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**Doña Luisa Gonzaga de León (1805–1843),
First Filipino Woman Author: Introductory Notes**

Luciano P. R. Santiago

A native of Bacolor, Pampanga, Doña Luisa Gonzaga de León was the first Filipino woman to publish a book—the Ejercicio Cotidiano (Daily Devotion)—in about 1844. This article introduces the writer, with a brief sketch of her life and family background, and her book whose significance in Philippine literature has been overlooked. The book is a compilation and translation, from Spanish to Kapampangan, of daily prayers and the liturgy of the Catholic mass. As the first missal in the vernacular, the book is seen as ahead of its time. Its most original part is the preface, which in this article is translated to English.

KEYWORDS: *Philippine literature, women's writings, Pampanga, religious literature, ethnic classification*

No other name of a Filipino woman or Kapampangan author appears earlier than that of Doña Luisa Gonzaga de León (1805–1843) in eighteenth- and nineteenth-century lists of books and comprehensive Philippine bibliographies (Medina 1971, 177, no. 1469; Rodríguez 1976, 381; see also AAM 1844; Medina 1904; Pérez and Guemes 1904; Pardo de Tavera 1903; Retana 1906; Santiago 1984). This article introduces the writer and her work whose significance in Philippine literature has been overlooked for more than a century and a half. The year 2004 marked the 160th anniversary of the publication of her book, but no commemorations were held.

At the outset, I would like to state that I am not proficient in Kapampangan, and had to seek the assistance of Pampango scholars to

translate the preface (*prólogo*) of Doña Luisa's book as well as the topics of its different sections to be able to write an overview of it. Thus, this article is at best a preliminary study, and it is hoped that a definitive work on the subject can be undertaken soon by a competent Pampango scholar. In the meantime, enough significant facts and data about Doña Luisa's life, lineage, and work have been gathered to justify an introductory article. Her work will be presented first and then her life and times, reflecting the order in which this writer found them in the process of primary research (de León 1854; AASF 1798–1816, 1816–1850, 1836–1858; AUST 1785; Alzona 1934, 143–53; de la Costa 2002, 312–33; Santiago 2003, 558–98).

A Book of Prayers (c. 1844)

As was the custom then, Doña Luisa adopted a Spanish title for her work, *Ejercicio Cotidiano* (Daily Devotion), but the subtitle was in Kapampangan: *Iti amanuyang Castila bildug ne quing amanung Capampangan nang Doña Luisa Gonzaga de Leon, India quing balayang Baculud* (Translated from the Spanish language to the Kapampangan language by Doña Luisa Gonzaga de Leon, India of the town of Bacolor). Consisting of 308 pages, it served mainly as a missal with a collection of daily prayers and other forms of religious devotion translated from Spanish *obras* into her native tongue. She was thus the first Filipino writer to compose a missal in the vernacular.

She had intended to publish her work during her lifetime, as indicated in the preface. The Spanish Civil Code, then in force in the Philippines, allowed a married woman to publish an article or book only with the permission of her husband. But this restriction no longer applied to Doña Luisa because she was by then a widow. And even if her husband were alive, judging from his benevolent character as gathered by their descendants, he would have readily given his consent to the publication. However, in 1843 death overtook her plans. The book was published in her name posthumously, apparently by her sons, but they did not disclose in the work that she had died in the meantime (de León 1854; Alzona 1934, 143–53). They obviously wanted the book to immortalize her and, in more ways than one, they succeeded in this objective.

Although there is no known extant copy of the first issue, it is still possible to determine the date of its publication from internal evidence in the 1854 reprint of her work preserved in the National Library. The copy's first four pages, where the official license to print and reprint the book would have appeared as was the standard requirement then, are missing.¹ The only other known copy of the second edition is kept at the Library of the Colegio de Padres Agustinos in Valladolid, Spain, but which I did not get the opportunity to examine. The Augustinian Library in Valladolid, Spain, contains copies of Doña Luisa's work because the province of Pampanga whence she hailed was under the religious administration of the Augustinians (de Leon 1854; Pardo de Tavera 1903, 188; Retana 1906; Rodríguez 1976). Fortunately, the 1854 reprint available to this writer shows the last of the engravings as having been signed and dated by the artist, a certain Noguera, in 1844 (de Leon 1854, 126). Further, the incumbent Archbishop of Manila, who conceded the plenary indulgence of eighty days to those who would pray the part of the book on the *Via Crucis*, was Fray José Seguí, OSA, who died on 4 July 1845. Thus, it appears that Doña Luisa's book was approved for publication between 1844 and 1845 and, as in most cases, printed subsequently within the year. What might have delayed its printing was the fact that the commissioned artist completed his series of twenty-four religious pictures only a year after the author's death. The book, however, was not among the entries of works given permission for publication in the Archdiocese of Manila from 1830 to 1846 and from 1846 to 1862, representing the reigns, respectively, of Archbishops José Seguí, OSA, and José Aranguren, OAR, and the subsequent vacant sees. For some reason, these entries in the administrative tomes (*Libros de Gobierno Eclesiástico*) are not complete since the second printing of Doña Luisa's obra in 1854 was not included in them either (de Leon 1854, 126, 212; AAM 1830–1845, 1845–1846, 1846–1861, 1861–1862).

Reprints of the Book (1854, 1867, 1910, and 1967)

The University of Santo Tomás Press reprinted her opus in 1854 under the direction of Don Manuel Ramírez and this is the oldest existing edition of it. A copy, with the missing pages, was acquired by the

Compañía General de Tabacos whose collection was purchased by the National Library before the war. Amazingly, it was to be one of the few books that survived the almost total destruction of the National Library during the Second World War.

Doña Luisa's book had been listed in Pardo de Tavera's *Biblioteca Filipina* (1903) and Retana's *Aparato Bibliográfico* (1906). According to her direct descendant, Don Mariano A. Henson, the eminent historian of Pampanga, it saw print three more times after the 1854 reprinting: in 1867, 1910, and 1967. A copy of the third edition (1867), together with that of the second edition, is also preserved in the Augustinian Library in Valladolid. The last edition was issued by Henson himself at the start of the implementation of a key reform introduced by the Second Vatican Council—the celebration of the Catholic mass in the people's language. Doña Luisa's missal in Kapampangan acquired a fresh relevance more than a century after she had introduced it (Henson 1965; Rodríguez 1976).

A Preface to Hope

Since Doña Luisa's book of prayers is primarily a work of translation, the most original part of it is the author's preface, which is essentially a spiritual essay rising, in the end, to poetry of mystic inspiration. It was the first essay by a Filipino woman to see print. She felt some sadness and alluded to a chronic ailment, which made her homebound at the time she was writing the book. Perhaps, she was suffering from tuberculosis, the most frequent form of chronic affliction in past centuries. The irony of her situation was that, while she was composing a missal in her language, she could no longer attend mass at the parish church due to her sickness, which was her own personal sacrifice.

However, as Doña Luisa avers in various parts of the preface, her faith and the insight she gained from her writing endeavor fortifies the mind, body, and soul in a holistic way (de Leon 1854, 7–12). Written with great simplicity, her religious essay evinces humility to the point of self-deprecation. She manifests unwavering hope and serenity in the face of an illness as well as a social malady of her time that deeply affected her: a burgeoning materialism and decadence, which probably emanated

from the unprecedented prosperity in her country, especially in her natal province. Hence, she emphasizes the importance of “being” rather than “having” and on this very motif she concludes her poignant preface with sacred verses.

In the *Trisagium* (three-day devotion) part of the book, Doña Luisa provides spiritual poems in adoration of the Holy Trinity.² Evidently, she was also a poetess, albeit a minor one. In a larger sense, almost all Filipino women and men of letters in the Spanish era, including translators and prose writers, were essentially poets like their pre-Hispanic counterparts. Many a wordsmith penned both prose and poetry. The prose of the creative writers was typically poetic and interspersed with verses along the way. Translators of plain works frequently poeticized significant parts of the original. *Gozos* or brief verses of joy formed a regular part of the novenas, a nine-day set of prayers for the intercession of a saint. Even translators of poetic romances such as the *corridos* took the liberty of rendering the ideas more than the words into the vernacular to allow them to express their own literary artistry and imagination.³

Doña Luisa’s line of thought parallels the mystical reflections of St. Teresa of Ávila, though of course conveyed in different words. For instance, the First Woman Doctor of the Catholic Church pens her famous poem:

Nada te turbe
 Nada te espante
 Todo se pasa
 Diós no se muda
 La paciencia todo lo alcanza
 Quién a Dios tiene
 Nada le falta
 Solo Diós basta.

Let nothing disturb you
 Let nothing frighten you
 Everything passes
 God does not change
 Patience overcomes everything
 He who has God

Lacks nothing
 God alone is enough.

Doña Luisa, on the other hand, speaks of Christ as her “only love,” who frees her from the fears and apprehensions of life; “with Him, (she) will not fail.” She is enamored with the Eternal Word, who has endowed her with a way with words. However, she disclaims being a saint and, in fact, she sees herself a “sinner who seeks to reconcile with God” (Santiago 1990a).

Death for her was the serene adventure. In the last part of her preface, she echoes the tranquil attitude of her patron, San Luís Gonzaga, regarding the ebb of life. Some of her favorite readings were evidently the lives of the saints. When the Patron of the Youth was asked what he would do if he were told he had only a few minutes left to live, he answered that he would just continue whatever he was doing at the moment—for he had long been preparing for the smooth transition to eternal life.

The following is Doña Luisa’s original “Prólogo” in Kapampangan followed by an English translation of the work.⁴

Prólogo

Quing ditac á calungcutan, ampon caratunana ning pangabilicu quening calung pamibalebalecu, macapamasacung numpilan catayá caring libros á baguena ning metung á taung palpicasala á bisang mibalic á lub quing Guinutang Dios, ing ababalucung tungcal ditac, pangutangcut paquisanmetung caring cacasi, t, ning Dios, nun carelang patutuan, ibaldugcu naman caniting amanu, at pasibayucung icuang sangguni, anti quing ecu atalatas, ampon é balu ing queraclan caring vocablos, oraciones, proposiciones, at aliuapang caculangan quing sabling castila, ampon tagalug ing tunggal ditac á apupulutcu, agadcung picatmucatmuan, at pisuglung suglungan, sacácu namanpin isulat queting maliniscung Cuaderno. Pagcalam nasa ning Dios queting nasacungmayap, at ditac á capibabatan, paquinabangnancusa, manggang ding alinapang bisang magdamut maguiabe masa cacu: dapot eco paquiabe, at lalangcap caniti, ding mangaplant Inteligentes á dactal á balita, ampon balu quing Sagrada Escritura, ampon suma ning Teologia, at aliuapang autoridadesda ding Santos Padres, uling deti

ilang quiquilalanancung Maestro á turu canacu quing bague á iti, nuné caretamung lupacung bulag at alan panamdang quing capallarian, at cabagsicana Guinutang Dios, uling deti, macaguimung bibiyanda ing catauan, ampon palayuan, dapot eta gaganacan quing ila atin caladuarang sulitana, at ucuman ning mayupaying Guinung Dios. Antimansa papamungana ning Dios quing pusura deting-tau, iting ditacung capagalan, baqueng numabang parapara quetang ligayang masampat banua. Yanasa.

Ing sucatnang pigaganacan ning tauo, bayang numabang quing pacalulu ning Dios.

Uli ning cayalan capigaganacan, masisirá ang Jatu. At sacáta isipan.

Ing tauo, nun iña millaria, bayang quilala, malsinta, manga sumuyu quing Dios, ampon mabang quetang ligaya banua. Eata iting bague iya ing pacsang quepallariana.

Ing Dios iya ing quecatang pigmulan, ampon ulian. Nun anti carin iya ing sucatang atapan parati.

Nun alang Dios alá namang nanuman, nun ena caburian, ó capaintulutan é mate ing yamuc; at é néman tague ing cabulung á yare. Nun macañan sucayang pigaganæan ing Dios quing sablang dapatamu: ing sablá sucatang daptan quing Dios uli ning Dios, at inguil quing Dios.

Ing Dios é dinapat nanuman á yalan quepapacanan, quing uli nita ucumanacata, t, parusan quing catayamumang amanung alan cabaldugan. ¿Baquet cayasa itamu tututang bande? ¿Nanung quepapacanan, nanabangnanta ing meto yatu, nun mahauwaya quecata, ing Dios, at masisiraya ing quetacatang caladua? Iñapin ngatang sumabi.

¿Nanung sangcan mabaitcu? Bacung micabus ing matecu; é sumala.

Ing é que aquit ing Dios, at mabaldugcu quing infernos.

Bague á macasindac, dapot sucat mapallari! At bistat macañan, maylicu, matudtudcu, at mitutula.

¿Sucat mapallari! At palsintancu, ing mayayaquit quing yatu.

¿Nanung daraptancu? ¿Nanung cabalanancu? ¿Nanung caligaligancu?

Mamulang sucat ing pangabilicu, dapot ecu Santo.

Ining lingapcung parati,t, lasacu quing aldo bengi ay Jesus á sintang dili! ecu caya misaulli!

SUMA MÍSTICA.

Paybabaya ing bisang mitas

mugseya ing bisang magap

tumangis yang bisang gunlas
paylasayang bisang ablas.

Preface

Despite my sad and frail condition here in my humble abode, I manage to read the pages of those books, which are proper for a sinner who seeks to reconcile with God our Lord. The humble knowledge I gain from those books and from my inquiries and association with God's ministers—if they will acknowledge me—I shall convey in my language. When necessary, I seek their guidance over again since I cannot really plumb nor do I know most of the words, prayers, and propositions I come across and I have other limitations in the Spanish language and even in Tagalog. I at once collect the small pieces I pick up along the way, as it were, write these down in rough drafts and, finally, make clean copies of them in my notebook. May God consider my good intentions and small sacrifice. May I benefit from this undertaking as well as others who want to partake of it and aspire with me for higher things. However, I do not include here the works of all the well-known scholars and experts in the Holy Scripture and Sacred Theology or those of the Church Fathers. There are other persons, whom I regard as my mentors, who will teach me these things, which are only for people who, like me, are blind and insensitive to the creations and the power of God Almighty. The works included here are enough to sustain the body and [?]. But let us not be afraid since the body possesses a soul that shall be given fulfillment and justice by our God Merciful and Almighty. Further, may God enrich the hearts of the persons who will read my humble work, so that I could attain with them the corresponding joy in heaven. Amen.

What should man concern himself with so that he will obtain the mercy of God?

Because of his indifference, the earth is going to be destroyed.

Let us reflect.

Why was man created? So that he will obey, love, and honor God, and aspire for happiness in heaven.

This is the order of things. God is our source and our destiny. What is due Him, we should offer Him. This is what matters always. If there is no God, there will be nothing. If He does not permit it, not even a mosquito will fall nor can a blade of grass be pulled out

of the ground. Therefore, God should be considered in all our actions: Everything should be for God, because of God, and about God.

God will not do anything but for a purpose. Thus, you will be judged accordingly and punished when you use words in vain. How much do we own? What does it profit a man if he gains the whole world but suffers the loss of his own soul? Let us therefore reaffirm:

Why was I born? So that I will be saved. If I perish, light will vanish from me. I will not see God and I will be thrown into hell.

These are indeed terrible things that can happen! Nonetheless, despite them, I will still smile, sleep well, and be happy.

These things can happen! Yet I will still enjoy the things I see around me.

What then am I doing? What things really concern me? And what disturb me?

Exhilarating indeed is my situation. Though I am not a saint.

Day and night, I always seek and desire Jesus, my only love! With him, I will not fail.

MYSTICAL SUMMING UP

Let him be humbled, who desires to be great

Let him give away things, who wants to accumulate

Let him weep, who wants to be happy

Let him suffer, who seeks revenge.

The Illustrations

The main focus of the book, the missal, was illustrated with prints of the different parts of the mass. Noguera, the competent engraver of the prints, is not known in the history of art in the Philippines, but here he displayed his artistic skills in twenty-four prints, the last of which he signed and dated in 1844, as mentioned earlier. Although the priest celebrant was shown in the different phases of the mass in the same altar setting, Noguera varied the motif of the *retablo* or altarpiece to depict the mysteries of the Holy Rosary and other scenes in the life of Christ. In the process, the artist produced a combination of biblical and genre pieces. He created a visual procession of religious images as well as a

pedagogy of piety and grace. He also filled the other pages with illustrations of the instruments and symbols of the Passion and Crucifixion of the Redeemer. Thus, Noguera visually complemented Doña Luisa's missal and drew the faithful to pray. He was probably an Indio, because the priest who was offering the Holy Sacrifice looked like a native man in profile and when facing the congregation. Most of the time, however, his back was turned because that was the manner of saying mass prior to the Second Vatican Council, which was convoked more than a century later (de Leon 1854).

The Other Parts of the Book

The missal was supplemented with other forms of pious devotion, such as the Examination of Conscience, Prayers for Confession and Communion, Way of the Cross, Holy Rosary, and the *Trisagium* or three-day series of prayers to the Holy Trinity. As affirmed in the preface, Doña Luisa culled these materials from various Spanish and Tagalog prayer books. However, she cited only two particular sources, one for the Stations of the Cross and the other for the *Trisagium*.

She acknowledged that the part on the *Via Crucis* was translated from the Tagalog version of Fray Tomás Orliá, OSA, into Kapampangan by Don Macario Pangilinan of Betis, another unknown writer and poet. Doña Luisa was apparently more proficient in Spanish than in Tagalog, though she made light of her knowledge of both languages. The gentleman writer introduced each Station of the Cross with a long poem, apparently of his own creation since this was not a standard part of the devotion. The old list of *gobernadorcillos* of Betis placed Don Macario as the town executive in 1839 (de Leon 1854; LPC 1905b).

The *Trisagium* came from the original Spanish of Fray Eugenio de la Santísima Trinidad of the Barefoot Order of the Holy Trinity (which did not reach the Philippines). For this part, as noted earlier, she wrote or translated two poems, one brief, "Puri quing Guinung Dios" ("Praise be the Lord God"), and the other quite long, "Pamitutula quing Santísima Trinidad" ("Poems in honor of the Holy Trinity"). Doña Luisa also appended a long and detailed list of indulgences as conferred upon the readers of this section by local and foreign prelates, ranging

from the Pope to various bishops all over the world. The book ends with the completion of this roster (de Leon 1854, 289–308).⁵

The Pioneer Authors

As stated at the outset, Doña Luisa was the first Kapampangan to publish a book. Before her, a Spanish Augustinian, Fray Diego Bergaño had written two obras on the Kapampangan language, *Arte de la Lengua Pampanga* (1729, reprinted in 1736) and *Vocabulario de la Lengua Pampanga* (1732, reprinted in 1860). Doña Luisa must have made good use of the friar's dictionary for her work. After her, Padre Domingo Dairit, parish priest of Mabalacat, printed in 1857 his *Pamamatuyag a anting panentuanan qng. cauculan a sucat dang daplan ding anac a bayung cucumpisal at maquinabang*. It was reissued in 1879. Padre Dionisio Macapinlac's popular work, *Casalesayan qng. Mal a Pasion*, first appeared in 1876, twenty-four years after his death (Retana 1906, 1: nos. 236, 239, and 251; Retana 1906, 2: nos. 959, 1528, and 1669; AAM 1852–1862).

Who was Doña Luisa?

A considerable amount of information about her family background has been found by this writer. There is also a complete record of the names of her descendants, some of whom are aware of their genealogical ties but have missed her unique distinction as a pioneer author (Henares 2001a, b; Nepomuceno 1987).⁶ In fact, her accomplishment has not been noticed, which probably reflects the lack of importance given to women achievers in this country in the past. Despite the very little that is said about her as a person, some information can be gleaned quite clearly from her work, especially from the preface discussed above.

Although she called herself an *india*, she and her family were officially classified as *mestizos de sangle* or Chinese mestizos. During the Spanish colonial period, there were two types of Chinese mestizos. The first type was an exact half-breed, the child of a Chinese father and a native mother, whereas the second type was a descendant of a Chinese ancestor in the direct male line regardless of the intervening number of generations between them. It was obviously a male-controlled classifica-

tion system since the ethnicity of the mothers was not taken into consideration. Upon marriage, the local woman followed the ethnic category of her husband, and when the latter died she reverted back to her original group. Nevertheless, she retained her maiden name for life irrespective of her civil status (Henares 2001a, b; Santiago 1990b).

Doña Luisa's paternal grandfather was Chinese, but both her mother and paternal grandmother were indias. One could say she was one-fourth Chinese by blood. By claiming to be an india, she was quietly identifying with her female ancestors and defying a farcical classification. After all, the Spaniards had devised the system for divide-and-conquer as well as economic purposes. The Chinese mestizos were taxed twice the rate for the *naturales*, and the Chinese twice that for the mestizos. There were only nine towns and two cities in the Philippines with a separate Tribunal de Mestizos to represent them, and Bacolor was initially one of them. However, in 1826, for obscure reasons, the Tribunal de Mestizos of Bacolor was abolished, although the two *gremios* remained separate categories. In any case, by Doña Luisa's time, most "Filipinos" viewed themselves as one homogenous group regardless of their official racial classification. In fact, by 1850, even the venerable University of Santo Tomás had dropped the classification altogether with regard to their students (Henares 2001a, b; Santiago 1990b; LPC 1905a; *Guía oficial de Filipinas* 1894).

On the feast of San Luís Gonzaga, 21 June 1805, Doña Luisa was born to an illustrious family in barrio Cabangbangan of Bacolor, Pampanga. The name of the place means "irrigated land." When she was baptized four days later, her uncle, Dr. Don Pedro León de Arzega, the first Filipino layman to earn a doctorate in philosophy, stood as her godfather. Her parents were Don José Leonardo de León and Doña Casimira Custodia, who were also originally from Manila like Dr. Arzega. From the latter's academic records, we find the names of his parents—Luisa's grandparents—as Francisco Tico and Andrea Pasquala. Like many a native woman in the seventeenth to the middle of the nineteenth century, her mother and paternal grandmother used only two first names without surnames. She took exception from this custom by using not only her first and second names (although "Gonzaga" did not

really appear in her baptismal record) but also a family name (AASF 1798–1816; AUST 1785). Doña Luisa projected pride and dignity in her complete identity as a woman.

In the beginning of the nineteenth century, Don José Leonardo de León was nominated by the governor-general as the *escribano* (notary) of the Province of Pampanga, which was a royal appointment, and thus he settled in the capital town of Bacolor. In Madrid, King Carlos IV confirmed him to the position in his royal order of 5 July 1803. As in most cases, the regal document would have reached the Philippines at least a year later. At about this time, the couple—apparently recently married the previous year—had their first child, José Aniceto de León. He was also born in barrio Cabangbangan on 19 March 1804. His godfather was a native priest, Bachiller Don Mariano de Miranda, parish priest of Minalin (Magdaleno 1954, 421; AASF 1798–1816).

Doña Luisa probably studied in one of the *beaterios* in Manila, which served as *casas de recogimiento* or schools for girls, where she would have learned Spanish and the four “Rs”: religion, reading, writing, and arithmetic, as well as the domestic arts (Santiago 1996, 119–79; Santiago 2005, 87–172). She obviously grew up to be a devout woman who was not content with personal devotions but endeavored to provide and share with her fellow Pampangos a wide range of prayers and forms of worship and veneration. Well ahead of her time, she sought in particular to bring the liturgy of the mass closer to the people by rendering it in the vernacular, which, as noted earlier, would be an innovation of the Second Vatican Council over a century later. In the process, she also contributed to the enrichment, flexibility, and general development of Kapampangan language and literature. Further, she showed that Filipino women could and should publish their own obras instead of keeping these in manuscript form to themselves and a small circle of friends and relatives, as was the prevailing practice then.

It can truly be said that Doña Luisa lived in “a world charged with the grandeur of God.” If more biographical materials about her would turn up later, she could possibly qualify as a candidate for beatification, a process which represents a new wave of consciousness in the Philippine church today.

A Heritage of Courage and Erudition

One does not have to look far for the source of Doña Luisa's spiritual and intellectual vigor, which knows no race or gender. Her uncle and godfather, Dr. Don Pedro León de Arzega (1766–c1815), as mentioned earlier, was the first Filipino lay Doctor of Philosophy (UST 1785). Before Dr. Arzega, there were two Filipino priests who had obtained a doctorate in philosophy from the University of Santo Tomás, but Arzega was the first Filipino layman to graduate with a doctorate degree in any field (Santiago 1984b, 257–70; Santiago 1988, 83–92; AUST 1785).

A Chinese mestizo, Dr. Arzega was born in the Port of Cavite on the feast of San Pedro and San Pablo, 29 June 1766. His father, Francisco Tico, was a Chinese entrepreneur and his mother, Andrea Pasquala, was a native woman. With prescience and confidence, they chose “León” as his second name. For his godfather, they selected the Spanish Adjutant Don Josef de Arzega, who gave him his surname (AUST 1785).

Francisco Tico, Doña Luisa's grandfather, was a resident of the Chinese district of Parián just outside the walls of the city of Manila. However, during the British Occupation (1762–1764), he took refuge in Cebu, remaining loyal to the Spanish crown and refusing to collaborate with the “Protestant” enemy, unlike many of his countrymen from the Middle Kingdom. When he came back to Central Luzon, he settled in the Port of Cavite, where Don José Leonardo, Doña Luisa's father, was probably born too (AUST 1785).

Arzega studied at the Colegio de San José, the former Jesuit institution, which had been reopened under the auspices of the archdiocesan clergy after the expulsion of the Society of Jesus in 1768. Since this college did not grant degrees at this time, he also took formal courses in theology and philosophy at the University of Santo Tomás, from where he graduated as a Bachelor of Philosophy in 1784. His professors in both institutions praised his “extraordinary intelligence and great dedication to his education coupled with an exemplary conduct.” They also confirmed that he was a “brilliant and competent student of philosophy.” The following year 1785, he obtained a master's degree in philosophy and applied as well for the licentiate and doctorate in the same faculty. He was then only nineteen years old. The other applicant

was Maestro Don Bernardo Justiniano, a twenty-one-year-old Chinese mestizo seminarian of the Colegio de San Juan de Letrán (Santiago 1988).

Stunned were the two aspirants when the *graduados* or university council of Santo Tomás, which was composed mostly of Spanish secular priests with licentiate and doctorate degrees, opposed their applications. A similar controversy had occurred in 1773 and 1776 involving two other Chinese mestizos, Francisco Borja de los Santos and Dionisio Vizente de los Reyes, respectively. The rights of their ethnic group to acquire the highest academic degree had been sustained by the Royal Audiencia and reaffirmed by a royal decree of 1781. Nevertheless, the *graduados* asserted that the previous cases did not apply to Arzega and Justiniano because the latter's fathers were Chinese who, collectively, had been declared traitors by the Spanish king for collaborating with the British more than two decades earlier. In the earlier cases of de los Santos and de los Reyes, their families had been mestizos de sangley for generations on their paternal side. The *graduados* were attempting to distinguish the two types of Chinese mestizos as explained earlier. Prejudice against the Chinese continued to rear its ugly head by masquerading as a "technicality." Arzega, however, was not named "León" by his parents for nothing. (In fact, his family ultimately assumed "de Leon" as their surname, including the branch of Doña Luisa's. They followed the local Chinese custom of adopting a first name of the father as the family name.)⁷ Once and for all, he and Justiniano resolved to slay the white dragon of racial prejudice (AUST 1785).

The beleaguered youths acknowledged that their fathers had been expelled from the colony—but not as traitors. Because of their good moral character and refusal to collaborate with the British, their fathers were in fact allowed by the Spaniards to remain in the Philippines, on condition that they engage in agriculture rather than in commerce. Refusing to kowtow to the oppressive measure, the principled men were banished. Nevertheless, as "transient traders," the fathers were able to visit as often as they could and support their family in the Philippines with dignity. They eventually died in their native land cruelly separated from their family. Arzega and Justiniano produced prominent witnesses, both natives and Spaniards, who corroborated their claims (AUST 1785).

To resolve the ethnic question once again, the university rector, Fray Domingo Collantes, OP, convened a marathon debate at the conference hall (*paraninfo*) of the university. Raging for seventeen hours, the war of words ended when the sagacious rector stood up and made a shatteringly simple statement: "We acquire nobility in many different ways but, if we trace our origins, we are all equal!" Hence, Arzega and Justiniano were finally allowed to graduate both as Licentiates and Doctors of Philosophy in 1785. According to the rules of the university, besides defending their theses orally, they had to write these down for publication. Hence, they were also academic writers (Santiago 1984a, 1988; Bazaco 1933, 220–21).

The fact that Don José Leonardo de León, Doña Luisa's father, rose to the rank of a provincial notary indicated that he also studied at the University of Santo Tomás, the only university in the Philippines at the time. This could not be confirmed, however, because the records of the institution are largely incomplete from the late eighteenth to the early nineteenth century (UST Alumni Association 1972).

Dr. Arzega chose to settle with his wife, Doña María Magdalena, in Guagua, Pampanga. Perhaps, his mother or his wife was Kapampangan. He had three daughters, only one of whom we know by name, Doña Carlota de León. She married Don Ciriaco de Miranda, son of Don Ángel Pantaleón, the hacendero and founder of Ángeles (now a city). Doña Juana, the daughter of the founder, married Don Mariano Henson, the first Filipino lay Doctor of Laws (1824) as well as the second Filipino lay doctor (next to Arzega). The childless Doña Carlota was apparently close to her first cousin, Doña Luisa. Known as a "match-maker," Doña Carlota encouraged the intermarriage of her husband's family's descendants with those of Doña Luisa's as demonstrated in their extensive genealogy (Santiago 1988; Henares 2001a, b; Nepomuceno 1987).

Devoted Husband and Sons

In about 1820, at the age of fifteen, Doña Luisa married Don Francisco Paula de los Santos (1795–1840) of Pórac, who was also a Chinese mestizo. They settled in Bacolor, where Don Francisco proved to be a

charismatic leader, for he was readily accepted by the town elite that elected him at once as the *gubernadorcillo* of the *Gremio de Mestizos* a year after their marriage. It was also apparently in 1821 that he served concurrently as the interim *alcalde mayor* (governor) of the province of Pampanga. Three years later, in 1824, he was elected again as the town executive (Henares 2001a, b; LPC 1905a). In between her roles as wife, mother, and first lady of Bacolor, Doña Luisa took time to write.

The prominent couple begot three sons, two of whom reached maturity. The eldest was Celestino Mariano who was born in Bacolor on 18 July 1822. After the death of his mother, he moved to Pórac, his paternal town, where he was elected *gubernadorcillo* in 1849 and 1859. His descendants adopted the surname León Santos to include Doña Luisa in their remembrance. The second son was José María who was born on 19 March 1825 also in Bacolor. He became the *gubernadorcillo* of his native town in 1857. His branch took the patronymic Santos Joven. The youngest son was Francisco who was born on 27 December 1828 in Bacolor, though his parents were then residing in Pórac. He died in childhood (Henares 2001a, b; AASF 1816–1850).

Manifesting the religious bent of Doña Luisa and her husband, they chose Filipino priests, Padres Celestino de Vera and Francisco de Miranda, as the godfathers as well as the namesakes, respectively, of their sons Celestino and Francisco. The latter, of course, was also named for his father. Indeed, in her preface, Doña Luisa acknowledged her “inquiries and association with God’s ministers” as well as their “guidance” in the preparation of her book. In the case of José María, the godfather was Doña Luisa’s brother, Don José Aniceto de León. Both uncle and nephew were born on the same calendar day, the feast of San José (Henares 2001a, b; AASF 1816–1850).⁸

Providentially, the life spans of the couple and their sons coincided with the country’s economic growth in the nineteenth century in which the province of Pampanga was in the forefront. It became the richest province in the Philippines. Spearheaded by Chinese mestizos, including Don Francisco de los Santos, sugar farms were carved out of the fertile forests and developed for both local and international commerce. As cited earlier, Doña Luisa in her preface seemed to be lamenting the re-

sulting materialism and decadence in local society. But it was this new affluence that made possible the emergence of a new leisure class with ample resources and the time to reflect, create, or write and publish the products of their minds and hearts (Larkin 1993; de la Costa 2002, 312–33). In Doña Luisa's particular case, her deep spirituality and the creative talent she inherited from her family of origin, combined with the solicitude and entrepreneurial skill of her husband, endowed her with the golden opportunity to become the first Filipino woman and Kapampangan author.

Contemporary Writers

An older contemporary and town mate of Doña Luisa was Padre Anselmo Jorge Fajardo (1785–1845), parish priest of San Miguel de Mayumo (then part of Pampanga, but now in Bulacan) and the first known Filipino priest playwright. He wrote the longest play in the vernacular, *Don Gonzalo de Córdova*, which he staged in his native Bacolor for seven days in 1831. In all likelihood, Doña Luisa watched the play and, realizing the lyrical beauty and richness of their language, was inspired to write also in Kapampangan. Up to that time, as noted earlier, no native Pampango had ever published a book in that language, although apparently there were manuscripts in Pampango that circulated around the province. Padre Anselmo himself died without seeing his obra in print. It was not until 1912 that it was published for the first time in its entirety (Manlapaz 1981; Santiago 2002).

Slightly ahead of Doña Luisa, the first woman to publish a book in the Philippines was Doña María Varela de Brodet, a criolla or Spanish lady born and raised in the Islands, who fitted the legal category of "Filipina." In 1844, she reprinted an enlarged version of her *Novena de Santa María Magdalena*, an original work in Spanish, which was first published in the late 1830s. It was most probably printed by the University of Santo Tomás Press, the most active printer in the nineteenth century, especially of novenas, although there are now no known examples of her obras. She was possibly a descendant of another writer, Don Luís Rodríguez Varela, known as "El Conde Filipino" (1795). True to his title, Don Luís championed the cause of native Filipinos, for which he was

persecuted by his fellow Spaniards. After the death of her husband, Doña María entered the Beaterio de Santa Catalina de Sena in the walled city, where she died in 1864 (AAM 1844; Santiago 1991, 281–87; ADSSCS 1697–2006).

A woman of means, Doña Luisa would have easily acquired a copy of Doña María's *Novena*, which perhaps also roused her to follow the example of the other pioneer woman author to publish. They apparently shared the same publisher, the University of Santo Tomás Press. In the first sentence of her preface, Doña Luisa at once humbles herself by taking up the image of a Magdalene, "a sinner who seeks to reconcile with God our Lord" (AAM 1844; ADSSCS 1697–2006; de Leon 1854).

Requiem for the Authoress

The untimely death of Doña Luisa's husband, Don Francisco, in around 1840 and of their youngest son, Francisco Jr., comprised the twin tragedies in her life. It appeared that it was during her widowhood, when she had fallen ill, that she worked in earnest on her publication project. After she had all but finished the manuscript, including the preface, ready for printing, God called Doña Luisa to her eternal rest and reward, three weeks before her 38th birthday. She received the last sacraments in her home in Barrio Cabangbangan, where she had been born and had lived most of her life and where the incumbent *cabeza de barangay* was her eldest son, Don Celestino. Heeding God's call, she laid down her pen for good on 1 June 1843 to join her beloved husband and youngest son in the next life. Neither of her two surviving sons was married at the time (Henares 2001a, b; AASF 1836–1858).⁹

As befitted a woman of her social stature and unique achievement, she was buried the next day in the parish church of San Guillermo Ermitaño in Bacolor. Presided over by the Spanish parish priest, Fray Manuel Luís, OSA, her solemn funeral rites consisted of a vigil; periodic pauses (*posas*) for responsorial prayers along the way from her home to the church, like the Stations of the Cross; and a requiem mass sung with a choir (AASF 1836–1858). When Mount Pinatubo erupted in 1991, the eighteenth-century church where she was interred was itself entombed in lahar. So were Barrio Cabangbangan and the rest of the ancient town.

The Worthy Descendants

Not unexpectedly, many of her descendants inherited her religious fervor. Her great-grandson through Celestino, Msgr. Pedro Pablo Santos y Songco (1889–1965) became the first archbishop of Nueva Cáceres (Naga) in 1951. His older brother, Don Mariano, was a prominent Catholic lay leader before the Second World War, and a younger brother, Agapito, studied for the priesthood in the Jesuit seminary but later entered a Carthusian monastery in Zaragoza, Spain (1921). Unable to adapt to the change in climate and culture, he returned to the Philippines. Their youngest sister, Sor Basilisa Santos, OP (1902–1977; professed 1926) was a beloved member of the Beaterio de Santa Catalina, now the Congregation of the Dominican Sisters of St. Catherine of Sienna (Santiago 2002; Henares 2001a, b; *Cultura Social* 1921; CDSSCS 1980, 30; telephone interview with Ms. Teresita Narciso-Ledesma, great-niece of Archbishop Pedro Santos, 30 June 2002).

Like the patriarch, Don Francisco Paula de los Santos, some of their other descendants were numbered among the most prominent personages and hacenderos of Pampanga (Henares 2001a, b; Nepomuceno 1987).

In the literary sphere, it was the Kapampangan authoress who provided important markers in the history of Filipino women's writings: before and after Doña Luisa Gonzaga de León. Making an enduring mark in a man's world, she further spawned a new generation of Filipina poetesses, prose writers, and publishers of a wide range of works and genres (novenas, *corridos*, *pasyón*, poems, musical lyrics, short novels, translations, essays, letters, historical accounts, news reports, and so on) in the second half of the nineteenth century (see Santiago 2003, 558–98).

Notes

A brief summary of this article formed part of the author's paper, "Kapampangan Pioneers in the Philippine Church," which was presented at the First International Conference on Kapampangan Studies held at the Holy Angel University in Angeles City, 3 to 5 Sept. 2001. That paper was expanded and published the following year by the Holy Angel University as *Laying the Foundations: Kapampangan Pioneers in the Philippine Church*; in that book a summary version of this article also appears.

Abbreviations

AAM	Archives of the Archdiocese of Manila, Manila
AASF	Archives of the Archdiocese of San Fernando, Mother of Good Counsel Seminary, San Fernando, Pampanga
ADSSCS	Archives of the Dominican Sisters of Saint Catherine of Sienna, Santa Catalina Convent Mother House, Quezon City
AUST	Archives of the University of Santo Tomás, Manila
CDSSCS	Congregation of the Dominican Sisters of Saint Catherine of Sienna, Quezon City
LPC	Luther Parker Collection, Microfilm copy, University of the Philippines Main Library, Diliman, Quezon City

1. At the Archives of the Archdiocese of Manila (AAM), the section on the *Libro de Gobierno Eclesiástico* keeps administrative books of the archdiocese that contain entries of licenses to publish books, both religious and secular, in Manila. A license was required before any book could be published by a printer. After censorship by a competent authority, the archbishop granted the permission to publish on behalf of both the church and state, which were united in the Spanish realm.

2. It is not known if Doña Luisa wrote or translated the poems in the *Trisagium*. This can be determined in a later study by comparing this section with the Spanish original.

3. This is my own impression of the various forms and works in Philippine literature (del Castillo and Medina 1966; Eugenio 1987).

4. The preface or *prólogo* was “loosely” translated for me from Kapampangan into English by Prof. Lino Dizon of the Tarlac State University and by Mr. Marc Nepomuceno, both Pampango historians and scholars. To both of them I would like to express my deep gratitude. I made a composite of the two translations, and edited the text with the aid of a dictionary (I do not read Kapampangan) to produce the translation presented here, for which I take full responsibility. The original preface was written in long sentences as was the vogue then. I took the liberty to shorten the sentences for better comprehension and appreciation by the modern reader.

5. Both extant copies of the 1854 edition have 308 pages.

6. I would like to take this opportunity to thank Marc Nepomuceno and Ivan Henares for sharing their genealogical data with me.

7. Other Chinese mestizo families who adopted the father’s first name as patronymic were the Paternos of Santa Cruz, Manila, the Domingos of Tondo, and the Cristóbalos of Lucban, Tayabas (now Quezon.)

8. Doña Luisa’s son José and his wife Ramona have extant portraits by Filipino master Simón Flores, which now hang in the Museo de La Salle (Henares 2003, 29).

9. I would like to thank Marc Nepomuceno for copying for me the complete pertinent entry in the burial book found in the AASF.

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