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Book History

Johns Hopkins University Press

Volume 8, 2005

pp. 131-197

10.1353/bh.2005.0008

ARTICLE

[View Citation](#)

In lieu of an abstract, here is a brief excerpt of the content:

Book History 8 (2005) 131-197

[\[Access article in PDF\]](#)

Florante at Laura and the History of the Filipino Book

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The metrical romance *Florante at Laura* by Francisco Baltazar (1788–1862) is a unique case in the history of

Philippine literature and publishing. It holds the distinction of being the only poem published in the country that has not gone out of print since its first publication, that has been translated into various local and foreign languages, and that continues to be read to this day. Baltazar, popularly known as Balagtas, has been hailed as the greatest of Tagalog poets and his *Florante at Laura* acclaimed as a masterpiece.¹ But beyond literary merit, what has ensured the survival of both poet and poem through the years is the great historical, social, and cultural value they have been granted.

The poem was written while Balagtas was serving time in a Manila prison, beginning around 1835 or 1836, and published in 1838 after his release. It comprises 399 monorhyming dodecasyllabic quatrains in Tagalog, and its original full title is *Pinagdaanang Buhay ni Florante at ni Laura sa kahariang Albania, kinuha sa madlang "cuadro historico" o pinturang nagsasabi sa mga nangyayari nang unang panahon sa imperio ng Grecia at tinula ng isang matuwain sa bersong Tagalog* (The History of Florante and Laura in the Kingdom of Albania, based on various "historical scenes" or portraits relating events in ancient times in the Greek Empire and written by one who delights in Tagalog verse). The poem is, as one critic put it, "romantic and lyrical in inspiration, social in intent, and allegorical in conception."²

At one level, and as its title suggests, *Florante at Laura* is a love story. Balagtas drew from the literary tradition of courtly love in fashioning **[End Page 131]** Florante as the suffering lover, Laura as the beautiful beloved, and their love impeded by powerful forces. At the time of the poem's writing, Balagtas was himself an unfortunate suitor, imprisoned on false charges by a rich and influential rival. However, he apparently set out to do more with the poem than merely give expression to his misfortunes in romance. He indicated other levels of meaning in his preface, "Sa Babasa Nito" (To the Reader):

Kung sa biglang tingi'y bubot at mas aklap
palibhasa'y hilaw at mura ang balat,
nguni't kung namnamin ang sa lamang lasap,
mas arapan din ang babasang pantas.

(At a glance, this may look unripe and sour,
because its rind is still green and immature,
but when savoured, the taste of its meat
will be enjoyed even by the discriminating reader.)³

Balagtas was thought to have employed elements far removed from nineteenth-century Philippine society to get his poem past the strict censorship of the government and the Church. Thus his fantastic characters and settings have been regarded as symbolic, and *Florante at Laura* has come to be read consequently as a stirring piece of patriotism—a depiction of the sufferings of the Filipino people under the oppressive Spanish colonial regime.

Balagtas is now a Filipino hero and *Florante at Laura* one of the country's sacred texts. It was the longing for and imagining of a Philippine nation that engendered the secular canonization of the poet and his poem. This is evident not only in the historical developments that established, celebrated, and preserved Balagtas and *Florante at Laura* as part of the national heritage of the Philippines, but also in the printed versions of the poem themselves, which display this nationalist sentiment at work. Many volumes have already been written on the poet and the poem; however, very little attention has been paid to *Florante at Laura's* history as a book. This study seeks to address such a gap in scholarship. Premised on the concept of the book as a cultural artifact and its life cycle—publishing, manufacture, distribution, reception, and survival—influenced by political, social, intellectual, and commercial factors, it explores how *Florante at Laura* has survived in its printed form.⁴

This study surveys the publishing history of...

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Florante at Laura and the History of the Filipino Book, parallax, therefore, develops out of the ordinary ion tail, while the pole is attached to brightly colored paper or cloth carp, one for each boy in the family.

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