

Technological University of the Philippines – Manila Campus
Art Appreciation (GEC6)

Felix Resurreccion Hidalgo's *La Barca de Aqueronte*:
A Timeless Masterpiece of Filipino Art

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Félix Resurrección Hidalgo's *La Barca de Aqueronte* (The Boat of Charon) is a stirring example of Neoclassical art, completed in 1887. In this oil on canvas painting, Hidalgo draws inspiration from Dante Alighieri's *Inferno*, imagining the mythic scene of damned souls being ferried across the River Acheron by Charon, the ferryman. The composition emphasizes dramatic contrasts, light versus darkness, tumult versus stillness, and the human form in anguish, which are characteristic of Neoclassicism's concern with idealized anatomy, allegory, and moral gravity.

The painting holds a significant place in Philippine art history. Hidalgo, born in 1855 and active during the late 19th century, created this work at age 34. Alongside its companion piece *La Laguna Estigia* (The River Styx), *La Barca de Aqueronte* gained international acclaim: it won the gold medal at the *Exposicion General de las Filipinas* in Madrid, and a silver medal at the 1889 Paris Exposition—accolades no other Filipino painter had yet achieved in such major international showcases. Over time, the work became part of the Philippines' cultural patrimony, and it is now displayed at the National Museum of Fine Arts in Manila, where it stands among other masterpieces of Filipino classical painters.

Personally, I find *La Barca de Aqueronte* both haunting and mesmerizing. The emotions on the faces of the souls seem to speak of human suffering and redemption, and I can almost feel the weight of their despair as they are ferried into darkness. What strikes me most is how Hidalgo, a Filipino artist under Spanish colonial rule, could portray such deep universal emotions using a European myth, it shows how art can transcend nationality and time. Standing before this painting in the National Museum made me realize how powerful visual art can be in reflecting not only mythology, but also the inner struggles of humanity. For me, this piece is a reminder that even in chaos and despair, there is beauty in expression and meaning in human experience.