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**Noli Me Tangere:
A Commentary on Two Translations**

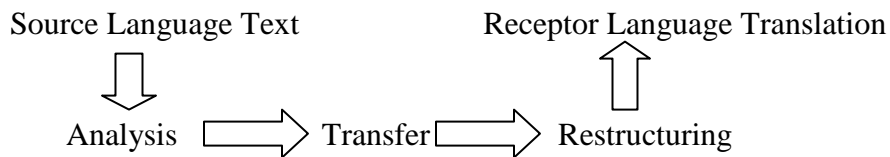
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Jose Rizal's *Noli Me Tangere* (Touch Me Not) was published in 1887 in Spanish is a popular nationalist Filipino text that indirectly led to the Filipino's united sense of national identity and to the Filipino revolution in 1896. This novel was a response against the Spanish colonization and the Spanish clergy that ruled in the Philippines during that time. I will be analyzing two well known English translations of the *Noli*: the 1926 version of *The Social Cancer* by Charles Derbyshire and 1968 version of *The Lost Eden* by Leon Ma. Guerrero. These two well known translations will be used comparatively to show the shifting colonial influence, from the Spanish to the Americans, in the Philippines. Derbyshire wrote in a time where the Spanish colonial rule in the Philippines just recently ended, whereas Guerrero translated during the time where the Americans have already established themselves as a modern colonial power in the country. Derbyshire's translation promotes the Spanish colonial power by keeping the domesticated foreign words within his translation; while Guerrero, in trying to resist this, promotes another colonial power: the Americans. This paper will examine how colonialism greatly influences the way the translations were written through the two English translations of the *Noli Me Tangere*. I will also be examining the abuse in Derbyshire's source-oriented translation and Guerrero's target-oriented translation and how this affects each of the translations and ultimately, the text in general.

The original text was deemed as "subversive", and suffered a strong political backlash. This text indirectly led to the Filipino's united national sense of identity, but it also indirectly led towards Rizal's public execution through a firing squad as it exposed the injustices of the Spanish friars and the Civil Guards that ruled the Philippines during this time through the use of satire. The two translations remain faithful to the story and its characters, but they have also admitted to paraphrasing and reworking. Guerrero admits, "I have therefore allowed myself the further liberty of paraphrasing certain passages... Other passages had to re-worked willy-nilly... In a number of cases I have thought it helpful to translate the original Spanish into modern

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Philippine equivalents” (xvi-xvii). But if he has reworked and paraphrased many passages, how could this still be a faithful translation? According to Nida, there is a “core of meaning” that can be extracted from the Source Language (SL). By extracting this core of meaning, the translation then becomes a sense by sense translation. The translator has to “[operate in a] criteria that transcend[s] the purely linguistic, and a process of decoding and recording takes place” (Bassnett, 23). In order to extract the “core of meaning”, Nida provides a model of translation:



The SL must first be analyzed as to what context it’s being used in, then translate it and restructure it based on the analysis into the Target Language (TL). Where word-by-word translation would not work due its linguistic untranslatability, Nida’s model can be used to do a sense-by-sense translation by extracting the “core of meaning”; and this would still be a faithful translation.

Both Derbyshire’s and Guerrero’s translations are faithful, but the biggest difference between the two translations would be whether it’s source-oriented or target-oriented, which influences their use of *foreignisation* and *domestication* within the text. Using Umberto Eco’s concept of source-oriented and target-oriented translation, “which are terms usually employed in translation studies” (Eco 88), we can then determine what kind of translation Derbyshire and Guerrero has done. Derbyshire’s translation is a source-oriented translation, disrupting the source language as little as possible. He achieved this by domesticating the foreign. Guerrero’s is a target-oriented translation, which disrupts the reader as little as possible and Guerrero achieves this through reworking and paraphrasing some passages to create a translation for the modern reader and by adding many clarifications that is not seen in Derbyshire’s. Guerrero claims: “I have tried in this version to provide a completely new one that would give the contemporary reader ‘the ease of original composition,’ the *Noli* as Rizal might have written it if he had been writing in English for the present generation of Filipinos” (xvi).

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Before addressing the translations, it is perhaps important to understand why Rizal chose to write in Spanish rather than in the local dialect. It is beneficial to examine this because the Spanish language influences the translations, especially Derbyshire's. Knowing the author's intent could also possibly affect the way the translations were also written. The *Noli* was written for Filipinos "to rouse the feeling of [his] countrymen" (Arensmeyer, qtd. in *Nineteenth-Century Literature Criticism*, 423) yet Rizal wrote the original in Spanish, "a language spoken and understood only by a tiny minority: the educated Filipino elite and the Spanish officials" (Reyes, *José Rizal*, 233). As it turns out, Rizal did not only "intend to address [the] Filipinos [but also the] Spaniards: 'You who read me, friend or foe'" (Reyes, 233). If Rizal wanted to incite nationalist feelings in his countrymen, why did he choose to write in a language that is only limited to the upper class? In an early anonymous review of *The Social Cancer*, the anonymous critic reviews Rizal's political position,

But we should observe that the major theses of Rizal are distinctly pro-Spanish in every essential. He attempts to prove first that everything good in Filipino civilization is due to Spain; and then that permanent advancement must come not from political convulsions, not from endless and abortive revolutions, but from an assimilation of Spanish civilization which automatically will place the Filipinos on a footing of equal opportunity with their rulers (408).

The *Noli* was anti-clerical, yes; but it was not anti-European, let alone anti-Spanish. After all, Rizal finished his studies in Madrid, Spain and travelled in Europe, where he most likely was instilled with European ideals of national identity. What Rizal wanted was not independence but assimilation with the Spanish. "[Spanish] would also draw together rulers and ruled, integrating the colony as a full-fledged province of Spain. The spread of Castilian promised, so the ilustrados thought to make Filipinos equal to Spaniards as citizens of a common *patria*" (Rafael, *The Promise of the Foreign*, 13). The *ilustrados*, meaning "enlightened" were the first generation nationalists who believed that through the language they could create a unity with Spain and was idealized as "the medium of translation, a second language with which to articulate one's first" (14), which was already making its rounds within the Philippine vernacular. Derbyshire's translation certainly reflects Rizal's purpose by domesticating the foreign Spanish words in his translation, and creating unity with the said language.

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The title is an important aspect in a text, yet Derbyshire and Guerrero have different titles for their translation. The title *Noli Me Tangere* or “Touch Me Not” is a Biblical allusion taken from John 20:17 are the words spoken by Christ to Mary Magdalene. However, Rizal’s title, as he explained to a friend suggest “that he [Rizal] would write of things as yet unwritten because untouchable” (Guerrero, xvii). Interestingly, the two English translations have different titles: *The Social Cancer* and *The Lost Eden*. Derbyshire’s title stemmed from Rizal’s letter to his fatherland, “Recorder in the history of human sufferings is a cancer oh so malignant ... hath thy dear image presented itself showing a *social cancer* like no that other!” (Rizal, “Author’s Dedication *The Social Cancer* trans. Derbyshire: lvii). Rizal studied medicine, so he often utilised medical metaphors. Derbyshire’s title alludes more to Rizal’s scientific, more practical educated part, a very Eurocentric ideal that is a product from the Enlightenment period. Thus, Derbyshire is promoting a Eurocentric ideal, which also relates not only to Spain being part of this Eurocentric ideal, but also to Rizal’s initial purpose of writing the *Noli*. This is opposed by Guerrero’s title, which has a more religious connotation behind it. It refers to “Rizal’s message, [from a poem Rizal wrote while in prison,] that the Spanish has lost a chance to participate in the building of an exceptional Asian nation” (Kaut, *Nineteenth-Century Literature Criticism*, 415-416); an Eden of some sort that the Spaniards lost. It is somewhat ironic that Guerrero would choose a title with religious connotation behind it when the novel itself is anti-clerical, isn’t it? Perhaps not: Rizal went to a Jesuit college and has not once attacked religion itself but the Spanish clergy and the “hypocrisy, which under the guise of religion, came to impoverish and to brutalize [the Filipinos]” (Gale Literary and Critical Databases 407). Guerrero’s title alludes more to Rizal’s humanist persona, which is associated with the American ideal of human rights and freedom. The title of these two translations not only speaks about the difference in translation, but also the underlying influence of different colonial powers.

An aspect that is prominent in Guerrero’s translation is the amount of clarification he makes. He has “incorporated into the text the unavoidable explanations of historical, local, classical, theological, and other references and allusions which would otherwise remain obscure to a generation no so erudite as Rizal’s or as familiar with the Philippines of his time” (xvi).

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This amount of clarification is not seen in Derbyshire's version. Now compare the two paragraphs below, (A) being from Guerrero's translation while (B) is from Derbyshire's, to show not only how Guerrero has achieved being a target-oriented translation by paraphrasing and reworking some sentences as , but to also show the modernisation of the language that the translators use.

(A) Don Santiago de los Santos was giving a dinner party on evening towards the end of October in the 1880's. Although, contrary to his usual practice, he had let it be known only on the afternoon of the same day, it was soon the topic of conversation in Binondo, where he lived, in other districts of Manila, and even in the Spanish walled city of Intramuros. Don Santiago was better known as Capitan Tiago—the rank was not military but political, and indicated that he had once been the native mayor of a town. In those days he had a reputation for lavishness. It was well known that his house, like his country, never closed its doors—except, of course, to trade and any idea that was new or daring. (1)

(B) On the last of October Don Santiago de los Santos popularly known as Capitan Tiago, gave a dinner. In spite of the fact that, contrary to his usual custom, he had made the announcement only that afternoon, it was already the sole topic of conversation in Binondo and adjacent districts, and even in the Walled City, for at that time Capitan Tiago was considered one for the most hospitable of men, and it was well known that his house, like his country, shut its doors against nothing except commerce and all new or bold ideas. (1)

(A) provides the reader with the time of the story; this aspect is nowhere to be seen in (B). It is the same for the setting: (A) clarifies that Binondo is in Manila and that the Spanish walled city is called Intramuros. (A) wanted to make sure that the reader knew where Binondo was.

Truthfully, as a Filipino, I felt alienated by (B) because I did not know where Binondo was located, despite knowing that the setting was in the Philippines. Another main point in this paragraph is the extra tangent in (A) explaining about the title "Capitan". This is due to the cultural untranslatability that is prominent in the text. Readers from the late twentieth century after the World War II would think that "Capitan" was a military title, especially due to the American influence that does not have such titles in their political strata.

Interestingly enough, only the clerical and non noble titles got translated into their English counterparts by Guerrero, while Derbyshire kept them all in their original Spanish. Fray

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Dámaso and Padre Sibyla became Father Dámaso and Father Sybila. Despite the obvious differences in the titles in Spanish, in English, the two simply mean “Father” for they are both priests of some sort. Derbyshire calls *Doña* Victorina as *Doctora*, while Guerrero calls her “Madame Doctor”. Spanish, like French is a gendered language, but English is not. “Female Doctor” would not have the same class that is associated with a *Doña*. *Señor* Laruja becomes Mr. Laruja in Guerrero’s translation, but all the *Don* and the *Doña* titled stayed the same rather than being translated into their English counterparts as “Sir” or “Madame”. The foreign titles associated with the Spanish have been domesticated as part of the Philippine vernacular in Derbyshire’s translation. Guerrero translated only the titles that were no longer being used as part of the local dialects. This simple way of translating the titles show the shifting of the colonial powers from Spanish to the Americans.

In the nineteenth century, parts of the Spanish language were often domesticated as part of the local dialect in the Philippines: “a practice of translation that expects the vernacular to forebear the untranslatability of words” (Rafael, 109). Untranslatable words during this time included titles and certain words and sayings that was adopted and domesticated into the local vernacular. This type of abuse is reflected in Derbyshire’s translation. So there are words like “Calle Anloague” and “*accidens*”. Guerrero, however, translates “Calle Anloague” to “Anloague Street”. By the late nineteenth century after Tagalog has been established as the national language, “Calle” was recognized as a domestic word rather than a foreign word being domesticated; so Guerrero treated it as a domestic word and translated it to its English counterpart. But the same can’t be said for the sayings. “*accidens*” was not translated, instead Guerrero writes it as: “*per accidens* or perdition” (10). Instead of translating the word, he just explains by providing the English version of the word in tandem with the Spanish saying. A feature of the twentieth century translators – “a continuation of many of the Victorian concepts of translation” (Bassnett 76) – was archaizing. Derbyshire archaizes by using the original Spanish words rather than modernising it like Guerrero has done, which avoids confusion that the contemporary reader may have when reading his translation. However, there is something lost due to this.

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(A). “I propose, first, that we have four sponsors for the two feast days...” (108)

(B). “I propose: first, four *hermanos mayores* for the two days of the fiesta...” (141)

Derbyshire adds a footnote to explain what *hermanos mayores* is, but Guerrero doesn't add any clarification or any footnotes. So, such social and cultural practices are lost in Guerrero's translation, and by losing these practices, in a way, lose the cultural identity. This is lost to many modern readers. Modernization is similar to doing a sense-by-sense translation, as long as the “core of meaning” is extracted. In the excerpts below, the “core of meaning” is extracted after analyzing the context of the SL text, which led to Guerrero (A) reworking the passage and doing a sense-by-sense translation as to not alienate the modern reader.

(A) Doña Concolación, who was then a laundress, gingerly felt with her fingers the effects of her husband's cuffing, and repeated, almost at the end of her patience:

‘Peeleep—Peeleep... pines—*Peeleepines*. Is that it?

“Not *Peeleep*, with a *p!*” roared the corporal. “Feeleep, with an *f!*”

“Why? How do you spell *Peeleep*? With a *p* or an *f*?”

The corporal thought it the better part of wisdom to change the subject that day, and meantime to consult a dictionary. Here his wonder reached its highest pitch. He rubbed his eyes. Let's see... slowly now... but there was no doubt about it. P-h-i-l-i-p-p-i-n-e-s: he and his wife were both wrong; it was neither *p* nor *f* but *ph*. How now, he muttered to himself. Could the dictionary be wrong? Or was this dictionary written by some stupid native? He took his doubts to Sergeant Gómez, who in his youth had aspired to the priesthood... “In ancient times Philip was spelled with an *f*, simply because that that is the way it is pronounced. But we are much too sophisticated for that now, and so it is spelled with a *p*, but with an *h* following to show that it is pronounced like an *f*. Furthermore the best people in Madrid... now all use what is known as the British or Oxford accent, and say Philippines with a long *I* at the end, like pine-trees, you understand. (Guerrero 248).

(B) Consolacion, at that time was a washerwoman, patted her bruises and repeated with symptoms of losing her patience, “Fe-li-pe, Felipe-nas, Fe-li-pe-nas, Felipinas, so?”

The corporal saw visions. How could it be *Felipenas* instead of *Felipinas*? One of two things: either it was *Felipenas* or it was necessary to say *Felipi!* So that day he very prudently dropped the subject. Leaving his wife, he went to consult the books. Here his astonishment reached a climax: he rubbed his eyes – let's see – slowly, now! *F-i-l-i-p-i-n-a-s*, Filipinas! So all the well printed books gave it – neither he nor his wife was right!...With these doubts he went to consult the seargeant Gomez, who, as a youth, had wanted to be a curate... “In ancient times it was pronounced *Filipi* instead of *Felipe*. But since we moderns have become

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Frenchified we can't endure two *i*'s in succession, so cultured people, especially in Madrid... have begun to change the first *i* to *e* in many words. That is called modernizing yourself... In ancient style, *Filipinas!*" (Derbyshire 303-305).

This is perhaps the biggest act of modernization by Guerrero (A). The contemporary English reader can no longer relate to being "Frenchified", especially if they are American; but they can relate to having a British or Oxford accent. France was the super power that was replacing Spain before World War II, thus becoming modern through France. However, as America becomes the super power after World War II, a British or Oxford accent is considered classy or modern, so it replaces what was "Frenchified". The spelling "Philippines" was only recently changed when the Americans occupied the Philippines. It was originally spelled as "Filipinas" by the Spanish. By adhering to the American spelling, Guerrero promotes the American colonialism, while Derbyshire promotes the Spanish colonialism by using the Spanish spelling. Guerrero had to rework this paragraph so that it becomes translatable and understandable to the modern reader. The changing of the spelling was a step towards an identity away from the Spanish that the Americans have pushed for. And as, the Philippines was no longer called Filipinas after World War II, again, the contemporary reader would be alienated and confused. Modernization is a technique Guerrero uses so it does not confuse nor alienate the contemporary reader. However it does not mean that Derbyshire was not also modernizing his translation. "Translators, even when trying to give us flavours of a language and of a historical period, are in fact *modernizing* their source" (Eco, 88). Even when Derbyshire is "[conveying] the remoteness of the original in time and place" (Bassnett, 71), he is still modernizing the source language.

"The translator either disturbs the writer as little as possible and moves the reader in his direction, or disturbs the reader as little as possible and moves the writer in his direction" (Schleiermacher qtd in *Source Vs Target*, 100). What Guerrero aims is to be a target-oriented translator so the contemporary reader is "disturb as little as possible" by adding clarifications and modernization. Derbyshire on the other hand is a source-oriented translator, translating as close as he can to the source. This is evident in the example above where he forgoes translating *Filipinas*. Despite being a source-oriented translator, it does not mean that Derbyshire's

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translations disturb the reader very much, the *modern* reader, yes, but the readers, especially the Filipino readers during his time would actually be disturbed very little.

There is a certain violence here that Venuti alludes to:

“The violent effects of translation are felt at home as well as abroad. On the one hand, translation wields enormous power in the construction of national identities for foreign cultures, and hence it potentially figures in ethnic discrimination, geopolitical confrontations, colonialism, terrorism, war.”(19).

These two translations construct two very different identities not only for the foreign cultures but also for the domestic. The identity of a colonial power within Philippines is obvious in Derbyshire’s translation through the Spanish that was domesticated. It is not only a pointer towards such an identity, but it is also advocates the Spanish colonization through the Spanish words. Guerrero does not escape this either. Despite translating most of the Spanish words with their English counterpart, he doesn’t do it for all of them. He hints at the Spanish colonization, but does not promote it. It is there, but it is no longer dominant. Instead, he promotes a different colonial power: the Americans. Guerrero nearly erases the Spanish words that became part of the local dialect except for a few, such as titles and Spanish sayings, and replaces them with their English counterpart. Very much like how the Americans came subtly into the Philippines and set to replace the Spanish influence with their own. It is a very subtle way of colonization. This was plausible and easily done because there was no united Filipino identity until the Americans came after the defeat of the Spaniards. Ultimately, Philippines was a series of islands with different tribes that was just claimed by the Spanish. The Americans came, using their rebellion against Spain to their advantage to promote and instill their own culture as part of the budding Philippine national identity. Guerrero expresses this form of colonization very well: “the Spanish were there, yes, we acknowledge that as history, but they are no longer in power; but we, the Americans will guide you through to the national identity process! Let’s start with the English language” sort of scenario. As a way to modernize his text, Guerrero participates in the “metonymic chain of fixed associations... modernization = Westernization = Americanization” (Stanford Friedman 66). This was most likely a conscious act, as he has admitted to translating it

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in the modern context; and the only way to modernize it was to Americanize his translation, which ultimately promotes the American colonization.

In the discourse of translation studies, colonialism proves to be a great influence towards the way translations are created, especially towards a country whose identity has not as fully developed yet. Colonialism can be promoted even through simple things such as choosing or not choosing to translate certain words from the SL. In this case, Derbyshire's abuse and choice to keep the original Spanish titles, such as *Doctora* and *Señor*, and domesticating them; while Guerrero chose to translate them into their English equivalents. There are more implicit ways of promoting the colonial powers. The mere notion of modernization itself promotes it, specifically Guerrero's way of promoting modernization. Both Derbyshire's and Guerrero's translations are strongly affected by the colonial powers that ruled the Philippines in their time.

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