating in the armed resistance or extending aid to guerrilla rebels. A final law to smother expressions of native patriotism of an anti-American stripe was passed in 1907: the Flag Law made illegal the exhibiting of flags supporting either the Katipunan or the Republic of the Philippines (Lumbera and Lumbera 87-88). With denunciations of the colonial administration denounced as “scurrilous libel,” journalists of the resistance turned to literature as a more indirect form of *filibusterismo*. Periodical publications—newspapers and magazines in both the colonizers’ languages and the vernaculars—sought a means of circumventing the Sedition Law. Among the forms taken by this counterdiscourse were allegorical drama and nationalistic poetry, a nationwide phenomenon that not responded critically not only to American imperialism but also to the invading flood of Philippine society by American culture.⁷

Recto wrote *La ruta* after the passing of the subversive, “dissident” and denunciatory Filipino theater of the first decade of the century. One important dramatic precursor to Recto considered “seditious” was Aurelio Tolentino (1868-1915). Tolentino’s dramas included *Bagong Cristo* [New Christ, 1907], *Luwalhati* [Glory, 1908], and *Pag-ibig at Patayan* [Love and Killing, 1914], their titles suggesting the depth of Tolentino’s patriotic zeal.⁸ Earlier in his drama-writing career, in 1903, Tolentino had been arrested for authoring the play *Kahapon, Ngayon, at Bukas* (Yesterday, Today, and Tomorrow). The allegorical drama sought to muster resistance against the Occupation by recalling the struggle and sacrifice of the revolution. Its creation was considered an act of sedition for which Tolentino was condemned to *cadena perpetua* (although this sentence would be lifted with parole many years later).

The persecutions of the “seditious playwrights” had run their course by the second decade of the century, the lesson had been learned, and the political oppositionists among the ilustrado literati shifted the focus of their endeavors: away from the radical cause of independence, although it made for a popular slogan and an effective campaign strategy, and toward the gaining of political power from a more collaborationist position. Cullinane writes that “by 1907,”

The “seditious” dramas were things of the past, relics of an earlier phase of the “nationalist movement,” which would soon focus on politics of a different sort, a politics that was less concerned with the nationalist ideals emanating from the Revolution and

⁷ Lumbera and Lumbera provide a list of newspapers that published the new literature: “‘Muling Pagsilang’ (1903, Tagalog [a version of the *Renacimiento Filipino*]), *Ang Kaluwasan* (1902, Cebuano), *Makinaugalingon* (1913, Ilongo) and *Nueva Era* (1908, Iloko).” The same authors list as well four magazines that contributed to this literary renaissance (88-89).

⁸ Play-acting not sufficing for Tolentino, however, he would go on to lead a rebel band, an action for which he was arrested and sentenced to life imprisonment (Medina 128).

more concerned with the realities of elite competition for political position and power.
(Cullinane 124)

Within three years, the post-revolutionary generation of writers would take center stage in works that addressed, in the place of anti-colonial agitation, the “polemics of partisan politics in representation of the new political elite” (Cullinane *ibid.*). By the second decade of the century, the “Aristocracy of Intellect”⁹ for the most part viewed the work of revolution as over and done with, and although members of the educated elite continued to denounce American imperialism and wave a standard of independence, this group in reality was jockeying for a position from which to increase its own power under conditions of accommodation to and collaboration with the American authorities.

Amidst this activity of reimagining and reimagined community, Recto’s two domestic dramas attempted an imaginary reconciliation of a series of contradictions. First of all was the question of the language shared in common by the *ilustrados*. Spanish in the Philippines was not the *lingua franca* by a long shot, and in fact spoken by a slim minority of the Filipinos—only about ten percent, according to the 1903 census (de la Peña 80)—a group of those who by their class privilege gained access to institutions of higher education where they could learn and master the language, often in universities abroad. As manifest in Philippine hispanophone literature and culture in general, the Castilian language, despite its status as a minority language, provided a counterweight to the hegemonic imposition of English, which had swiftly become the language of business and bureaucracy during the Occupation. Philippine poetry, narratives and plays that were written in Spanish offered a version of a patrimony, a national identity that was to be built on a Hispanic foundation. Recto’s dramatic productions thus contributed to the vindication of Hispanicity which also endorsing the prerogative of his Castilian-speaking class for setting the national agenda.¹⁰

Recto’s plays thus constitute the gesture of an *ilustrado* artist and intellectual to come to terms, using the linguistic resources at hand, with the *fait accompli* of American colonial rule. Their action and dialogue, in working out the contradictions of the new situation, assess the possibilities for a route that will lead the Philippines, eventually, to independence, while at the same time they perform a legitimating act for the rising *ilustrado* hegemony. It could be said that the plays’ scenographies project virtual mappings of the way in which an *ilustrado* political class would work to resolve its disputes and come to a consensus on the right and proper direction of the country’s leadership under the watchful eye of the American authorities. Recto thus exemplifies the Filipino lawyer as political “radical” and artistic intellectual whose call for independence stance creates in practice a space for negotiating an

⁹ As they were called by Macario Adriatico (cited in Cullinane 340).

¹⁰ Gellner’s reflections on the role of the “clerisy” apply to the role of the *ilustrado* class in the Philippine society of the time: the literati in agro-literate polities will tend to maintain their distance from the folk culture, even show disdain for it. The brand of literacy to which this intelligentsia lays claim cannot, at this stage of development, be acquired by the masses; yet the literati may strive to gain respect for its ideals (Gellner 1983: 10-11).

accommodation with the American colonial administration, and thus a route to autonomy for the Philippine nation-in-progress, but within the bounds of the nation form shaped by American colonial institutions. A peculiar form of democracy will provide the vehicle for this development: in what Cullinane calls “the collaborative empire,” networks of municipal alliance and electoral manipulations will give the ilustrados the means with which to consolidate and increase their power (Cullinane 7). Addressing this ambiguously precarious situation from a perspective that is conditioned by his own ilustrado status, Recto’s plays strive to come to terms with the realization that a complete and sovereign nationhood, especially within the shifting colonial framework of the American-ruled Philippines, would have to be deferred. Patriotism meant keeping a dream alive, or under wraps, but safe and viable for a future in which the nationalist ilustrado would lead. In the meantime as well, the educated elite would take care of keeping things in order by cooperating and collaborating with the American administration.

As Recto’s dramas illustrate, the institutions of family and education occupy the center of a system by which the nation is constituted and given form. This sort of drama can be compared to the family narrative that is cast as “romance” in the conception formulated by Doris Sommer, by which issues of an imputed national community are examined and analyzed on the intimate and microscopic scale of the domestic narrative. Just as the nineteenth-century Spanish American novel for the reader of that century relocated race, gender and marriage as central to the project of nation-building, Recto’s household dramas performed the story of Filipino identity that was in process, after its interruption, in which social stratification and the relations between men and women take the center stage. Accordingly, his dramas exemplify what ilustrado writing by the second decade of the twentieth century registered as a sense of an “ambiguous identity,” to use the expression that serves as subtitle to Balibar and Wallerstein’s book on racism and nationalism. For in the Philippines under American rule, the Spanish-speaking elite confronted nation in need of form, one that was more a multiethnic and polylingual dispersion of peoples than a unified polity, an archipelago that was now overtaken by the tide of rapid Americanization and a simultaneous anglicization. In the role and position of one who continues to write in the language of the previous colonizing power, Recto would speak for his Philippine people, the *nous autres* called “Filipinos,” but in a language that spoken by few of its numbers. How to account for the status of drama written and performed in Spanish at this point of the nation’s continuing prehistory? As discernible in Recto’s plays, the manner in which the elite ilustrado rule over the Filipino masses, the *tao*, can be read in the way the ilustrados critique as they acknowledge the power of the American-backed press or the American-sponsored educational system.¹¹

¹¹ But the primarily agrarian society that the Philippines still was at the beginning of the twentieth century, composed as it was of diverse and linguistic communities, still stymied and stultified by colonialism, was not yet prepared for a coherent and unifying experience of nationhood, lacking as it did the political bonds that would create the solidarity of a political unit. As the sort of country that Ernest Gellner calls a “culturally eclectic empire,” the Philippines, an

American domination was to be realized no longer through brutal domination, but now via the consent-winning stratagems of a policy of “benevolent assimilation,” and this approach entailed the grooming of an ilustrado leadership class in the early part of the twentieth century. The Americans shifted their support from the Partido Federalista to the one Recto had joined, the Partido Nacionalista, which had been formed in 1906 by the merging of the Partido Independentista and the Union Nacionalista. Their campaign succeeded: in the first elections to the Philippine Assembly on July 30, 1907, the party in which Manuel Quezon and Sergio Osmeña would rise to prominence won the majority of seats (Francia 168). Others among its foremost founding members were Rafael Palma, Macario Adriatico and Leon Ma. Guerrero.¹² The newspaper that served to disseminate the message of the Partido Nacionalista, it should be noted, was *El Renacimiento Filipino*, the one that sponsored the competition won by *La ruta*. With a platform calling for “immediate, absolute, and complete independence,” the Partido Nacionalista gained majority status in the Philippine Assembly in 1907, thus taking over the lead once enjoyed by the Partido Federalista of Trinidad H. Pardo de Tavera, Benito Legarda and Cayetano Arellano. Held under the American colonial administration, the elections for the Philippine Assembly in 1907 offered a choice among nominees who owned property and were literate in Spanish or English. The latter requirement, premised on the access to formal education, virtually allowed only members of the privileged taga-bayan class to attain positions of leadership under the American tutelage (Lumbera and Lumbera 1997: 88). Quezón, elected to the Assembly in 1907, would be appointed resident commissioner to the U.S. House of Representatives in 1909. Twenty-six years later, in the year that Quezon became the Philippines’s second president, Recto would write the constitution for the Commonwealth.

Insofar as American imperialism framed the political activity of the ilustrado elite in the early part of the twentieth century, it is important to recall that this was a time when pro-American feeling surged among the masses of Filipinos. Now that the American occupation had established itself, a feeling of relief and gratitude swept over the newly colonized nation, now that the 300-year misrule of the Spanish had ended with the supposed dawning of new day of enlightened tutelage (Constantino 1996: 6). The shift in tastes for American products obeyed the logic of a larger cultural self-estrangement: made in America became the very sign of modernization, even as this dependency did its part to perpetuate the relegation of the Philippines to the status of raw materials exporter, with the transformation of the traditional landed elite into the brokers and middlemen. The differences in opinion between members of the aristocratic stratum and those of

American neocolony, would continue to sustain the “sub-ethnic communities” that typically characterized the political activity of the agrarian age (Gellner 1997: 21). It is important to keep in mind that the drive of the principalia elite to assume a dominant, unifying role in the new society was welcomed by an American colonial administration in need of indigenous leaders.

¹² Not to be confused with Guerrero’s grandson, the diplomat and novelist Leon Maria Ignacio Agapito Guerrero y Francisco, who authored *The First Filipino*, first published in 1961.

the urban middle sectors come out in the dialogues between Doña Irene and the journalists married to women of her sister's family.

The bounded condition of Philippine politics made collaboration, and not independent nationhood, the name of the game, and the pseudo-democratic institutions imposed during this formative period produced an electoral system that allowed such provincial politicians as Osmeña and Quezon to create municipal networks of alliance that would raise them each in his turn to the presidency. Power would be shared. Taking the place of the ilustrado as bureaucrat would be the ilustrado as lawyer and politician within the broader context of a unique and special relationship between colonizer and colonized.

To generalize about the two dramas, one could say that in them, the national identity, but under American rule and ilustrado hegemony, is put on the stand and interrogated. The structure of their every domestic scene is clearly dialogic and dialectical: a schema could be drawn of the opposing values voiced by characters in each confrontation. Whereas the antagonists of 1913's *La ruta* are to be located externally, in the American colonial administration, in the unpatriotic collaborators and newspapers it backs, the enemy of *Solo* of 1917 is internal: in this case, the antagonist is identified with a flaw manifested within the emergent ilustrado class itself. The conflicts that emerge in dialogues among the characters give expression to their response not only to the colonial institutions that shaped their lives, but also to one another as members of the same class holding divergent views, those among the educated elites who should and will form lines of patronage and networks of alliance and association. Recto's own background illustrates the ambiguous identity of the Filipino intellectual as ilustrado.

The Ilustrado as Poet, Playwright, and Fledgling Politician

Recto worked his way through law school at the Universidad de Santo Tomas by writing for the Spanish-language newspaper *El Debate* (Medina and Feliciano xvii). Gifted polyglot that he was, Recto could continue to study law in Spanish, which remained the sole official language of the courts until 1911 (when English was added as the second official language, to remain so until it completely supplanted Spanish by January 1, 1920) (Constantino 1975: 317). It is clear that Recto had mastered the Spanish he learned in school and in which he expressed himself in poetry and drama, followed in subsequent years by a rapid mastery of English, no doubt facilitated by his previous schooling in Greek and Latin. Tagalog remained the language in which he spoke to audiences in his native Tayabas and in the Batangas province he represented. As if following the notion, voiced by Simoun in Rizal's *El filibusterismo* (1891), that "Spanish will never be the general language of the country," Recto would publicly champion the claim of a native language to anything that could be called the national identity of the Filipinos (Arcellana 369).

Yet Recto harbored, as observed by B. S. Medina, Jr., the “ilustrado ambivalence” of the articulate Hispanist in a post-Malolos era, pulled by the past that was Hispanic and the present that was American, and it was in Spanish that he wrote his major literary works. Recto’s polyglot facility proved a formidable arm in the political environment that saw the rise of the Partido Nacionalista (Medina 136).

Recto’s literary works were written for the most part by the year he reached 28 years of age. When his first play was produced, in 1913 he was serving as secretary to Vicente Ilustre, who had headed the Revolutionary Committee in Spain until the year 1899; and who thereafter led the junta in its Hong Kong exile during the war with the United States. By 1918, a year after *Solo’s* premier, Recto turned to writing mainly for the political arena, mostly in English, continuing to work in a fervent nationalist vein while contributing to and participating in the ilustrado ascendancy. His literary production thus falls comfortably into what has been called the “Period of Efflorescence of Philippine Literature in Spanish,” or the “Golden Age” of 1903-1942, the nearly forty years that stretched from the beginnings of American rule to the Japanese domination.¹³

Although Philippine literature in Spanish did not “reach” the masses in their original form of expression, such seminal works as Rizal’s *Noli me tangere* (1887) and *El filibusterismo* (1891) underwent vernacular “translations” with broad-ranging repercussions. It was the Spanish colonial legacy, transmitted as what Lumbera and Lumbera referred to as the Euro-Hispanic Tradition, that “informed literary development during the first half of the entire period of American Occupation.” The ilustrado Hispanists—Pedro Paterno, Antonio Abad, Cecilio Apóstol, and Recto among them—affirmed a Spanish Philippine identity, or, more exactly, a Philippine identity that embraced what was noble and even heroic in the legacy left by the Spanish centuries. Ilustrados calling on Filipinos to resist American imperialist seek endeavored to vindicate this unique cultural heritage, and thus establish a genealogy of “golden age of Fil-Hispanic letters” traceable back to the Propaganda Movement and the Katipunan (Lumbera and Lumbera 89). Publicly, at least, the Hispanophone ilustrado writers attempted to fire up enthusiasm for independence by strengthening the literary culture with works that could be read and understood by Castillian-speaking compatriots among ilustrado elite and middle sectors.

In 1911, when Recto was 21 years old, he gathered the poems he had published in *El Renacimiento Filipino* and had them republished in a collection titled *Bajo los Cocoteros* (*Under the Coconut Trees*). Some of the collection’s poems draw from Spain and Spanish for their thematics; others celebrate aspects of the native culture; all of them flow in the nationalist current of the Philippine *edad de oro*. Famous among these poems are “Elogio a la lengua castellana” (“Praise of the Castilian Language”) and “Alfonso XII,” but also the popular “Mi choza de nipa”

¹³ Luis Mariñas points out that the apogee of Hispanic Philippine literature occurred in time when the Spanish forces had withdrawn and the American regime had firmly established itself in the archipelago. Mariñas, referring to Estanislao Alinea’s periodization from 1903 to 1942, asserts that no new figures worthy of mention appeared after 1930, and the luminaries Recto and Manuel Bernabé would pass on in 1960 (Mariñas 51).

(“Mi nipa hut”) (cited in Alinea 160). Other poems remember the sacrifice of those who fought to free the nation from Spanish tyranny. “A los héroes del 96” affirms that spirit of the José Rizal and Andrés Bonifacio is reborn in the revolutionaries of 1896, a concept echoed in “Revolución” (Lumbera 2000: 72).

An ilustrado sense of outrage against the American imposition that will be expressed in *La ruta* and the cultural critique that will be articulated in *Solo* are forthrightly previewed in one poem, appearing in *Bajo los cocoteros*, that was first published in December 1910. The “Epopéya de la raza” (“Epic of the Race,” CW 67-73) offers itself, in its brief dedicatory, to “the memory of the heroes of Independence.” The verses of the poem go on to elaborate a sort of racializing identification of the Filipinos as a people, deploying what could be called, after John D. Blanco, a stratagem of “race as praxis” (Blanco 2011), but here not as a practice of colonial racism but rather as a gesture of counter-hegemonic resistance. The heroes of the 1896 revolution against Spain are the inheritors of Rizal, who is implicitly the “Moses” who led his own people from a long captivity. The same heroes are “Paladins of the Idea, bearers of Progress, / Spartacuses and Kozciuszkos of the Philippine Cause, / invincible under the weight / of three centuries of Conquest.”¹⁴ Under such inspiration, and beneath the standard of the Sun and the Three Stars, and guided by the examples of the *Indios Bravos* of 1889 and the Katipunan revolutionaries of 1896, the Filipino nation conceived in the text as *raza* is called again to become the protagonist of its own epic struggle for “Independent Status”: although the native *limbas* prevailed over the lion of Spain, segreant and rampant, yet that Philippine bird of prey, “bloodied,” “livid and battered,” must now flee from the Eagle of America. For the new foreign master has “nipped [tronchó] the morning bud of the republican flower”; the “destroyer Bird [. . .] of this winning Race [. . .] discharged upon us the cascade of its lightning / and the venom of its wrath.” The poem’s ending bears witness to the aftermath of defeat, now that the hecatomb has occurred. *Pax Americana* is settled upon the land, taking the form of a specious fraternity. For the Eagle is “absolute” by dint of its irresistible might; the Philippine nation has no choice but to take refuge in the “sovereign shade / of its wings,” and nurture hope for the future, consoled or encouraged by the thought that “defeat ennobles.” In the meantime, the vanquished can bear in mind that the victory is transitory, empires rise and fall. Patience, enjoins the ilustrado poet: his people must wait for liberty, but all can work, build tomorrow, raise a new Philippine nation “from the dust of its ruins.” The legacy left by the heroes of the race will endure.

¹⁴ The invocation of Andrzej Tadeusz Bonawentura Kościuszko (1746-1817) is telling, since, as the Supreme Commander of the Polish National Armed Forces, it was Kościuszko who led the 1794 uprising against the Russian Imperial Army and the Prussian Army.

With the plowhandle of the laborer and the parliamentary word
will flourish on Calvary
the Great Tree of the Idea.

The present now is dead,
To liberate it is impossible, because it has been condemned.
So, then, let us free the future, watching over the seed
that has been cast
in the furrow of souls
by our heroes who died, conquering eternal glory.¹⁵

Keeping hope alive, in this ilustrado conception, means saving the seed of a not yet attainable Philippine sovereignty and autonomy. Guided by the ilustrado's pragmatic idealism, the nation must take custody of that which the patriots have sown. If Spain is the undeniable, though not unproblematic, *Madre Patria*, the culture and language that its conquistadors and colonizers established in the Asian colony created a connection to a patrimony that linked the Philippines not only with Spain but with the republics that once were Spanish colonies. Implicitly, as the poem indicates by its authorship, genealogy and very language, the ilustrado will accept guardianship of the legacy.

In the year prior to *La ruta's* premier, in 1912, the Democrat Woodrow Wilson won election to the U. S. presidency, giving Filipino nationalists reason to hope that he, with support from the Democratic Congress, might feel ready to grant independence to the islands. Although Recto's mentor Quezon may have had his private doubts about his country's preparedness for independence, his public endorsement of it assured his continued popularity among the masses, whose optimism was further encouraged by the introduction of the Jones Act in March 1912, the bill that would have granted independence that same year. Quezon of course was arguing against Quezon, for, as Governor-General Forbes interpreted his intentions, Quezon believed that continued American tutelage for the Philippines was in the best interests of the Filipinos, not to mention his own political ambitions. The version of the Jones Act that would be passed in 1916 promised that the grant of independence would materialize "as soon as a stable government could be established" in the Philippines, providing as well for a government organized into three branches like that of the United States, including the Quezon-proposed

¹⁵ Con la esteva del obrero y el verbo parlamentario
florece en el Calvario
el Gran Arbol de la Idea.

Está ya muerto el presente. . .
Libertarlo es imposible, porque ha sido condenado.
Pues, entonces, librémos el futuro, custodiando la simiente
que han echado
en el surco de las almas
nuestros heroes [sic] que murieron, conquistando eternas palmas.

bicameral legislature, and for a bill of rights. The Jones Act thus advanced the process of Filipinization continued under the term of Governor-General Francis Burton Harrison. Still, the Filipinos remained under the obligation to prove to the Americans that they were capable of governing themselves. To do so was the charge of the “independence mission” to Washington of which Recto was a member, and by which delegated leaders argued their case while at the same time maneuvering for electoral gains from a Filipino populace that by this time was convinced, paradoxically, that political autonomy for their country would necessarily require Washington’s pledge of continued support (Constantino 1975: 329-330). Early in 1913, however, Recto raised a cry in demand for “absolute independence” for the Philippines, arguing that protection from the United States was unnecessary because any threat of foreign aggression was minimal: European countries refused to challenge the North American hegemony, Japan had other preoccupations, etc. Independence, in Recto’s explicitly stated view, would allow the Filipinos to become “more owners” of themselves and to develop their country’s natural resource all to better effect.¹⁶

Recto’s own political career began in 1913, the year of *La ruta*. Recto joined the staff of the Philippine Commission under the watchful eye of the Wilson-appointed Harrison. Having earned his Bachelor of Law degree and a masters degree from the University of Santo Tomas and amply demonstrated his talents, Recto would be recruited as an advisor to the first Philippine Senate in 1916 (Bernardo 130; Constantino 1975: 334). The following year would see the production of his second and final drama. Like *La ruta*, Recto wrote *Solo entre las sombras* in part to win the prize of a contest. What follows now is an analytic reading of each of Recto’s domestic dramas. An overview of each drama will serve to reconstruct the form of each work and frame the references it makes to the sociopolitical context and the ilustrado’s changing, contested role within it.

Checking the Fourth Power

La ruta de Damasco depicts life of journalists—that is, of Filipino newspapermen and their spouses—identifiable as members of the middle sectors of the ilustrado class. It is such journalists, the play seems to assert, who keep alive the dream of independence in the face of not only American censorship but collaboration on the part of the Filipino principalia who have profited from their intimate relations with the colonizers. Yet the text of the play, a showcase of public statements, hosts an interstitial message in which a real political agenda is rehearsed. In the gap between what the journalist characters advocate in the play

¹⁶ “Mirando afuera: sobre una profecía de Rizal,” *Renacimiento Filipino* III / 123 [January 21, 1913]: 907-08 (CW 209).

and what the ilustrados secretly worked for in the assembly lies its covert, perhaps “unconscious” meaning.¹⁷

Among the play’s cast of characters is the family’s suffering matron, Señora Tomasa, who knows something about the newspaperman’s life: not only is she the widow of a journalist, but she is mother to another journalist and potential mother-in-law to yet another. Bitter experience has taught her that the livelihood of a nationalist newspaperman in the colonial situation means indigence, and probably other forms of misery. Jacinto Makaraig, the editor-in-chief of *La Integridad*, is in love with Señora Tomasa’s daughter Loling; Antonio, husband to Señora Tomasa’s older daughter Mercedes, is the newspaper’s director. Jacinto and Antonio complain that they must fight a daily battle to spread the word of autonomy and national self-determination: “public apathy and the excesses of the regime” are what limit their activities and “oblige us to move within a narrow circle of iron, in a kind of attic where the air and the light of life find themselves stagnant” (CW 240). But fight on they must.¹⁸

Recto’s drama of ilustrado crisis follows the critical path taken by Henrik Ibsen’s realist prose dramas: it offers the spectacle of protagonists confronting the created interests of society that threaten to crush them: but unlike the compact majority that appears in Ibsen’s *An Enemy of the People* (1882) to ostracize the idealist Doctor Stockmann, the antagonists of Recto’s *comedia* are not only the American administration and the principalia-compradores who collaborate with it, but the mass of apathetic or non-literate Filipinos. Like a Filipino Ibsen, Recto in his first play denounces a social injustice, a violation of human rights, which here is the censorship imposed by the American regime on the native Philippine press. In reenacting recent events, the play made an audacious statement on the U.S. suppression of newspapers that dared to publish material that was judged “seditious.”¹⁹

¹⁷ Pierre Macherey’s *A Theory of Literary Production* (first published in 1966) articulates a notion of interpretation as a “production” by which the text speaks out of its gaps, silences or absences.

¹⁸ Recto in his editorials often praised the heroism of the ilustrado journalist, as in the article “Periodistas filipinos” of April 14, 1913 (CW 218-220). Max Bernard was another of the honorable company of the visionary and unadapted idealists, one who dedicated his work to “social regeneration.” He stands in the company of Tolstoy, Kropotkin, Socrates and the Spanish journalist José Nakens Pérez (1841-1926). In more sweeping terms, Recto’s “Del sublime apostolado[,] el periodista” (CW 167-169), published in the *Renacimiento Filipino* (II.97) on July 7, 1912, sings the praises of the journalist on the occasion of the newspaper’s second anniversary. No demagogue is the newspaperman, declares the opinion piece, but rather a derided would-be redeemer of humanity, one who honorably has sought to “guide through channels of sensibility the disoriented public opinion.”

¹⁹ Among the judges of the contest were newspapermen already under notice: José Ma. Romero, Teodoro M. Kalaw, Manuel Ravago, Macario Adriatico, and Joaquín Pellicena Camacho (CW 229). A Philippines genuinely for the Filipinos was foremost on the mind of Teodoro M. Kalaw (1884-1940), another model for Recto (Medina and Feliciano 55). Kalaw, who served as one of the judges for the *Renacimiento* contest, was the legally-trained journalist who from the pages of *El Renacimiento* issued an aggressive critique of an American imperialist regime corrupted by graft. From the newspaper he promoted the formation of a national language and advocated for independence. Kalaw also served as president of the *Asociación Hispano-Filipina*. Contest judge Joaquín Pellicena Camacho, in the prologue he wrote for the piece, calls it a “nationalist allegation” whose message of love of country transcends fashion and daily life and maintains a vital link to the struggle for independence. And by its achievement, displaying the great progress that theater has made since the premier of *José el carpintero* by the Dominican Juan Zulueta de los Angeles in 1880, Recto’s play does “[mark] the beginning of a new stage in the history of the literature of the country” (Camacho 224, 225, 226).

As a visitor and favored guest in the household, the Spaniard Don Florencio serves as a sort of chorus that comments on the action of the drama and makes observations that link the Filipino present with a Hispanic past. Doña Irene, the aforementioned sister to Señora Tomasa, enters the domestic space with two objectives in mind: to persuade Loling to break off her engagement with Jacinto in exchange for a promise of a substantial inheritance; and to persuade Antonio to cease and desist from his patriotic crusade and to accept a well-remunerated post in the colonial bureaucracy, which she can obtain for him through the offices of her already well-positioned husband. Yet against Doña Irene's creed of "adaptation to the environment," as well as Mercedes' weary disillusionment weariness, Antonio remains steadfastly dedicated to his cause, bolstered as he is by Don Florencio's vision of moral progress and fired up by Jacinto's angry idealism (CW 267, 271).

La ruta is a play of ideas, expressed and contested dialogically. In staging the battle waged by Doña Irene's accommodationism against Señora Tomasa's family's pro-Philippinism, the play represents the antagonisms inherent in the relationship between an urban elite, which includes an aristocratic stratum, and an urban middle sector, one that consisted in reality of the labor force of *jornaleros*, professionally educated and skilled office workers, and members of the petite bourgeoisie called *empleados*, from whose ranks emerged the likes of Andrés Bonifacio, Aurelio Tolentino, Isabelo de los Reyes, Fernando Ma. Guerrero, and others connected with the 1896 Revolt. Unequal in resources to the urban and landowning aristocrats, the *ilustrados*, as Cullinane observes, "must be viewed as a subset of the larger elite and not as a separate class within the society (Cullinane 17-18, 22, 32).

At stake here in the dramatic conflict as in the social sphere is the claim of the *ilustrado* subset to the role of first Filipinos and to leadership of the Philippine nation. "Who is to represent the Filipinos?" This is the fundamental question, both political and artistic, that the play poses to its audience of *ilustrados* and other educated elite. How Recto makes this argument through the play's construction is by seeking an *ilustrado* compromise between the ideal and the real, translated as a struggle between the right to a free Filipino press and the pressure of sociopolitical forces that aim to smother dissidence. The government has made telling the truth a dangerous business, for, as Jacinto has earlier stated, "Any little gust of air from above can break the thread from which hangs that sword of Damocles that dangles over our heads" (CW 263, 274). What the text of the play therefore creates and claims at the same time is a space for acceptable dissent, for contained rebellion, from which the nationalist *ilustrado* may give voice an independentist credo while searching for other opportunities. In the play, the *ilustrado* represents himself as a family man, examining his role and risk as public intellectual in a colonial situation.

The *ilustrado* self-examination begins in Scene I, in which Señora Tomasa and her daughters, awaiting the arrival of their wealthy sister and aunt, scoff at

The nationalist message of *La ruta de Damasco* pushes back against the censorship imposed by the American regime, its consequences suffered by the courageous journalists represented by the drama's key characters.

the indolence of such late-sleeping “people of quality” (*gente de calidad*), but they laughingly scorn as well the half-wit of a deputy who paid a visit to their home to insist that Antonio publish his speeches. The same deputy, the women recall, forwarded a bill demanding that the government prohibit the passage of typhoons through the northern provinces. The outlandish request, adds Mercedes, came from a member of the “conservative” minority (CW 232, 233).

It is evident by her words and demeanor that Doña Irene has benefitted from her family’s collaboration with the American regime. Her promise to Mercedes that later on she will bring her a birthday gift of “a ton of sorbet,” rather than some traditional dessert of, say, *halo-halo* or *bibinka*, serves up a sign of the times (CW 244). Other references make clear that Doña Irene’s sanctimony (“I have just heard four masses and a sermon”) and her automobile (its horn beeps in the background) belongs to the urban elite who have found a *cosy convivencia* with the colonizers, and her visits to the Eiffel Tower and the White House and her having kissed the sandals of His Holiness guarantee her brand of creole cosmopolitanism. Doña Irene complains of Antonio, calling him a *tunante* (“rogue, villain”) who criticizes her husband and “the whole Government” in his newspaper. She offered to seek a position comparable to her husband’s for Antonio, she reminds Mercedes, but he has refused, allowing himself to be blinded by “those spiderwebs of patriotism that prevent him from seeing the true aspect of life” (CW 244-245, 248). Mercedes, at her wits’ end for stretching the meager housekeeping allowance to cover the needs of a household with its four sons, has reached the point where she is willing to abandon idealism for the sake of the family’s welfare and go along with Doña Irene’s renewed efforts to steer her husband away from journalism and toward a government job. The exchange between Jacinto and Mercedes foregrounds an opposition between conflicting values: Mercedes answers the idealistic pronouncements of her patriotic brother-in-law with the words, “The idea of the family is superior to the idea of country [patria].” For Jacinto, on the other hand, the “imperious cry of duty” calls one to sacrifice “for the health of the mother country” (CW 242). Loling, also refusing to be bought off by her aunt, will pledge undying devotion to her Jacinto and to the patriotic ideal he embodies. Her commitment to the ideal represents the manner in which the ilustrado as members of the educated elite may rise above self-interest, pragmatism and “realism” so as to embrace the greater good and lead the nation to “la libertad de nuestra patria” (CW 255). It is up to Loling to sound a conciliatory note in this domestic debate between Mercedes and Jacinto, or between family and nation: “I don’t see the incompatibility of both interests,” she offers. “The ideas of country and family, not only do they not exclude, but they complement one another” (CW 242).

Yet the challenges are daunting for these nationalist ilustrados. Jacinto explains to Loling, on the last two pages of the script, that a Damoclean sword hangs over his head: he anticipates being arrested for having authored and published an editorial that has insulted “a certain man of stature.” The man of stature, a

government functionary, has sued the paper for libel, and “the government has made common cause with the one who believed himself offended.” The charge leveled against the anxious Jacinto is for publishing an editorial accusing a public official of malfeasance. With this report, the play makes oblique reference to the cause célèbre that arose when *El Renacimiento* published an editorial by Fidel Reyes titled “Aves de Rapiña” (“Birds of Prey”). The editorial, appearing in the 10 October 1908 issue of the newspaper (which published a version in Tagalog, the *Muling Pasilang*), criticized statements made by the influential American civil servant James A. LeRoy. LeRoy, as former secretary both to the Philippine Commission and to Secretary of the Interior Dean C. Worcester, went on to become private secretary to Secretary of War and former governor of the Philippines William H. Taft in 1905. The *Renacimiento* editorial denounced the assertion made by LeRoy that Taft, responsible (as the Philippines’ first civilian governor, 1901-1903) for a “policy of attraction” in the islands, had proven to be “the best and most influential friend of the Filipinos.” *El proceso de “El Renacimiento,”* as the trial came to be known, issued from a libel suit charged by Worcester in response to the editorial. Accused of sedition and libel, *El Renacimiento* was forced to shut down its presses in 1908, closing down with it one of the last journalistic publications in Spanish language in the Philippines (Càno 395, 397, 409). The story of that unequal battle is illustrative of the ilustrado class’s struggle for recognition and accommodation under the American administration, and of the lesson learned when the limits had been tested.²⁰

Recognizable in *La ruta* is social critique with comic panache of Oscar Wilde (1854-1900) and the satire of “created interests” set in motion by Jacinto Benavente (1866-1954). Also discernible is the trace left in the play of Spain’s Generation of ’98, the group of writers, essayists and artist who sought to revive the spirits of apathetic and abulic compatriots in the wake of the “debacle” of 1898. The script of Recto’s play suggests that a spiritualized Spain, its *casticismo* identified with the Archipreste de Hita, Don Quixote and Santa Teresa, can prove a wellspring of regeneration even for the former Hispanic Asian colony. Continuing on the

²⁰ Recto’s article of 28 July 1912 titled “El periodismo en Filipinas por la pendiente de la bancarrota” (“Journalism in the Philippines on the Slope of Bankruptcy,” CW 169-173) continues on the same theme; namely, the condition of Philippine journalism under colonialism, but it shifts the focus to the economic dimensions of the current dilemma. Of a population of eight million Filipinos, writes Recto in a statement echoing one made in *La ruta*, only five or six thousand subscribe to the largest-selling newspaper. Such indifference or neglect belies the Filipinos’ claim to living in a civilized society that supports the talented and genial members of the “race.” Under such circumstances, newspapers in the Philippines must struggle to survive on the insufficient support they receive from some few “disinterested spirits.” Further illustrating the precarious financial state of Philippine journalism is its comparison with the American-based newspaper industry in the islands. A reporter of the *Free Press*, Recto reports, basing his reference on what he calls a reliable source, will make more than 250 pesos, which is what a Filipino newspaper editor will earn. And the seasoned editor who writes opinion pieces or articles “de fondo” (in depth, on current issues) will probably receive no more in salary than 80 “pesillos,” 120 at most. The lack of adequate remuneration paid to the Filipino journalist signifies a tendency in the national psyche to prefer “lo importado, lo exótico, lo occidental,” which is, so to say, American; with this loss of support the press can lose its effectiveness as the Fourth Power to critique the abuses and excesses of the American regime. The “abdication of the Ideal” will leave the public in “the sad condition of a flock of sheep, disposed at all hours to be sacrificed in the slaughterhouse of the Government, with the stupid resignation of the pariah and the helot, [and] exploited by birds of prey.”

theme of regeneration, corroborating Jacinto's less than sanguine prognoses for the country, Don Florencio supplies a diagnosis:

The sickness of the century, señora. [. . .] Our society is neurasthenic. We are the men of today richer, wiser, more progressive, in a word, than our grandfathers, but also sadder. The contemporary soul, despite the magnificences of the century, social inequality, the privileges. . . . (CW 258)

It is a vague diagnosis: a general condition of destitution and the insufficiency of Americanizing modernization have brought on a chronic fatigue; one could clarify that the problem of social inequality and privilege are not merely two more afflictions of the contemporary soul, but the latter is the cause of the former, and both are experienced by the *ilustrado* as merely depressing. But in the Spanish heritage, which the *ilustrado* conserves and honors: there is the fundamental element of the idiosyncrasy that is the nation's identity. The Filipinos are "connected with moral ties" to the Spanish, Don Florencio reminds Antonio; and it is to Spain that the Philippines owes its form of "basic education." Sadly, the nobility of spirit he exalts has been violated by the law of libel and the control of the government by the "created interests" of trusts, and Don Florencio cannot but note that the Philippines is becoming "the empire of plutocracy" (CW 262, 263, 264). In the face of Americanization, this link is essential to recall: "The affections engendered by a community of culture, of religion, of history, of language, of civilization and of aspirations—time cannot erase them, nor progress, nor future conquests" (CW 262). In manner comparable to that of Uruguayan *modernista* José Enrique Rodó in his *Ariel* (1900), Don Florencio implies the contrast between the "Latin" temperature of the Filipinos and the "Saxon" mindset of the Americans in a way that positions the *ilustrado* for his intermediary role as intercultural broker.²¹ Voicing in this small oration what is perhaps the play's most direct indictment of the colonial acculturation, Don Florencio pronounces the word of cultural survival and resistance, nurtures the Hispanic seed that the *ilustrado* would save in order to hold out against cultural inanition.

Jacinto, in answering Loling's misgivings about the possible lack of resources in the couple's future, has Spain on his mind as well. In a burst of romantic nationalism, he declares that his only treasure is ideas and conviction, his only ambition, "the freedom of our beloved country." In this quest, he bears a resemblance to the knight of *La Mancha*, and he later on identifies himself as a "Quijote moderno" who would "give kicks against the pricks" (CW 255, 273). But now, in the aftermath of 1898, Jacinto draws attention to what is happening elsewhere

²¹ The leading "theoretician" of Spanish American modernismo, Rodó in *Ariel* gave voice to an anti-imperialist denunciation in a language of symbolist and parnassian preciousness; its critique was worded in the terms of an intellectual unease. Rodó's affirmation of the Hispanic spiritualism and idealism, which found an echo in Rubén Darío's ode "A Roosevelt," published in the *Cantos de vida y esperanza* (1905), opposes a cultural resistance to what the Uruguayan writer saw as the invasion of North American values and models under the banner of an impoverishing pragmatism.

among Spain's last and former colonies in the Caribbean: Cuba has gained its independence but remains materially dependent on the United States; Puerto Rico, its nationhood thwarted, has no choice but to resign itself to its fate. There, in the remnants of the "imperial archipelago" (Morillo-Alicea 33, 29), the Filipinos are to see reflected their own loss of freedom. Yet the quixotic ilustrado continues his absurd quest in the name of eight million Filipinos despite the absence of hope or likelihood of success: the fight must go on just as the show must go on, for the play's the thing that consecrates his knight-errantry (CW 264, 165). Taking up arms to answer that chivalric calling, Jacinto proclaims, pessimistically, that a future liberty may be the best one can hope for, because significant reform may take centuries (CW 241).²² Jacinto of course is not play's only knight of the woeful countenance: Antonio, too, has, "despite all his good qualities," says Señora Tomasa, "a quixotic spirit" (CW 236).²³ Yet it is not Antonio's "quixotic spirit" that will win the day under the present circumstances, Señora Tomasa believes, but rather shrewdness, guile, and cleverness: in a word, "astucia" (CW 236).

The sacralizing of the ilustrado mission has occurred even before the opening of the play's action, in the play's title. This of course alludes to Acts 9:1-21 of the New Testament, evoking therewith the narrative of Saul's spectacular conversion to Christianity and transformation into the apostle Paul. With this metaphorical comparison implicit, the play heralds the ilustrado journalist's charge of spreading the message of national salvation and restoring the nation to its rightful foundations.

In Scene XI Loling takes up Jacinto's challenge by pledging her willingness to follow him not only to Calvary, but also as far as Tabor (the Palestinian mount on whose peak it is said Jesus underwent his transfiguration) (CW 257). The apotheosis of the ilustrado journalist is completed in the play's final scene, in which the Loling and Jacinto join in the love that is both love of spouse and love of country. Jacinto at this point says he feels the nearness of Santa Elena, the mother of the Emperor Constantine; Loling lovingly contradicts him, and in so doing makes explicit the meaning of the drama's title: "No, it isn't your Saint Helen. It is your Damascus! It is the glory that seeks you, that descends upon you. . ." (CW 275).

La ruta made its debut some six years after Sergio Osmeña was elected to the National Assembly and became its Speaker, and soon thereafter the head of the Partido Nacionalista. It was under Osmeña's political leadership that the party, while professing the objective of total independence for the Philippines, could play its part in a collaborative relationship between the colony and an

²² Recto's revindication of the Spanish legacy takes up one of the main currents of Spanish writers at the end of the nineteenth and beginning of the twentieth: that of the national self-examination, the Spanish inquiry into its own identity and the related causes of its centuries-long decline: what British hispanist Gerald Brenan has called "the Spanish predicament" (Brenan 417).

²³ What is quixotic in Antonio is his "Hispanic" individualism and idealism, qualities traceable perhaps to the influence of Ángel Ganivet's Spain, whose aptitude is best suited among the dominating powers for "ideal creation." This is the Spain that has left its mark on beyond its boundaries, with "the seal of our spirit" (Ganivet 1964: 45, from 1897-V-252 and 46, from 1897-II-183).

American administration directed by Governor General William Cameron Forbes. In Recto's play, as it works through a mediation of differences among character representatives of the Filipino power holders, the educated elite are identified differentially (see Cullinane 15, 18). The upper class of urban elites, to which Doña Irene belongs, were either creoles or mestizos of Chinese descent who enjoyed an extravagant privileged lifestyle that included mansions and trips to the continent financed by incomes from landholdings and other properties. Cullinane identifies such aristocratic families as Manila "the Pardo de Taveras, Legardas, Del Pans, Alberts, Valdezes, Zobels, Ayalas, Roxases, Roceses, and others" (Cullinane 21). The wealthy or well-off ilustrados of the audience who possessed the means to attend performance at the Manila Grand Opera House could see therein a questioning and cross-examination of their own identity and status as leaders of the new imagined community of Philippine society under American rule. In the revisioning of that identity and status, the ilustrado had to make room for the claim of circumscribed or bounded change that the nationalist-accommodationist party was promoting.

Having suffered the hardships of marriage to a newspaperman, Señora Tomasa looks dourly upon her younger daughter's wish to marry another one, and so she has made other plans for her: she intends to marry Loling to the usurer Don Félix. Sommer's notion of foundational fictions as "national romance" once again illuminates the significance of marriage in this ilustrado home: an "erotics of politics" informs and personalizes "nation-building projects." The nubile ilustrada is nearly forced to choose between financial security with the hoary member of the urban elite and a life of want and sacrifice with a dissident newspaperman, thus figuring a desire that may or may not conform to the ilustrado prescription for collective happiness. By "invest[ing] private passions with public purpose" (Sommer 7), the play personalizes the process by which alliances are formed and broadened within the category of the ilustrados. Not only through marriage, but also by the acts of nepotism and cronyism to which Doña Irene's immodest proposal amounts, is the ilustrado class advanced.

The conciliation of opposing loves within the ilustrado household is sought in this particular romance. The aligning of family loves, and especially between spouses, with the love of country, is the holy grail of this fiction for refounding the nation. Jacinto's declaration to Loling—that "for me you are life, glory, the future, the country made flesh"—has the effect of sacralizing the nation, even feminizing it as a sublime object of desire: for she is "everything that is great, in the end, under the blessed sky of this land of poets, of martyrs, of sampaguitas and of adorable girls like you, crazy, mischievous. . ." (CW 240). By such declarations, Loling unites in her being the two loves of the hero as ilustrado journalist.

The resounding and melodramatic note on which the play concludes notwithstanding, there will be censorship, including forms of self-censorship, of the Philippine press under American colonialism, and it will continue to rein in the kinds of denunciation that were published in *El Renacimiento* and performed in

Recto's first play. Recto's second play will address another challenge to the developing ilustrado hegemony, one that consists of divisions and antagonisms that fragment the ilustrado class internally, within the spirit of its own members.

“So much . . . English!”

Whereas the action of the *La ruta* begins early one April morning, before 8:00, the action of *Solo* is explicitly set to open in October “at five in the afternoon” (CW 304). The punishment that awaits the central character Andrés in the final scene will take place in the deepening darkness of twilight, with a bell striking six times in “isochronous” fashion to mark the conclusion of the drama (CW 325).

Briefly, the plot of *Solo* is constructed as a gradual revelation through dialog of an adulterous relationship: Andrés, a 30-year-old doctor, has betrayed his wife Gabriela, 25 years old, in an affair with Gabriela's own sister, 22-year-old nurse Marina. The action of *Solo* is set in 1912, in the house of an upper middle-class ilustrado family of Manila.²⁴ The exposition, quickly laid out in the ilustrado family's drawing room, introduces the complicating situation: in reply to Don Narciso's inquiries, housewife Gabriela, Don Narciso's niece, reports on the condition of her heart, then ill-tempered Andrés explains the origin of the scratch on his face: he received it in a scuffle in the Club occasioned by an insulting insinuation made by an acquaintance about Andrés and his sister-in-law. In the series of verbal interactions that constitute the ensuing complication, in which Andrés responds to accusation with denial, mitigation, hypothetical justification and outright lies, the awful truth hangs like a Damoclean sword in the shadows, threatening to shatter the peace of the ilustrado home as well as bring on catastrophe in the form of a cardiac arrest to the heart-weakened Gabriela. Tension builds through heated arguments over the facts of the matter, which turns debate on the meaning of individual freedom and the value of custom in a changing Philippine society.

The debut performance of Recto's *Solo entre las sombras* on June 19, 1917 raised a tropical storm of discussion over the meaning of its message. With a denouement demonstrating the tragic consequences of a relaxation in morals, the play seemed to some to denounce the U.S.-imposed system of education and to valorize, in negative fashion, the mores of traditional Philippine society. Prominent ilustrados of the time rose to the play's defense: Apóstol, Bernabé and Varona, among others, made the case for the play's advocacy of a balance between the new ways and the old, for a moderating reconciliation that would incorporate a counterweight to the

²⁴ Recto's one-act plays follow the dialectical model of Ibsen's modern drama. For Hans Georg Meyer, the theme to which Ibsen constantly returned was “self-emancipation unattained because of the seeker's own deficiency.” The description especially rings true for *Solo*, whose antihero fails in his egocentric attempt to break free of the conventional morality. The means by which the drama plays out this vain striving is by a “recapitulation of the past”; that is, of a “resumé” of that “prehistory” whose unmasking via dialogue leads, in the end, to disillusionment (Meyer 9, 10, 13). History repeats itself generationally in *La ruta*. In *Solo*, on the other hand, the secret of Andrés and Marina's transgression will have tragic consequences once it is “reenacted”: their presumption of emancipation and vanguardism will be reframed as destructive hubris and regression.

“violent saxonization” of Filipino youth. What the play called for, in this view, was not the overthrow of the American system but a blending of Hispanic and Anglo-Saxon cultural values (see Joaquin 2001). What remains to be examined is the way in which Recto constructed this ilustrado self-critique in a drama that revolves around a social sin whose motives are traceable to an uncritical acceptance of American-imposed acculturation-deculturation on the part of the ilustrado. For in holding up the mirror to members of his own privileged class, he encouraged that category of Filipinos to take stock of their own identities, and to find the resources and reserves of character that would make them worthy of taking a dominant role in a dominated nation. The message concerning “violent saxonization,” American-styled education, uncritical imitation and language imposition is conveyed indirectly, by a semi-allegorical approach that imagines the negative consequences of a mode of modernization that one could call “un-Filipino.” Such reflections tell but a part of the story, however, insofar as a re-reading of the play discerns what could be called an interrogation of the paradoxes that haunt the ilustrado mind in a period when the national community has need of a leadership that knows how to balance or least negotiate the contradictory elements that comprise the changing national culture.

In the year prior to the premier of *Solo*, it will be recalled, it was Quezon as resident commissioner (1909-1916) who led the effort to approve the Philippine Autonomy Act of 1916, or the Jones Bill, which would replace the Philippine Commission with a bicameral legislative body composed of an upper house, called the Senate and a lower house, formerly the Philippine Assembly. In the same year, Quezon was elected to the first Philippine Senate, and Recto was appointed legal advisor to it. The Jones Bill also anticipated the U.S. grant of independence to the Philippines, at a time as yet to be determined. Quezon’s reluctance to demand independence too quickly—he felt that the United States would deny it to a people of whom the majority was illiterate—in effect denied support to the Anti-Imperialist League and to others, among them members of his own Partido Nacionalista, who would have preferred an immediate independence. Accepting support from an American administration eager to put in place a compliant group of native leaders, the Nacionalistas advocated for greater autonomy, but did so without calling for removal of the Americans (Francia 168). By 1922, Quezon would attain the leadership of the Partido Nacionalista. The die was cast, there was no turning back, the Philippines led by the Nacionalistas would become, despite their independentist rhetoric, more American, as Quezon would Osmeña have it and Recto would dramatize it.

As previously cited, the actional “trigger” that begins the complication is the news or rumor circulating around the neighborhood about Andrés altercation in the Club on the previous night: Andrés had scuffled with someone who made strong insinuations of improprieties committed by the doctor with Gabriela’s younger sister (CW 305). Calumnies and slander, Andrés calls such infamies. Don Narciso,

who is uncle to Gabriela and Marina, knowing more than he lets on, responds by giving some credence to the word of gossip, qualifying the “*qué dirán*,” what people say, a “necessary evil” that regulates society according to its “canons” of decency. The *qué dirán* exerts a powerful moral force on the individual’s conduct; there is good in retaining such “Filipino” customs, the “[i]deas that have aged somewhat,” for they are rock-like *convencionalismos* that form a part of real life: the life “we live” (CW 304-306). Andrés sharply replies, without admitting any truth to the accusation, in a manner as it is disingenuous as it is surly: it is better to live not by the “judgment” of society, but by that of one’s own *conciencia*—“conscience” or “consciousness” (CW 306). For the judgment of society, the *conciencia* of the community, in Andrés’ view, is nothing but “*espectros, fantasmas nada más*” (“specters, nothing more than phantasms”), the product of an “old education” that is but an “antiquity, shadow of a past, soul of the night.” Gabriela discovers the truth when she witnesses Andrés and Marina in adulterous embrace in Scene 8, and the shock of that spectacle brings on Gabriela’s death by heart failure. Devastated by this tragic outcome, Andrés and Marina in their repentant shame must submit to the judgment of a higher law. The play’s denouement gives characters and audience occasion to reflect on how traditional values—the Filipino sense of decency, the communal link, the sanctity of marriage—have been scrutinized and questioned, and can still serve the function of anchoring the *ilustrados*’ identity and sense of self-worth, or play their part in the *ilustrados*’ balancing act in the transitional time under the new dispensation.

The self-justificatory ideas to which Andrés gives expression betray a loss of noble ideals and community spirit—a dangerous tendency in a member of the privileged sector who plays a professional role. Luisa, who is a friend of the sisters, finds much “egoism” in Andrés’s concept of individualism; Andrés on the contrary reaffirms his approval of egoism, for “Happiness,” after all, he confidently asserts, “is egoistic.” Each one in society, he declares, should seek his or her own happiness, selfishly; and altruistic generosity, itself a “true egoism” on his view, will not matter if the system is truly effective (CW 311-312). Here the radical individualist is cast as a sort of metaphysical rebel rising against the tyranny of heaven. Cecilio Apóstol likens him to a Caliban or Persian mythology’s Ahriman, perhaps also to a Lucifer as “star” or “bringer of light” (Apóstol 293). Whether callously amoral or just plain diabolic, Andrés will know that Don Narciso knows what provoked the clubhouse kerfuffle. Andrés’ house is “no California ‘bar;” reproaches Don Narciso; Andrés should treat his wife with the love and consideration that are her due; and finally, the worst of it all, the news of Marina’s pregnancy with Andrés’s child will surely strike a mortal blow to Gabriela (CW 306, 308-309, 318).

Gabriela’s identification with tradition, community and altruism is signified by a particular manner in the play, and that is through the symbolism of flowers. As if to provide a counterpoise to the unsavoury nature of *ilustrado* selfishness, Gabriela is seen arranging at several moments either arranging or carrying

bouquets of flowers, one of which she, in the gesture of love this symbolizes, will bring to a sick friend. A language of flowers is spoken in the name of Don Narciso (i.e., narcissus or daffodil), the voice of conscience, community and castilianness; the “troublemaker” who accused Andrés in the Club is a certain Flores. These blossoming manifestations recall the steadying presence *La ruta’s* Don Florencio.

The ilustrado indictment of the “new ways” and relaxed morality references the explicitly anti-American and pro-independence stance that the ilustrados publicly espoused. Yet the rhetoric of moral condemnation, while it doubled as a prophetic utterance against the too-rapid modernization under the Americans, functioned in effect as an ideology, in Althusser’s sense of the term,²⁵ that misrepresented the reality of the ilustrado project of collaborative leadership. Part and parcel of this

Americanizing modernization is the new type of education that Andrés seems to approve in his dialogue with Luisa in Scene 4.²⁶ Andrés defends the new, “practical” education, which teaches students to become “strong” and rise to the challenge of reaching “an ideal for our lives.” In comparing the new style of education with the old, Andrés calls the latter a “vestiglo,” an imaginary monster, the word deriving from the Latin *besticulum* (CW 317).

Gabriela and Marina’s discussion in Scene 3 reconfirms the play’s association of new ideas with the new style of Philippine education established during the American occupation. Gabriela remarks on the *frescura* (freshness, lack of restraint) of the “modernist youth” (*jóvenes modernistas*) and the “promiscuity of sexes in the public schools”; Marina, more favorably disposed presumably toward the new mentality, comments on the greater “liberty” (or “freedom,” *libertad*) they enjoy. The educational system is, she insists, *lo de menos* (the least of it): young women after all are exposed to new ideas and models of behavior even in their own homes. Resuming her jeremiad against the new mores, Gabriela notes that disgraced girls are resorting even to criminal procedures to restore their honor. “What a horror!,” she exclaims. “We have come to this point with so much progress and so much. . .English!” (CW 310). Between the lines it is suggested that Marina’s “miseducation” in the Americanized institution, possibly in a situation of medical training that brought her in close contact with her brother-in-law, has conditioned her mentally for falling into adultery, though it would be disingenuous to assert that a simple cause-effect relationship has developed here between education and moral behavior. But because English supplanted Spanish as medium of instruction and conduit of information, the control of both instruction and information served the purposes of American domination and de-filipinizing deculturation, cutting off access to knowledge of the pre-American eras and to the traditions

²⁵ As given in “Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses,” Althusser 127-186.

²⁶ The household in the modern era is sustained in an interrelationship with other units of the operational structure. Among these interrelationships, that of the “dyad” family-school has taken precedence, replacing the dyad of family-church (Wallerstein 107; Balibar 102). As implicitly referenced in *Solo*, the educational system has been trusted with the professional formation of Andrés and Marina, with the influence of the church institution receding into the background, yet with its agency manifest perhaps in Marina’s talk of providence, sin and punishment, and in Andrés’s final “recognition” of God’s hand in the outcome of the tragedy.

that would tie the community to its past while making room for a new culture of efficiency, dependency, initiative and practicality. For an audience alerted now to the deculturating-acculturating function of the educational system, however, Marina's assertion that education is "not so important" must ring rather hollow.²⁷

In Pursuit of Solitude

Like *La ruta, Solo* stages a critique of recent changes in Philippine society through actions played out in the bosom of an ilustrado family's intimate drama, but its critical negations have to do more with deleterious effects of Americanization on the ilustrado mentality. The shift in tone and perspective that occurs in the passage from *comedia* to *tragedia* can be explained as a change in the form or modality of denunciation: Recto's second play criticizes an American *mangoneo* ("interference, meddling") that is not so much political as it is moral and cultural. Writing in the realist and psychological current already established by Ibsen and Benavente, echoing perhaps the *modernista's* sentiment of pro-Latinity and anti-Saxonization, Recto reminds his audience of who they are: "the ilustrado as Filipino," but also "the Filipino as ilustrado."²⁸ More than *La ruta, Solo* resembles Ibsen's more psychological dramas in their focus on character psychology and family secrets. The internal conflictedness of the upper middle-class protagonist in Hedda Gabler (1890) comes to mind with regard to Marina, but it is Andrés' own degeneracy or amorality that recalls the hidden perfidy of one who appears a pillar of society in Ibsen's *Ghosts* (1881).

Having come upon the scene of her husband and sister's intimate encounter, now reeling under the shock of an irreparable loss, a shattered Gabriela, as if to screen one painful memory with a less sad recollection, recalls that now, today, is the fourth anniversary of her mother's death. Gabriela regrets her defaulting on the "deuda de cariño" that she owes her mother: that is, a "debt of affection" that easily translates to the Tagalog *utang na loob*—literally understood as a debt of one's inner being or interiority. The one who of course has horribly defaulted on the debt he owes to Gabriela is Andrés. At the end of the penultimate Scene 12, Don Narciso, in a statement that is as truly metadramatic as it is melodramatic, declares: "Aquí se desenlaza el drama de vuestras existencias! Gabriela muerta, y Marina se va lejos de aquí, con su hijo, con el hijo de vuestra culpa" ("Here comes undone [as in the *desenlace*, or *denouement*] the drama of your existences! Gabriela dead, and Marina goes far from here, with your child, the child of your sin!"). Devastating the moral order of the home with an act of selfishness that is sickening

²⁷ This discussion on schooling and education casts a spotlight on their role in the socialization of nationalized individuals. For there, in the school institution, an ideology is inculcated and languages are taught (Balibar 98). The legitimizing of the ilustrado ascendancy must continue through publication in the language of power and prestige, and the question of which language—the former "mother tongue" in which the play is scripted, or the English that Gabriela associates with the schoolgirls' shame—does not even entertain the notion of a truly autochthonous language.

²⁸ As affirmed in the subtitle of Roces (2006).

in view of all its obscene consequences, Andrés and Marina are punished—she with the shame of an unexpected pregnancy, he with the loneliness and terror of abandonment, both with the knowledge that their crime has produced the final and mortal assault on the “weak fortress” that was Gabriela’s heart. The take-away message is that the ilustrado must uphold the institution of marriage and family. It is on these institutions, which produce unity among the elite and stability within the community, and the power of education that depends the successful reordering of Philippine society under American authority and ilustrado direction.

But the ghost which Marina and Andrés fear is something more: it is a fundamental Filipino difference from the culture received from the colonizers: it is a ethos of community and caring, a respect for others of one’s family, and no less a regard for the sanctity of marriage. This spiritual something is what the too-Americanized Andrés has forgotten in his hypervalorization of egoism and individual strength,” even to the point of embracing the cruelty of life and acting on the need, “[i]n the hour of the shipwreck,” to kill in order to save oneself (CW 318).

Having lost wife and lover, the isolated Andrés, of painfully ambiguous identity, is left in Scene 12 amidst the deepening shadows of the twilight, and he fears the *sombras*. These “shades” or “shadows” reiterate not only the Ibsenian ghost motif but Don Narciso’s departing curse (CW 325). The path of heartless pragmatism leads to a spiritual destitution comparable to death, experienced as the death-in-life of solitude. The spectral “soul of the night” that was for him the old education (CW 317) turns out instead to be the nothingness of a life now absent both of love and of communal belonging. Ibsen’s ghosts were the diseased legacy of a dissolute father; Andrés’s ghosts are guilt, loneliness, shame, and, who knows, perhaps the real ghost of a wife whose death was hastened by the act of a selfish husband.

The tragic death that befalls Gabriela seals the play’s *modernista* critique of the practices that were introduced by an *América Sajona*, or at least associated with its customs and institutions, as it confirms the ilustrado requirement of group allegiance and cultural balancing. In the end, the play has become a cautionary tale to the ilustrado audience in whose own dramas might too uncritically assimilate the new ethos and mode of conduct. The ilustrado family and the national community must, the message goes, withstand the destabilizing effect of new cultural influences, or at least accept them into a harmonious blending of the constituents both native and foreign that make up the contemporary national culture. An abuse of patriarchal power or male prerogative is corrected in such a way as to acknowledge that power and to relegitimate the power of the ilustrado leader. Educational reform is critiqued, but the Pontifical and Royal University of Santo Tomás (founded in 1611) will continue to provide a salutary counterweight to the American-sponsored University of the Philippines (founded in 1908).

Conclusion

Staging the ilustrado family in his two domestic dramas, Recto re-examined the class of educated elite to which he and his audience belonged, scripting in effect an aesthetic experience that served to define and clarify an ambiguous Filipino identity as an uncertain balance of elements while at the same time coming to terms with the American colonial imposition in a way favorable to the interests of the same “directing class” that was coming into its own as leaders of the nation newly re-configured for the Nacionalista ascendancy. For after all, the right to independence and autonomy had been denied to the Filipinos. Despite *La ruta*’s calls for national liberation, and in anticipation of future calls for abolishing the parity agreement with the United States and protests against the maintenance of American military bases on Philippine territory, Recto in his plays expressed a willingness to set aside the armed struggle and to seek a path of legality within the bounds of the American system. After *Solo*, Recto set aside dramaturgy for real-life drama, continuing to write for other venues. He was elected representative of Batanga’s 2nd district in 1919, and chosen as minority floor leader. He became a full-fledged member of the ilustrado establishment. As for what can be said about the community reimagined to the measure of the ilustrado in Recto’s ambivalent dramas: the nation in question--whether on the road to Damascus or in the lonely shadows—remains deferred, held in check, but kept in custody by the same educated elite. Or, in the terms of Recto’s “Epopeya de la raza”: the present is dead, freedom awaits in the future, the Great Tree of the Idea will flourish on Calvary, but for now the task is to watch over the seed.

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