

Book Reviews

The Magellan Fallacy: Globalization and the Emergence of Asian and African Literature in Spanish

By ADAM LIFSHEY

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Increasingly, scholarship in Hispanic studies aims at transcending the conventional limits of the Peninsular and Latin American subfields in order to provide a wide-ranging understanding of cultural phenomena. By focusing on the literary production of the Philippines and Equatorial Guinea, Adam Lifshey's *The Magellan Fallacy* joins that discussion as it tackles a timely theme: the development of global approaches to Hispanophone cultural productions.

In his first book, *Specters of Conquest: Indigenous Absence in Transatlantic Literatures* (Fordham University Press, 2010), Lifshey centers on “America” as a “reiterating foundational narrative” (1). In *The Magellan Fallacy*, however, he turns to an even more complicated narrative whose scope is global. If *Specters* examines encounters between conquerors and conquered across the Atlantic, *The Magellan Fallacy* concentrates on a similar encounter, this time in the Pacific. Magellan, a Portuguese captain on track to circumnavigate the planet in the name of the Spanish crown, dies at the hands of Lapu Lapu, a chief defending the island of Mactan in today's Philippines. Although interrupted, the circumnavigation is eventually completed by the survivors of Magellan's crew and is chronicled by his assistant, Pigafetta. For Lifshey, Magellan's death is a pivotal event in this narrative: “The death of Magellan marks the birth of modernity, for it is his voyage . . . that intertwines provincial and planetary powers into an irreducibility that is the definitive hallmark of the world today.” (1) Furthermore, he insists in the lambent style he adopts in the book, this 1521 event reveals a fallacy: “the conviction that captains can control the consequences of globalization.” (1)

In *The Magellan Fallacy*, Lifshey conceives of literary authors as captains of textual vessels. By so doing, he is able to produce a study that underscores the simultaneous (trans)formations of local, national, and global subjectivities as it “interrogates how the local, versed in the global, reimagines the seeming centers and presumed peripheries of the modern world.” (4) These interrogations deepen the symbolic and historical insights Lifshey offers us in *The Magellan Fallacy* as it highlights the “global ebbs and flows” (26) portrayed in the imagining of the metropolis—and of the rest of the Hispanic world—from Filipino and Equatorial Guinean literary perspectives. Despite some audacious—and, often, debatable—claims concerning previous groundbreaking publications on the areas examined by this book,

Lifshey accomplishes his objectives very skillfully. The textual analysis of works by Filipino authors Pedro Paterno, José Rizal, and Felix Gerardo highlight the intricate development of identity discourses in the Philippines prior to and after its emancipation from Spain in 1898. Likewise, *The Magellan Fallacy* outlines the cultural implications of the simultaneous battles of colonization and decolonization involving Spain, its former colonies in the Americas, the United States, and the Philippines that characterized the period of the 1880s through the 1940s. Furthermore, through his remarks about Leoncio Evita's 1953 novel (which is analyzed more thoroughly in *Specters*), Lifshey shows the impact of the 1898 era on Africa's imaginary. Yet, despite a comparative section that considers side-by-side nuances of the Filipino and the Equatorial Guinean literary contexts (154–171), the study's argument loses historical traction as it moves further into the last three African novels it covers. Even so, Lifshey's approach effectively reveals the multilayered and interweaving discourses of identity that converge in the novels by Equatoguinean authors Daniel Jones Mathama (1962), María Nsue (1985), and Juan Balboa Boneke (1985).

Lifshey admits that *The Magellan Fallacy* “attempts to be the first word, not the last, on many aspects of a field that does not presently exist” (24). To be sure, there are areas that could have been developed. For example, the book's global approach would have gained strength from including a theoretical dialogue with work that does exist on postcolonial, hemispheric, and transatlantic studies (which the author incorporated in his first book), as well as a discussion of transcontinental and global methodologies developed by other scholars within and beyond Hispanic studies. In spite of these omissions, *The Magellan Fallacy*'s broad scope and innovative and thought-provoking proposal constitute an important step in the advancement of global studies in Spanish.

ELISA RIZO

Iowa State University
rizo@iastate.edu

The Swahili Novel: Challenging the Idea of “Minor Literature”

By XAVIER GARNIER, TRANS. RÉMI TCHOKOTHE ARMAND AND FRANCES KENNETT

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Xavier Garnier's study of the Swahili novel does not so much *challenge* the idea of “minor literature” as import it into a new context and *put it to the test*—this being, perhaps, a more appropriate rendering of “*littérature mineure à l'épreuve*,” the original French subtitle of his book. Indeed, *The Swahili Novel* largely accepts the concept of “minor literature” as Deleuze and Guattari formulate it in their work on Kafka, where it refers to making “a minor usage of a major language.” For Garnier as much as for Deleuze and Guattari, “the essence of this minor literature is in its