

"El verbo del filibusterismo": Narrative Ruses in the Novels of José Rizal

Author(s): Eugenio Matibag

Source: *Revista Hispánica Moderna*, Año 48, No. 2 (Dec., 1995), pp. 250-264

Published by: [University of Pennsylvania Press](#)

Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/30208350>

Accessed: 26-04-2015 08:26 UTC

Your use of the JSTOR archive indicates your acceptance of the Terms & Conditions of Use, available at
<http://www.jstor.org/page/info/about/policies/terms.jsp>

JSTOR is a not-for-profit service that helps scholars, researchers, and students discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content in a trusted digital archive. We use information technology and tools to increase productivity and facilitate new forms of scholarship. For more information about JSTOR, please contact support@jstor.org.



University of Pennsylvania Press is collaborating with JSTOR to digitize, preserve and extend access to *Revista Hispánica Moderna*.

<http://www.jstor.org>

EL VERBO DEL FILIBUSTERISMO: NARRATIVE RUSES IN THE NOVELS OF JOSÉ RIZAL

SCHOOLCHILDREN learn his “Último Adiós” by heart. University students, although not those of the Universidad de Santo Tomás, are required to read his two famous novels. Citizens gather annually around his statue in Luneta Park, site of his December 30th execution. Some pray to him as to a saint, before domestic altars displaying his portrait. He is indeed the “patron-saint” of the Filipinos: ¹ the apostle, martyr and patriot; “the man who,” according to one biographer, “single-handedly awakened the Philippine people to national and political consciousness.” ² A precursor to Gandhi in his advocacy of Asian nationalism, Dr. José Rizal y Alonso, born in 1861, became a hero of modern Third World nationhood when he denounced the violence of Spanish colonialism in his novels *Noli Me Tangere* (1887) and *El Filibusterismo* (1891). For doing so, he was shot by a Spanish firing squad in 1896 at the age of 35. Together with Rizal’s speeches and articles, the two novels are often credited with sparking the Philippine Revolution, which began two years after his death, in 1898, only to be cut short by the intervention of the United States, engaged at that time in its own war with Spain.

Yet Rizal, for all the agitation his writings produced, never called for outright revolt against the Spanish colonizers. On the contrary, his explicit statements never ceased to sustain the hope that Spain would allow the Philippines the freedom and means to develop its intellectual and material resources within a colonial partnership. A Philippine revolution, in Rizal’s view, would be unsuccessful and yet inevitable, should Spain continue to delay in granting the kind of reform that would ensure security, freedom, dignity and education for the Filipinos. If a revolutionary, then, Rizal remained a cautious one to the end of his brief life. Regardless of these reservations on Rizal’s part, the Judge Advocate General Peña, charged with passing the death sentence on Rizal, called him *el Verbo del Filibusterismo*, meaning, according to the Philippine usage of the time, the “word of insurrectionism” or revolutionary separatism. That Peña thus identified Rizal as an exponent and leader of the separatists. ³ And although Rizal had discouraged insurrection, his words would later arouse the militant *Katipunan* (“patriots’ league,” literally “confederation”), led by Andrés Bonifacio, to take up arms in a violent confrontation that might have forced the departure of the Spanish from the Philippines. ⁴

Rizal, to judge from his writing, intended no such effect in his readers; his correspondence reveals why prudence had tempered his indignation against colonial misrule. In a letter written to Dr. Pío Valenzuela from his exile in

¹ Mahajani 41.

² Coates xxv.

³ Marcelo H. del Pilar, “La Soberanía Monacal.” Cited in Bocobo, “Translator’s Prologue” viii.

⁴ For Rafael Palma, “La obra de Rizal es separatista y en ella se ha inspirado Bonifacio para fundar el Katipunan.” Cited in the “Prefacio” by the Comisión Nacional del Centenario de José Rizal, chaired by José E. Romero, in *El Filibusterismo* (1990 ed.) iv.

Dapitán in June 1896, the year of his death, José Rizal expressed his views on Philippine revolution in response to Valenzuela's news that an uprising was imminent. Rizal wrote:

That I do not approve. A revolution without arms should not be started against an armed nation. Its consequences will be fatal and disastrous to that country. The Filipinos will necessarily have to lose owing to lack of arms. The Spaniards, once conquerors, will annihilate the Filipinos who love their country, will employ all means to prevent the intellectual, moral and material progress of the conquered people who, sooner or later, will have to start a new revolution.⁵

In the same letter to Valenzuela, Rizal cites the Cuban revolution of 1868 as a precedent to current events in the Philippines, and he alludes to the tremendous costs of the second and third Cuban struggles as well.⁶ Although in the right, a Philippine revolution, like the Cuban revolutions of the mid-nineteenth century, would simply fail. It was practical considerations, not inflexible principle, that moved Rizal to oppose revolution while doing his part to start up the anti-colonial resistance movement in Asia.⁷

One can see the same sort of pragmatic idealism (the phrase is Gandhi's) worked out in *Noli Me Tangere* and *El Filibusterismo*. In the novels themselves, Rizal's mode of satire and social criticism puts in question the legitimacy of Spanish domination and yet displays some complexities that challenge the traditional documentalist, propagandist interpretation that his works have elicited to this point. Those novels bear out the particular ambivalence in Rizal's viewpoint – an ambivalence, I would stress, not chosen by temperament but imposed by sociohistorical conditions. Rather than to unfold only a verisimile depiction of colonial injustices, the novels deploy a strategy of evocation, indeterminacy and self-ironizing metafiction, problematizing the narrative of Philippine revolution by constructing self-referential narratives implicitly critical of their own propositions and hypotheses. This would be the logical path, given that the substance of nationalist resistance, according to Rizal's preface to *El Filibusterismo*, is itself fictional. In that preface addressed "Al Pueblo Filipino y su Gobierno," which was suppressed in the first edition but appeared in subsequent editions, Rizal states, "Tantas veces se nos ha amedrentado con el fantasma del *Filibusterismo* que, de mero recurso de aya, ha llegado a ser un ente positivo y real, cuyo solo nombre (al quitarnos la serenidad) nos hace cometer los mayores desaciertos."⁸ Rizal proposes to examine the reality of that ghost and this ruse: mirages that have taken on substance in the minds of the Spanish *gobernadorcillos* and the Filipinos alike. The "Advertencia" that follows the preface of *El Filibusterismo* indeed warns that the author has "disfigured his characters" in order to avoid making them "the typical photographs" that were found in his first novel. To complete this strange apparatus of framing the narrative proper, an epigraph credited to Ferdinand Blumentritt, Rizal's Austrian mentor, ambiguously remarks:

⁵ Quoted in Agoncillo, "Rizal and the Philippine Revolution" (39).

⁶ Agoncillo 39.

⁷ See Coates xxvii.

⁸ "Apéndices," *El Filibusterismo* (1990 ed.) 1 n. 2. See *Noli Me Tangere* 28, n. 4.

Facilmente se puede *suponer* que un filibustero ha hechizado en secreto á la liga de los fraileros y retrógrados para que, *siguiendo inconscientemente sus inspiraciones*, favorezcan y fomenten aquella política que sólo ambiciona un fin: *estender las ideas del filibusterismo* por todo el país y convencer al último filipino de que no existe otra salvación fuera de la separación de la Madre-Patria. [my emphases]

By attributing the idea of separatism to only a supposed filibustero, his inspirations followed *unconsciously* by Filipinos – and by using subjunctives to emphasize the hypothetical status of that inspiration – Blumentritt reinforces from a distance the notion of revolution without openly espousing it or assigning it unequivocally as a thesis to Rizal's novel.⁹

Alerted by these unusual framing devices, one can verify that a shift in representational strategies has occurred in the transition from the first novel to the second, which the Filipinos refer to affectionately by the respective nicknames *Noli* and *Fili*. The shift involves a changing attitude toward language: whereas the *Noli* is more classically “transparent” and referential with relation to the social reality it portrays, the *Fili* sustains a more “analogical” and explicitly fiction-based relation to a reality it “disfigures.” Such considerations of literariness suggest that both texts would lend themselves to alternative readings to become not so much reflections of reality but provocations for the reader to interpret that reality in a different manner. In this light, it becomes easier to understand that *Noli Me Tangere* and *El Filibusterismo* present anti-colonialist “exposés” conditioned by a painful awareness of historical contingency – of the formidable colonial power already poised to smother any sign of resistance. Such awareness matches a complex narrative form attentive to the contradictions of the Philippine colonial situation. In the framework of these considerations, my reading of Rizal's *Noli* and *Fili* will foreground the cautious critique and sophisticated subversion worked out in their respective strategies.

In succinct historical overview, Benedict Anderson analyzes the specific factors that made the Philippines a uniquely complex case of Spanish domination. Spain would colonize the Philippines as the last among its overseas acquisitions, conquering its tribes in 1560 at the peak of Felipe II's power. Early on in the Hispanic period, the class of Chinese mestizos (from which Corazón Aquino's family, the Cojuangcos, claim descent) predominated the Philippine economy by the power of their large landholdings, trade and political influence. But largely due to the lack of mineral resources in the islands, Spain preferred to concentrate its trading efforts in Europe and the Americas. Spain was indeed drawn to China for the commercial opportunities it promised, and not for the little mineral wealth it seemed to offer. With the Philippines considered in this period as an extension of the Viceroyalty of New Spain, the so-called “galleon trade” departing from Acapulco turned Manila into a commercial entrepôt where Chinese silks and porcelain were traded for Mexican gold. The lack of both mineral wealth and hacienda-based agriculture enticed few Spanish to immigrate to the islands. This meant that the Spanish who did arrive concentrated in Manila and often participated in massive exploitation of the

⁹ This epigraph, appearing in German in the original manuscript, was suppressed upon its first publication by Boekdrukkerij F. Meyer-van Loo, Gent, in 1891.

so-called *indio* population. Not *conquistadores* or *hacendados* but the missionary priests would become the major ruling group in the Philippines, and they would later establish a powerful *frailocracy* characterized by an unwieldy and insensitive bureaucratic apparatus.¹⁰

The frailocracy indeed determined the structure of the Philippine economy and culture. The domination of the clergy entailed the development of agricultural properties in ecclesiastical hands, a situation promoted by governor José Basco y Vargas (1777-1787) under Carlos III. (These agricultural conglomerates, never family holdings, were later to be expropriated by the Americans and would in more recent history fall into the hand of families like the Marcoses and the Aquinos.) As Anderson observes, "The Philippines thus never had a substantial *criollo* class" that would have supported a revolution for independence. Also contributing to Philippine dependency, the priestly caste carried out its campaign to Christianize the Philippines, not in Castilian, as was the case in Hispanic America, but in the myriad of local languages spoken in the islands. This starting condition ensured that Spanish would never become the Philippine lingua franca as in other lands, such that the pre-existing heterogeneity of languages proved a major obstacle to national unity (Anderson 6).

Rizal's early writings express a concern to shore up, against the opprobrium of colonial dominion, the self-esteem and prestige of an indigenous Philippine culture. In annotating the introduction to Morga's *Sucesos de las Islas Filipinas*, to which he wrote an introduction, Rizal reinforced the image of complexity and sophistication that comes across in Morga's pre-Magellanic history. Even earlier, in a poem titled "A la Juventud Filipina," which he wrote in 1879 at the age of 18, Rizal approved the idea of a Philippine identity different from that of Spain, but there he also acknowledges the benefits that mother country had bestowed on the Philippines. In the nine months following June 1888, in the period during which he was copying and annotating Morga's *Sucesos* in the British Museum Rizal wrote his two influential novels. Through that period, Rizal's critique never openly diverted from reformist line: while satirizing the Spanish clerics he never renounced Catholicism and even expressed skepticism toward the positivist religion of science and progress.¹¹

The two novels, along with other writings, called not for revolution but for education and development with the help of Spain, the ends to which he dedicated the peaceful *Liga Filipina*, which he founded in Tondo in 1892 and directed. The membership of the Liga was divided between the reformist *ilustrados* or aristocrats on the one side, and the militant *compromisarios*, including Bonifacio, preparing for the nationalist fight on the other side. This division doomed the Liga to an early dissolution.¹² The Katipunan was founded in the same year and offered the direction of the revolution to Rizal, which he turned down. Yet having written the prohibited *Noli*, the novel that "was to shake the foundations of Spanish power in the Philippines,"¹³ Rizal was arrested on the charge, drawn up by the Spanish Governor General, of "'anti-religious and anti-patriot agitation.'" ¹⁴ Andrés Bonifacio, with the cry of "Balintawak!" in

¹⁰ Anderson, "Cacique Democracy and the Philippines: Origins and Dreams" (45).

¹¹ Coates 46.

¹² Mahajani 61.

¹³ Coates 79.

¹⁴ Wolff 23.

Cavite, began the insurrection on August 19, 1896, and declared the Philippine Republic on August 21.¹⁵

Mahajani avers that Rizal's two subversive novels, together with the *Kalayaan* "propaganda organ" printed by the Katipunan, won many adherents to the Katipunan cause (64-65). Filipino readers certainly recognized the novels' references and allusions to the abuses of the Dominican friars: their refusal to promote Spanish language instruction, their expropriations of land, their suppressions of student campaigns, their opposition to the native priests, their complicity with violence perpetrated by the *Guardia Civil*. Indeed, by satirizing the actions of the abusive friar class in a country that had become a "missionaries' empire,"¹⁶ Rizal expressed the kind of nationalist outrage that in others would light the fires of armed rebellion: not only did Andrés Bonifacio lead the first rebellions, but Emilio Aguinaldo instigated revolts by approximately 250,000 members of the Katipunan in Cavite. The suppression of the Katipunan and other insurrectionary movements at the close of the century included the killing of some two hundreds Filipinos, and the imprisonment and torture of hundreds more.¹⁷

The military judge pronounced Rizal's death sentence characterizing the doctor-novelist as "the principal organizer and living soul of the insurrection."¹⁸ Once again reason, the logic and the law overlook the fundamental ambiguity of the political position such as it could be inferred from Rizal's writings. José Alejandrino formulated Rizal's ambivalence in these words:

I will never head a revolution that is preposterous and has no probability of success, because I do not like to saddle my conscience with reckless and fruitless bloodshed; but whoever may head a revolution in the Philippines will have me at his side.¹⁹

Yet Rizal's opposition to revolution indeed runs against the radical uses "made" of those novels. His occasional apologies for Spain at the same time go against the grain of his own anti-colonial denunciations and those uttered by his central characters. The contradiction indicates that Rizal faced the challenge of having to build a certain interpretive open-endedness in those polemical, denunciatory texts. They therefore present doubly-valenced arguments directed against Spanish rule; they also invite misreading and misinterpretation in the positive senses of the terms. This complexity can be explained, I would propose, through a concept of narrative misdirection, or *ruses*.

A ruse in ordinary speech is an artifice or action intended to mislead; the word originates from the Middle English word derived from the Old French *ruser*, meaning to detour a hunted game animal into a trap. Narrative ruses could be the devices by which an author strives protect his meaning, and/or himself, from the violence of or consequent to interpretation. In a colonial situation, artifice allows what the author says and means to make its way past the censors of the regime and to reach, empower and redirect, by indirection, its

¹⁵ Russotto 386-7.

¹⁶ Coates 3.

¹⁷ Wolff 24.

¹⁸ Coates xv.

¹⁹ José Alejandrino, from Palma, cited in Coates (218).

intended readership. Allegory is one means by which social critique disguises itself as innocuous fiction. Saying one thing and clearly meaning another, Rizal aptly takes up the “nursemaid’s ruse” of *filibusterismo* and turns it into the vehicle for his complex political statement. Such narrative ruses, in addition to dissembling an anti-authoritarian meaning, also function in problematizing a many-sided, indeterminate historical moment, in which the “truth” of a fiction must be deferred to or “written up” by future historical action and interpretation.²⁰

Rizal’s prose fiction and poetry, filled with political or patriotic references, are not of course political screeds but literature, susceptible to the free-play and aesthetic distance characteristic of literary art. The criticism in Rizal’s novels takes the form of polyphonic dialogism, an orchestration of viewpoints and forms of speech, rather than univocal denunciation or pronouncement.²¹ This does not necessarily mean that narrative can or should say everything and anything without proposing a definite thesis; at the same time that they oppose viewpoints in mutual dialogue, Rizal’s novels fulfill Jameson’s description of third world texts as “national allegories, even when, or . . . particularly when their forms develop out of essentially Western machineries of representation, such as the novel” (141). Using the novelistic machinery, Rizal incorporates an allegory that evokes the forms of Philippine culture that, so narratized, becomes self-referential and ironizing, as when the narrator at the beginning of the *Fili* mocks his own comparison of the steamship *Tabo*, boarded as it is with the diverse classes and races of Philippine society on levels corresponding to their rank, as a “ship of state” (1). Earlier, in the *Noli*, the philosopher Tasio had told colonial history after a fashion, disguising it as a strangely pre-Borgesian “historia del Purgatorio” (75). Rizal’s reader, in complicity with Rizal’s narrator(s), not only grasps the code of cultural reference but also the implicit instructions for the construction of the anti-colonial signified.

In remarking the ruses in Rizal’s novels I am arguing for their pragmatic modernity or post-modernity. The *Noli* and the *Fili*, credited with sparking the exploding-imploding revolution that saw the Philippines delivered into the hands of a second colonizing power, were more ambivalent, undecidable works of literature than the encomiastic-patriotic tradition has acknowledged heretofore. In eschewing a plain, unequivocal thesis, Rizal in his post-coloniality is indeed committed to the well-being of the Philippines but to no definite political campaign: one could argue that, after all, no viable road to Philippine nationhood existed in Rizal’s time. Rather than to call ingenuously for revolution, then, Rizal chooses the metafictional path: only in and through a fiction about insurrection in the Philippines does he call for a revolution that would become reality only in the event that the Spanish *capitanía* does not reform the oppressive, violent system that his reader recognizes in fiction. In and through a fiction about insurrections and the aforementioned “ruse” of *filibusterismo*, Rizal furthermore explores the desperate consequences that would issue from such

²⁰ In the Hegelian terms favored by Heidegger and Gadamer, the dialectical disclosure of truth emerges in a process of working through the “ruses of reason.” Truth works through to expression and recognition in art and history without our fully knowing how this disclosure is taking place (see Howard 133). The ruses of reason consist of the subterfuges of a historical spirit that does not conform to conscious programs, obeying instead the turning movements of a subterranean logic.

²¹ See Bakhtin on the notions of polyphony, dialogism, and speech genres.

an uprising. The Spanish would crush it, and the United States is waiting in the wings to take their place anyway! Rizal's novels even suggest at times that some variation on colonialism would be acceptable in a less-than-perfect world, if it were to take the form of a truly beneficent, Christian patronage and not ruthless exploitation. These contradictory ideas must be inferred from texts in which multiple plots with their ideological implications conjoin and cross in a tangle emblemized by Rizal's *baliti* tree, the leafy *Ficus indica* that marks the site of narrative crossings and revelations. As Simoun describes it in the *Fili* for Basilio, the tree is "enorme, misterioso, venerable, formado de raíces que subían y bajaban como otros tantos troncos entrelazados confusamente" (38). The entangled root-trunks of Rizal's stories, intertwined like the up-and-down roots of the *baliti*, suggest the alternate courses that Philippine history and its re-interpretation could take in the years ahead.

NOLI ME TANGERE

The title *Noli Me Tangere* cites Jesus's words to Mary Magdalene at the Resurrection: "Touch me not." The condition of the country is, like that of the risen Christ, vulnerable or delicate, but, as Coates points out, "the title also reads as a warning against picking up an explosive."²² Coates continues: "*Noli Me Tangere* does not call for independence; but it postulates it, and in a compelling manner, as the only alternative if there is no reform."²³ The protagonist of the *Noli*, Crisóstomo Ibarra, experiences a series of revelations and confrontations with colonial authorities that convince him that the despotic rule of the friars must end. Ibarra's defiant actions thus incur their enmity and bring on an order for his arrest. The novel illustrates the arrogance and despotism of the Spanish colonists, and especially the priests, while exploring the bases for a possible definition of a Philippine national culture. Bocobo adds that the pages of the *Noli* "luminously express the national conscience, which rebukes evil, oppression, avarice, intolerance, inferiority complex and subserviency, and exalts righteousness, patriotism, abnegation, love of freedom, nationalism and civic virtue."²⁴

As previously stated, the principal target of the *Noli*'s as well as the *Fili*'s critique is the abuses perpetrated by the friars and Guardia Civil of the Spanish colony, both of which groups wielded enormous power and influence in the politics of the colony. The unique circumstances of the Philippine frailocracy require some further elaboration. As detailed by Coates, the Augustinian friars, the Dominicans and the Franciscans not only controlled religious and intellectual life in the Philippine villages and cities but also frequently ruled as local magistrates. Practically every Philippine parish had its Spanish friar curate, one who dominated administrative tasks that included inspecting taxes and schools, chairing health boards, overlooking charities, taking censuses through the parish registry, and issuing the identity cards, *cédulas*, that every citizen was required to carry under pain of arrest and forced labor. Apart from their polit-

²² Coates 108.

²³ Coates 116.

²⁴ Bocobo, "Translator's Prologue" (iii).

ical tasks, the friars were also privy to information gleaned from the confessional that they used to shameless advantage. Finally, since education was carried out in the vernacular, the friars were often the only ones of the village who commanded Spanish, the language of taxation, commerce and government, a fact that all the more firmly consolidated power in their hands and in the hands of the Spanish Creole class. It is understandable, then, that the first revolts against Spanish rule were supported and sometimes led by secular, or native priests against the Dominican, Franciscan and Jesuit clergy.²⁵

Despite its denunciation of the friars, the *Noli*'s narrative challenges the simplistic view of the novel as univocal propagandism by its interweaving of various plots and varied, often contradictory political statements into one complex, perhaps overwrought tapestry of Philippine society on the eve of revolution. What follows is a basic synopsis for those unfamiliar with the novel. The protagonist Crisóstomo Ibarra has returned after years abroad in Europe to Manila, and reunites with his childhood love, María Clara. Ibarra then goes to his town of Tondo, intending to establish a school there. In Tondo he discovers that his deceased father, once embroiled in a conflict with the town curate, Padre Salví, and the Spanish *alférez*, was possibly killed as a result of that conflict, his corpse removed from the cemetery and eventually tossed into a lake. Meanwhile, two boys named Crispín and Basilio are accused by a sacristan of stealing thirty-two pesos from the church where they work as acolytes. As a consequence, Crispín is detained and tortured by a sadistic sacristan, Basilio is shot by the Guardia Civil, and the poor boys' mother, Sisa, goes mad with grief as she wanders the street in desperate search of her sons. In addition to these outrages, we find out later, that Padre Salví harbors an uncontrolled passion for María Clara that will lead to the violation and devastation of Ibarra's beloved by the immoral curate. At a ground-breaking ceremony for the new school, the same Padre Salví engineers a failed plot to kill his rival Ibarra. Ibarra later throws a fiesta at his house, where insults by Padre Dámaso directed to Ibarra's father impel Ibarra to threaten the priest's life, an act for which the protagonist is excommunicated.

Padre Salví creates his own ruse in starting up a false rebellion and making it appear, through false witnesses, that Ibarra is the instigator. Although Ibarra has insisted on the virtues of patience in dealing with the Spanish, he soon realizes that he must flee the Guardia Civil and burn incriminating letters penned by his father. Through those letters, fellow reformist and outlaw Elías discovers that Ibarra's grandfather had caused the downfall of Elías's grandfather. Elías nearly carries out his revenge plot to kill Crisóstomo, but – another narrative ruse – he follows another plot, remaining faithful to Ibarra, even sacrificing his life for Ibarra's by drowning in the waters of the Pasig when the authorities close in on them. With this sacrifice Ibarra takes up where Elías left off. With the law in hot pursuit, Ibarra bids farewell to María Clara, who reveals during that last encounter that María's real father is Padre Dámaso, and that the same father has, using letters that Ibarra had sent to María, forged letters that implicated the youth in the trial for insurrection. Now a fugitive from justice, Ibarra becomes, in his own words, a "true *filibustero*" (339).

²⁵ Coates 20-22.

Ibarra's conversion is complete. Much earlier, Ibarra had admitted to Tasio, who says that one must either bow one's head or let it fall, that he loved both the Philippines and Spain, and that Christian principle did not require him to humble oneself or defy the mother country: "amo a España, la patria de mis mayores, porque, a pesar de todo, Filipinas le debe y le deberá su felicidad y su porvenir" (147). Only after his downfall at the hands of the friars, however, Ibarra, like the vengeful Elías, will abjure happiness but sustain his identification with the suffering country. Elías declared:

. . . Es verdad que yo no puedo amar ni ser feliz en mi país, pero puedo sufrir y morir en él, y acaso por él. . . . ¡Que la desgracia de mi patria sea mi propia desgracia y puesto que no nos une un noble pensamiento, puesto que no laten nuestros corazones a un solo nombre, al menos que a mis paisanos me una la común desventura, al menos que llore yo con ellos nuestros dolores, que un mismo infortunio oprima nuestros corazones todos! (338)

Elías's solidarity in sorrow with his countryfolk, contradicting Ibarra's hispanophilia and seems to prevail throughout the unfolding of the *Noli*. The novel's accumulation of grievances against Spanish misrule take us along that detour. Yet Rizal's narrative, as it catches us up in sympathetic identification with the cabal of the *filibusteros*, warns us of the probable futility of insurgency. "Todo se sabe," reads the epigraph for Chapter XXXVII of the *Fili*, and what is known includes the unhappy outcome of the anti-colonial cause. The narrative is reduced to warning that the abuse of authority, especially on the part of the friars, has to end if Spain does not want to lose its dominion in the Philippines. And if she did not live up to her purported ideals in the islands, Rizal, taking a realistic attitude toward the question of resistance, preferred a gradual solution to outright rebellion: things would eventually improve, according to this alternative line of reasoning, and other nations could possibly intervene or otherwise promote change in the Philippines.²⁶

Despite the realist appeal of the *Noli*, the novel's text pulls toward a more self-referential mode on numerous occasions. The action of the plot and subplots is melodrama, a sort of *tremendismo*, as when Elías's mother is said to have discovered the severed head of his *filibustero* brother hanging from a tree, in a basket (281). On other occasions, art and artifice themselves are the topics. At one point the *Noli*'s narrator observes that "El Filipino gusta del teatro y asiste con pasión a las representaciones dramáticas." This comment comes on the eve of the town festival, in which the *gobernadorcillos* have permitted the town to present not the popularly favored Tagalog drama but only a Spanish *comedia*, *El príncipe Villardo o los clavos arrancados de la infame cueva*, featuring pyrotechnics and magical illusion. The fireworks prefigure other pyrotechnics about to break out: shortly into the performance, an explosion attributed to the *filibusteros* shatters the event (150-51). Another performance, of the operetta *Les Cloches de Corneville*, with its "gay chorus of Corneville peasants" (217), distracts its privileged audience from the desperation of the Philippine peasantry. Although the epigraph for chapter LIV, taken from the *Dies Irae*, states that "*Quid*

²⁶ Coates 144.

quid latet, adparebit / Nil inulfum remanebit" (Everything that was hidden will be revealed; nothing will go unpunished, 296), and although characters such as Elías can recite lists of crimes committed by the Guardia Civil, crimes familiar to Rizal's Filipino readers (275), the entire *Noli* is also a performance and artifice for their benefit, spectators who will watch therein the satiric reflection of their own cultural drama and the divergent plottings of their own national history, leaving them free to draw their own conclusions.

EL FILIBUSTERISMO

El Filibusterismo, as a sequel to *Noli Me Tangere*, continues the *Noli*'s plot but also contains what is in effect a metafictional rereading with commentary of the first novel. Crisóstomo Ibarra reappears in the *Fili* intending to lead the revolt that he promised to foment in the *Noli*. As expressed in his dedication to the *Fili*, Rizal had in mind the Cavite Revolt of 1872 and the execution, in the same year, of the three priests accused of leading it. To these priests he dedicated the novel.²⁷ Mahajani notes the manner in which the *Fili* plots a three-stage nationalist response to Spanish colonialism: from "multi-faceted passive nationalism through organizational nationalism into a militant revolutionary nationalism" (41). Despite its nationalist "thesis," however, the *Fili* elaborates not so much a militant stance as a critical revolutionism by a series of narrative deviations and disfigurations, most notably in the transformation of the complacent and reformist Ibarra into the sinister anarchist Simoun. As a key character in the novel – it has no real protagonist as did the *Noli* – Simoun serves as a strange model of the *filibustero* as untimely subversive.

Turning to the text of *El Filibusterismo*, one can spot the first of a number of ruses on the dedicatory page, which addresses both "The Philippine people and the Spanish Government." Speaking to two addressees, the novel has no single message, but several strongly formulated messages, some mutually contradictory. One inferable message is the familiar one, telling the Spanish Government that it had better institute reforms. Such reforms would include educational improvements, such as the founding of a Spanish language academy, or the reform of meaningless scholasticism at the University of Santo Tomás; the elimination of government and ecclesiastical corruption; the suppression of the widespread concubinage practiced by the friars; the interdiction of brutality and imprisonment without due process by the Guardia Civil. As the exemplar of the anti-colonial terrorist, Simoun plots death for the oppressors. Now disguised as a mestizo jewelry merchant, Ibarra-Simoun has become close with the Governor-General and other officials of the colonial government. He has scoffed in public at the utopia of progress (15), but, he later reveals to Basilio, he has nonetheless returned to the Philippines in order to ignite the conflagration that would restore freedom and dignity to his people. With revenge in his heart, his strategy is to subvert authority by a ruse and a program: he seeks out evildoers and helps them to do even more harm; and he seeks out the poor and stirs them up to insurrection.²⁸ Simoun tells Basilio, "Ahora he

²⁷ Coates 201.

²⁸ Coates 202.

vuelto para destruir ese sistema, precipitar su corrupción, empujarle al abismo á que corre insensato, aun cuando tuviese que emplear oleadas de lágrimas y sangre..." (46)

Part Nietzsche and part Bakunin, the agent provocateur strives to regenerate his country by subversion and outright terrorism. Coates rightly remarks, "There is a demoniac quality about Simoun" and refers to the oft-commented humor of the *Fili* as "sinister" (202). Before the complacent Basilio, Simoun calls the acquiescent Filipinos "Pueblo sin carácter, nación sin libertad," adding that, "todo en vosotros será prestado hasta los mismos defectos" (47). Domination could also mean the eventual imposition of Spanish language itself, to the suppression of native languages such as Tagalog, and this imposition constitutes a loss of identity and original thought. At any rate, the Spanish administrators and especially the friars are reluctant to teach it or to open up a Castillian academy. By resisting, however, and by "delineating" their own character, the Filipinos would "fundar los cimientos de la patria filipina" (48-49).

After this nationalist denunciation, another string of abuses on the part of the friars and the Guardia Civil makes the *Fili* a strong echo of the *Noli*. And yet a different theory of representation, a divergent poetics governs the construction of the sequel. The ideological tensions of the narrative point to its own contradictoriness – and to a powerful ambivalence on the question of revolution. Coates reads the *Fili* as a novel that bears an irresistible urge to revolution, while promising nothing from it. For Simoun fails, everything fails, as everything must, Rizal believed, that is founded on hate. The novel thus achieves a dual purpose; it is both an incitement to revolution and a dire warning against it, an exact summing-up, in fact, of his views on revolution, which because they were completely realistic contained the element of ambivalence. He now saw no alternative to revolution; everything else had been tried. But he could not see how a revolution could succeed. *El Filibusterismo* is not an appeal. It is a morality, a profound description of the mentality and climate of revolt, with all the urgency of its demands, and with all its shortcomings in their fulfillment. It is a statement of the facts, having stated which, once again he leaves it to others to draw conclusions, and to time to take its course. But to Spain it was a last and terrible warning. (202) Even as a "morality" and not an "appeal," I would add, the *Fili* maintains a violent dualism in its own polemical structure. As Padre Florentino admonishes Simoun, the country must deserve nationhood, even die for it, if it truly desires it, yet the country is not yet ready for such a sacrifice. Prior to Coates's perceptive reading, Rizal's friend Apolinario Mabini also interpreted the novel as a double message directed both at Spain – urging that it listen to the Filipinos' call for justice lest they demand a separation – and at the Philippines, urging that it not allow hatred to cause more suffering and bloodshed.²⁹

Surprisingly, although consistent with his enigmatic nature, Simoun disappears for a good eleven chapters (XX-XXXI), reappearing only to be falsely accused, in Chapter XXXII, of producing subversive posters that have cropped up throughout the city (244). In the end, unfortunately for Simoun's plans,

²⁹ Cited in Mahajani 56.

the nitroglycerine bomb intended to destroy the life of the Captain General and a good portion of the Manila aristocracy is hurled out the window by the former fiancé of a young woman who would have been killed in the blast. The rebellion is quickly put down. Frustrating conventional expectations of narrative teleology, the *Fili* does not reach its promised end.

One understands, in reading the *Fili* after the *Noli*, that Simoun was motivated not so much by patriotic zeal as by his resentment against the friars and colonial governors responsible for imprisoning his beloved María Clara. Simoun, his idealism shattered by events he experienced as Ibarra, succeeds in dissembling his dark intent under the fantastical disguise of a mestizo or mulatto jeweler. The false lead takes off in the narrative and takes on a life of its own in the scene concerned with Simoun's sale of jewels to the local aristocrats. The lyrical descriptions of Simoun's jewels seem to serve no narrative function other than that of reinforcing their owner's assumed identity and displaying a lyrical exquisiteness more commonly associated with the *modernismo* of Latin America (61-64).

Another striking instance of deceptive artifice occurred earlier in the *Fili*, an episode in which a "speaking head" appears in a magic act at the Klapò Fair. Through a ventriloquist's carnival trick, the head, called by the misnomer "Sphinx," tells the assembled clergy and townsfolk that his name is Imuthis, and he tells a tale of ancient history that allegorically strikes home with his listeners. Says Imuthis, with reference to the Egyptian priests:

En mi patria entonces gobernaban estos; dueños de las dos terceras partes de las tierras, monopolizadores de la ciencia, sumían al pueblo en la ignorancia y en la tiranía, lo embrutecían y lo hacían apto para pasar sin repugnancia de una á otra dominación. Los invasores se valían de ellos y conociendo su utilidad los protegían y enriquecían, y algunos no solo dependieron de su voluntad sino que se redujeron á ser sus meros instrumentos. (135)

The priests in the audience understand, with the reader, the implicit message; the guilt-ridden Padre Salví is "seized by convulsive trembling." All the friars in attendance are perturbed, "acaso porque vieran en el fondo alguna analogía con la actual situación." The head goes on to tell a story that resembles that of Ibarra's escape from death in the *Noli* and accuses his own, the "Sphinx's," murderer in terms that cause Padre Salví to swoon (136). To expose the artifice this time, Rizal curiously provides a long footnote to explain the trick of the table, box and mirrors producing the illusion of the talking head (137, n.). Like the narrative of the *Fili* itself, the carnival spectacle is unveiled, revealed as a fake, yet one capable of eliciting suppressed feelings and of indicting colonial authority. Through illusion and fiction announced as such, the critique of Spanish colonialism is mediated, made indirect, tentative, merely literary. Like the talking head's idiosyncratic version of ancient history, an earlier allegory, told by a coachman to a grown Basilio, retells a legend of liberation:

Los indios de los campos conservan una leyenda de que su rey, aprisionado y encadenado en la cueva de San Mateo, vendrá un día á libertarles de la opresión. Cada cien años rompe una de sus cadenas, y ya tiene las

manos y el pié izquierdo libres; solo le queda el derecho. . . – Cuando se suelte del pié derecho . . . le daré mis caballos, me pondré a su servicio y me dejaré matar . . . Él nos librará de los *civiles*. (42)

Like the coachman's story of the enchained giant, nightmares, too, can perform the allegorical function. In her fitful sleep, Juli dreams of her father's bloody fight against the religious corporation that usurped his land; her ex-fiancé Basilio is "agonizando en el camino, herido de dos balazos, como había visto el cadáver de aquel vecino, que fué muerto mientras le conducía la Guardia Civil" (232-33). This protest is also muted and transformed by the dreamlike work of art.

As if to provide a counter-weight to the tragic depictions of the *Fili*, Rizal allows viewpoints sympathetic with the Spanish colonial enterprise to comment on the Philippine condition. An unidentified "high official" tells the Captain General that "España para ser grande no tiene necesidad de ser tirana," that she should honor "los altos principios de moralidad" and "inmutable justicia" (239); furthermore, warns the official, "si las cosas no se mejoran se sublevarán un día y á fé que la justicia estará de su parte y con ella las simpatías de todos los hombres honrados, de todos los patriotas del mundo!" (239). The Captain General ignores the official's declarations and asks him about the arrival of the next mail ship (240). A second pro-Spanish character, Padre Florentino, is the one who speaks the last words of *El Filibusterismo*. The benign friar hears Simoun's last confession, then assures the erstwhile subversive that God "ha hecho abortar uno á uno sus planes," but that He has not for all that given up "la causa de la libertad sin la cual no hay justicia posible" (281, 282). The reader, once misdirected by Simoun's talk of insurrection, now is tempted to accept the illusion of closure created by the priest's conclusion: redemption will come to the Philippines, not through hate and deception but through virtue and sacrifice. A theodicy of historical process, not a proclamation of independence, ends the second and last of Rizal's novels. Yet this final word is not necessarily the last word on the novel's own complex statement.

Another interpretive perspective on the two novels finds its expression in the words of the old philosopher Tasio. When in the *Noli* an incredulous Ibarra asks Tasio, a paleographer by avocation, why he writes "in hieroglyphs," the old man answers, "¡Para que no me puedan leer ahora!" (142). Writing in hieroglyphs, he writes for future generations. Ibarra, too, according to Tasio, has done his part by standing up to the friars and by attempting to build a school in his native town:

poner la primera piedra, sembrar, después que se desencadene la tempestad, algún grano acaso germine, sobreviva a la catástrofe, salve la especie de la destrucción y sirva después de simiente para los hijos del sembrador muerto. El ejemplo puede alentar a los otros que sólo temen principiar. (148)

Knowing that a viable separatist movement was untenable at the present juncture, Rizal nonetheless affirmed that a unique Philippine culture had arisen since Magellan's "discovery." Nationhood could be founded on a Filipino creolism. Local pageants and fiestas described in the *Noli* and the *Fili* capture the feeling of a culture that is unique, and not merely derivative from

the Spanish. Food, dances, flora and music are Filipino. The author creolizes Spanish language by including regionalisms, Tagalog words and Philippine spellings in dialogue and narration.³⁰

Intercalated stories of the *Fili* other than the ones already examined here, while further complicating the narrative's referential function, contribute to creating a profile of a folk identity. Legends abound, anticipating the marvelous realism of some modern Latin American novels: on the sacred rock called *Malapad-na-bató* sitting on the banks of the Pasig River, the spirits used to dwell before bandits or *tulisanes* lived there; a woman becomes a water spirit when she casts her silverware into the water; a Chinese man turns a crocodile into a rock by invoking San Nicolás (19-20). In reaction to Simoun's jesting proposition to raise ducks on a massive scale so that their action of digging for snails would create a freshwater lake, Doña Victorina's snobbish reaction is to say that raising so many ducks would make too many *balot* eggs (10). Not only local culture, but the Spanish rejection of that culture finds expression that remark.

Rizal thus succeeded in rendering, with strong, clear lines, the complexities involved in the Philippine colonial situation. His critique of Spanish misrule and his affirmation of a unique Philippine national identity, not to mention his considerable literary talent, invite comparison with political intellectuals in other colonial societies. Cuba's José Martí, Rizal's nearly exact contemporary (1853-1895), comes to mind. In their parallel lives, both Martí and Rizal sought to vindicate the rights of their compatriots against Spanish domination. Yet in sharp contrast with Martí, Rizal seemed nearly oblivious to the threat posed by the United States at this historical moment. Probably due to his country's geographical and cultural distance from the future colonial power, Rizal could only briefly envisage the possibility, in his essay "The Philippines a Hundred Years Hence," of an Americanized Philippines, only to dismiss the possibility immediately, recalling that the U.S., "Because of its libertarian traditions . . . could not be imperialist. It was something contrary to its puritan morality."³¹ Despite the author's historical blindness, the multi-voiced, intricately dialogic nature of Rizal's narrative discourse serves to strengthen a singular impression of a critical novel that indeed made a real psychological and political impact in Philippine cultural life, and yet whose entangled plot structures continue to invite rereading and reinterpretation. Although Rizal's satire of Spanish colonial society in the Philippines has given expression to dissatisfactions and thereby promoted reforms, a "second reading" of the texts opens them up to the play of an emancipatory desire that continues to move the Philippines today.

EUGENIO MATIBAG

IOWA STATE UNIVERSITY

³⁰ Coates praises the *Noli* as "one of those rare novels which reveals the soul of a nation" (360).

³¹ Cited in Zea xi.

WORKS CITED

- Agonillo, Teodoro A. "Rizal and the Philippine Revolution." *University of the East Rizal Centennial Lectures*. Manila: 1961. 36-45.
- Anderson, Benedict. "Cacique Democracy and the Philippines: Origins and Dreams." *New Left Review* 169, May-June 1988: 3-31.
- . *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*. London: Verso Editions and New Left Books, 1983.
- Bahktin, M. M. *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays*. Trans. Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist. Austin: U of Texas P, 1981.
- Bocobo, Jorge. "Foreword" and "Translator's Prologue." In *El Filibusterismo* by José Rizal (1990). III, VII-XXIX.
- Cavanna y Manso, Jesús María (C.M.). *Rizal and the Philippines of His Days: An Introduction to the Study of D. Rizal's Life, Works, and Writings*. Manila: U of Santo Tomás P, 1957.
- Coates, Austin. *Rizal: Philippine Nationalist and Martyr*. Hong Kong: Oxford U P, 1968.
- Howard, Roy. *Three Faces of Hermeneutics: An Introduction to Current Theories of Understanding*. Berkeley: U of California P, 1982.
- Jameson, Fredric. "World Literature in an Age of Multinational Capitalism." *The Current in Criticism: Essays on the Present and Future of Literary Theory*. Eds. Clayton Koelb and Virgil Lokke. West Lafayette, Indiana: Purdue U P, 1987. 139-158.
- Mahajani, Usha. *Philippine Nationalism: External Challenge and Filipino Response, 1565-1946*. St. Lucia: University of Queensland Press, 1971.
- Rizal y Alonso, José. *El Filibusterismo*. (*Escritos de José Rizal, Tomo V*.) Manila: Comisión Nacional del Centenario de José Rizal, 1990.
- . *El Filibusterismo*. Trans. Jorge Bocobo. Manila: R. Martinez & Sons, 1957.
- . *Noli Me Tangere*. Ed. Margara Russotto. Venezuela: Biblioteca Ayacucho, 1976.
- . *Poesías de Rizal*. Ed. Jaime C. de Veyra. Manila: Bureau of Printing, 1946.
- . *Political and Historical Writings*. Manila: National Heroes Commission, 1964.
- . *Quotations from Rizal's Writings*. Trans. and ed. Encarnación Alzona. Vol. X. Manila: José Rizal Centennial Commission, 1962.
- Romero, José E., et al. "Prefacio." In *El Filibusterismo* by José Rizal (1990). I-IV.
- Russotto, Margara. "Cronología." In *Noli Me Tangere*, by José Rizal. 357-87.
- Unamuno, Miguel de. "Rizal: The Tagalog Hamlet." *Rizal: Contrary Essays*. Ed. Patronilo Bn. Daroy and Dolores S. Feria. Quezon City: Guro Books, 1968. 3-16.
- Wolff, Leon. *Little Brown Brother: America's Forgotten Bid for Empire Which Cost 250,000 Lives*. New York: Longmans, Green and Co., 1970.
- Yabes, Leopoldo, ed. *José Rizal on His Centenary: Being an Attempt at a Revaluation of His Significance by Professors of the University of the Philippines*. Quezon City: Office of Research Coordination, University of the Philippines, 1963.
- Zea, Leopoldo. "Prólogo." In *Noli Me Tangere*, by José Rizal. ix-xxx.