

Satire and Political Purpose in the Novels of Jose Rizal*

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More than a century ago, future national hero, Jose Rizal, attempted to put the Spanish colonial presence in a bad light. While in Europe, Rizal wrote two future classics, the *Noli Me Tangere* and the *El Filibusterismo*, through which Rizal made known his views towards colonial and religious oppression, his hopes for his country and his place in the then revolution in the works. While achieving modest success in Europe, the *Noli*, a triumph in satire, had limited impact in the Philippines when it was published in 1884, much to Rizal's dismay. The *Noli* merely earned him a token *filibustero* status and a place in the watch list upon his return but was inconsequential in terms of raising political consciousness. No reform forthcoming, Rizal retreated to Europe and wrote the sequel. Equally satirical and politically sharp, the *Fili* took on the same laughably absurd character and situations but was of darker humor and more violently tragic resolutions, reflecting Rizal's final recognition of the futility of his role as a poet.

Rizal's first novel, *Noli Me Tangere*, was published in 1884; by then Rizal had already been living for four years in Europe. The purpose of the novel was very simply to raise political consciousness in relation to the current state of affairs in the Philippines. Rizal and his fellow students from the Philippines studying in Spain had tried to disseminate information about their country through journalism and public debate, an enterprise referred to at the time by the term "propaganda" taken in its original sense of publishing information, but their success was relatively limited (Schumacher, 1973).

Paradoxically perhaps, the freedom which they found in Spain to criticise and publish their views meant that in the context of all the other political debates which were raging at the time, not least of which were those concerning Cuba and Puerto Rico, the issues relating to the Philippines tended by comparison to attract less attention. Where the points they were making did, however, hit home was in the Philippines itself where the periodicals from Spain carrying the news of the activities of the students were carefully scanned by both secular and religious authorities who were quick to identify the names of potential subversives or *filibusteros*. Rizal was very soon put on their list.

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That the authorities were taking note of him – they had read for example his early essay *El Amor Patrio* (Bonoan, 1996) – was in its way a minor achievement but what clearly irked Rizal was their failure to appreciate what it was he saying and respond constructively to his criticisms. To achieve this larger purpose he realized that what he needed to do was to shock a European, or at least a Spanish audience, into paying closer attention to the abuses that were being perpetrated with the collusion of the colonial government, and it was from this realization that there arose the decision to write a political novel which would be controversial and compel the state to act.

When it first appeared the novel was reviewed in the Spanish press where it had a mixed reception. Conservative reviewers, as might have been anticipated were dismissive, but among the Filipino community in Spain it was extravagantly praised. In the Philippines itself, into which copies were smuggled it was a minor sensation. Not long after its publication, Rizal returned to Manila to see his family and to test the political waters. He seemed genuinely to have hoped that the colonial governor might have been persuaded to stand up to the religious authorities, the friar orders, whose frailocracy he had castigated in the novel. In the event it was made clear to him that this was a vain hope and that he was running a political risk by remaining in the Philippines. He returned to Europe in 1888 and in addition to working on several projects designed to formulate a sense of Philippine identity by a historical and ethnographic recuperation of the pre-Hispanic character of Filipino-Malays, he worked on his second novel *El Filibusterismo*, a sequel to the *Noli*, published in 1891.

Again the intention of the novel was to draw attention to the calamitous state of affairs in the country, but the tone of this novel is considerably bleaker than the first. It is not simply that the second novel ends on a note of failure and the triumph of evil over good – that was also the case with the *Noli* – but there is no suggestion of redemption of any kind, no central characters with whom the reader can positively identify, no hint of an alternative to the brutality and abuse which have been described; even the humor is blacker without the lighter touches of the first novel. By the time of writing this second novel, then, Rizal appears to have despaired of the efficacy of political opposition and exchanged the role of critic for one of prophet.

Despite the difference in tone, however, the two novels are very alike in structure and style. But before considering these similarities it may be useful to recall in outline the plots of the novels. The *Noli* relates the return of Crisostomo Ibarra to the Philippines after a long period of study abroad in Europe. He has high hopes of marrying his childhood sweetheart Maria Clara, daughter of Captain Tiago, the mayor of the town in which Ibarra's family lives. Ibarra also hopes to put his talents to improving social and economic conditions in the Philippines. On both counts his hopes are thwarted by the representatives of the religious orders, the friars, who appear to control everything which goes on in the provinces and are a law unto themselves, vicious, corrupt, immoral and the major cause of injustice in the country as depicted in the *Noli*.

Try as he might to overcome the difficulties that face him, Ibarra is ultimately defeated. His fiancée retires to a convent, and he himself throws in his lot with Elias, a revolutionary who had previously tried in vain to win Ibarra to the cause of revolution. The novel ends somberly with Elias' death and Ibarra's disappearance. He later emerges as the anarchist-revolutionary Simoun in *El Filibusterismo*.

Now clearly at one level, as several commentators have pointed out Ibarra is Rizal and his ideals and aspirations as well as his social position mirror those of Rizal himself. Furthermore, the conflict with the clergy in which Ibarra becomes embroiled resembles the situation in which Rizal's own family was caught in its confrontations with the friar-owned estates in his hometown of Calamba. This similarity between Rizal and Ibarra can, however, be overemphasized, and a useful corrective to that critical approach is to bear in mind how much Rizal was influenced by the form and structure of the European novel of the time. Again this is fairly well-trodden critical territory and there has been a lot of discussion of Rizal's literacy influences. He was an avid reader and we have the evidence of his letters, his diaries and his library itself to testify how familiar he was with French novelists from Victor Hugo to Zola, with Dickens and of course with contemporary Spanish authors. In particular, critics have noted the similarity of the *Noli* to Galdos' novel *Doña Perfecta*: in both cases the hero leaves the sophisticated urban metropolis to pursue his engagement to an innocent and beautiful girl in the province comes adrift after confrontation with the Machiavellian intrigue of the clergy. The parallels are clear and the influence seems obvious.

However, it is worth recalling, as Rodolfo Cardona does in his edition of *Doña Perfecta*, that the theme of the educated representative from the modern, rational and progressively-oriented metropolis coming unstuck in the mire of rural superstition and backwardness is a common one in the Spanish literature of the time and offers an instructive contrast to what is sometimes taken to be the more usual novelistic theme of the time: the difficulties encountered by the provincial ingenue as he tries to make his way in the labyrinths of urban sophistication and deceit.

For Rizal and his compatriot, Pedro Taverno, who had written a similar novel, *Ninay*, two years previously, the scope offered by this allowed them both to expose the ignorance, superstition and clerical tyranny which still prevailed in the Philippines and to make the same criticisms as their Spanish contemporaries in Spain of oppressive and autocratic religious institutions.

If, however, it is Galdos and a Spanish tradition which can be distinguished in the *Noli*, it is Alexander Dumas of *The Count of Monte Cristo* who so evidently left his mark on the plot of the *Fili*. Just as Edmond Dantes is transformed into the rich and powerful figure of the Count of Monte Cristo, so Ibarra is metamorphosed into Simoun, the rich and influential jeweler, friend of the Manila elite who like Dantes plots his revenge on those who had destroyed him and his hopes. But if in Monte Cristo there still remains traces of Dantes, there is nothing in Simoun to remind us of the once noble character of Ibarra. Simoun plots anarchy and terror and rejects reform in favor of bloody revolution, and in the intervals of his plotting the reader is introduced to vignettes of student life in Manila and examples of abuses in the provinces. In the end, however, readers are left without the conventional satisfactions of melodrama; Simoun commits suicide and the abuses of power remain unchecked. The conclusion of the novel with its pessimistic destruction of not only Simoun but of the characters who represent enlightenment ironically therefore vindicates Simoun's view, that structurally there is no hope for the Philippines without massive political and social upheaval.

To concentrate on the plot of the novels is, however, to miss Rizal's purpose: the story is there simply as a hook to engage the reader initially; the substance of the novels is intended to make the reader reflect and, ideally, act. To that end Rizal in fact builds up his novels like a bricoleur, putting them together with bits and pieces which come to hand, not

worrying too much about the thread of the plot nor the logical consistency of the type of realism to which he is committing himself, but relying on different styles of writing to make his polemical points. Thus there is promiscuous confusion of humor, mordant satire, pathos, romance and straightforward ethnographic description which constantly unsettles the reader's response to the narrative. There is also a profusion of minor characters and sub-plots which at times threaten to displace the attention from the principal themes, but which, as Anderson (1994), Rafael (1993) and Ileto (1982) have shown through close analysis, illuminate, in ways in which Rizal himself may not have been fully conscious, structural aspects of the social organization of native society in the domains of the cognitive implications of the multilingual cultural environment (Rafael, 1993 and Anderson, 1994), the tension between official Christianity and native ritual and belief (Ileto, 1982) and the gendered nature of social relations in the Philippines of the time (Rafael, 1984).

Despite this miscellany of styles, however, the unpicking of the various thematic threads in the novels is made easier by the division of the narrative into short, almost self-contained chapters, each of which carries its own salient critical observation while pushing forward the sequential narrative at a more or less slow pace. This slow pacing of the narrative is especially noticeable in the *Fili* where numerous chapters intervene to divert the reader's interest away from Simoun, who resembles a shadowy eminence rather than the novel's protagonist. This particular characteristic of the novels, that is, the sacrifice of the fast paced development of the main plot to fragmented focus on single and separate issues in individual chapters, owes something again to the general conventions of the 19th century European novel, in particular to those serialized novels, like those of Dickens, where each chapter besides furthering the overall narrative must also possess a certain relative autonomy.

In addition, however, there is a specifically Spanish literary dimension to Rizal's practice, at least so it seems to me, though I must confess to being very much an amateur in this field. As I understand it, preceding the realism of Galdos and also influencing his writing was a tradition of essay-writing devoted to descriptions of local customs and practices designed to awaken the public to the variety of cultural forms and institutions which existed in the country. This tradition of *costumbrismo*

contributed to a sense of local and national pride and can be linked to a general European movement at the time, especially visible in Germany and German scholarship which exercised a strong influence on Spanish intellectuals of the day, in relation to the development of the idea of a national culture and identity.

A similar impulse to promote an awareness of a Philippine culture inspired Rizal to conduct research into characteristic cultural beliefs and practices. It also prompted him to incorporate references and descriptions into his novels, where one finds allusions to myths and legends, types of food, children's games, folksongs and rituals. With postcolonial hindsight, one can of course recognize the irony of an oppositional subaltern culture being constructed in terms of a nationalist discourse which derives its inspiration from a European colonially influenced version of cultural identity. But the irony was not apparent to Rizal.

Another demonstrably Spanish influence is Larra's satirical essays, themselves a version of the *costumbrismo* tradition. Rizal admired the wit and style of Larra's articles and imitates them in the satirical accounts of contemporary life in the Philippines. There seem to be two different but complementary satirical approaches. The first is to follow the practice already well-established in European literary history, at least as far back as Theophrastus, of writing about characters or types of people to whom one ascribes in exaggerated caricature humorous and ridiculous patterns of behavior. Such characters are to be found in abundance in Rizal's novels and include, for example, Don Tiburcio, the quack doctor from Spain and Doña Consolacion, the pretentious and foul-mouthed wife of the sergeant of the *guardia civil*.

The second form which satire takes is to be found not in typical characters but in the depiction of typical scenes or situations which take on a representative status as standing for the general unhealthy condition of existing social relations. A good example of this in the *Noli* is the famous chapter on the sermon in which the mismatch between the arrogant and bullying pretensions of the preacher and the naive ignorance of the congregation is exploited to demonstrate the nature of the intellectual and physical tyranny which the clergy exercises over the local population. A comparable scene in the *Fili* is located in a lecture hall of the university where the humiliation of a hardworking student who

becomes the butt of the priest's sarcasm serves the same purpose of exposing the tyranny of the frailocracy but in a different setting.

Although satire, in these two forms is only one of several different styles of writing of which the novels are composed, it is arguably the most successful in conveying Rizal's political message. Certainly the satirical episodes are more successful than the overtly political scenes which, however much based on actual events, as Rizal strongly maintained, because they are embedded within the set of conventions peculiar to melodrama and sentimentalism lack the conviction of such scenes when inscribed within a context of social realism. For the remainder of this paper, then, I want to look briefly at two examples of satire, one from the *Noli* and one from the *Fili*, to demonstrate Rizal's technique and the targets of his critical attacks.

Chapter 28 of the original edition of *Noli* is entitled *Correspondencias* and begins, rather disingenuously,

No habiendo sucedido nada importante para nuestros personajes, ni en la noche de la vispera ni al siguiente día, saltaríamos gustosos al ultimo, sino considerasemos que acaso algun lector extranjero desearida conocer como celebran sus fiestas los Filipinos. Para esto copiaremos al pie de la letra varias cartas, una de ellas la del correspondal de un serio y distinguido periodico de Manila, venerable por su tono y alta severidad.

Nothing of importance having happened to our characters either on the evening before or the following day we would have gladly skipped over the proceedings of the day, if we had not thought that some foreign reader might perhaps like to know how Filipinos celebrate their feast-days. To that end we have copied down exactly several letters, one of them that of the correspondent of an illustrious and distinguished Manila journal, respected for its gravity and its high seriousness. (My translation)

This direct address to the reader is of course a familiar convention in the realistic novel of the period – it is used, for example, in *Doña Perfecta* and immediately implies a collusion between writer and reader from which the subject of the narrative is automatically excluded. Delivered in this way, rather than as a comment by an omniscient narrator, readers

know that they are being archly invited to share in the humor of what follows. This impression is confirmed by the hyperbole of the epithets applied to the *journal* “*un serio y distinguido periodico de Manila, venerable por su tono y alta severidad.*” Yet at the same time the mention of the “*lecto extranjero*” hints that, absurd and humorous as the following account may be, it will contain sufficient truth to reflect contemporary circumstances. The effect is to provide a critical account of inflated ritual practice but at one remove, that is, through the pomposity of the correspondent’s language, which is of course also the object of satire. (An alternative would have been to do as Galdos does with Pepe Rey in *Doña Perfecta* and express the criticism of the superstition and ritual through the opinions of the protagonist, but that would jeopardize the status of Rizal’s hero in the eyes of his fiancée and his family, and that is something which he wishes to postpone until a more dramatic occasion).

The parody of the correspondent’s report continues for several pages with a description of the celebrations including the presentation of an outdoor play, tributes to the rich native patrons of the festivities and an account of a religious procession followed by a sermon. Throughout the description, in addition to the absurdity of the elaborate language and the inappropriate references to Croesus, the wedding feast at Cana and Don Quixote, there is a constant self-congratulatory reference to Spain and at the same time an insistent need to distinguish between the two different categories of Spanish and *indios* (natives), however enlightened and educated some of the latter, like Ibarra, maybe as a consequence of the privilege of having received a Spanish education. Let me give an example of this parody.

Causa admiracion ver la modestia y fervor que estos actos inspiran en el corazon de los creyentes, la fe pura y grande que a la Virgen de la Paz profesan, la solemnidad y ferviente devocion con que tales solemnidades celebran los que tuvimos la dicha de nacer bajo el sacrosancto e immaculado pabellon de España.

It is admirable to see the modesty and fervor which those actions inspire in the hearts of the believers, the great and pure faith which they profess for the Virgin of Peace, the solemnity and fervent devotion with which such solemnities are celebrated by those of us who have the privilege

to be born beneath the immaculate and sacrosanct banner of Spain.
(My translation)

By registering this language as representative and typical Rizal is, of course, not simply inviting the reader to laugh at its pretentiousness but also to consider the more serious implications of its detachment from the realities of life outside Manila. In the context of the times it would be funny, if one was not aware that it is precisely this ignorance and alienation from reality which prevents those in authority and power from engaging and grappling seriously with the injustices and abuses of everyday life which Rizal has detailed in previous chapters. Ultimately, then, the passage is bitterly satirical not on account of the absurdity of the phrasing and the vocabulary per se, but because it indicates a total lack of comprehension of what is actually happening in the society. The distance of this elaborate language from the language of everyday exchange metaphorically reproduces the distance of the Spanish colonial administration from events of everyday life in the provinces outside Manila.

That the purpose of the chapter is to reveal the contrast between appearance and reality is confirmed by what immediately follows the correspondent's report. Without any introduction there is no longer any need for the collusive nudge to the reader. We read the letter of Capitan Martin Aristorenas to his friend Luis Chiquito also describing some of the events of the day. This letter, however, is an account of the gambling and cock-fighting which took place during the festivities and there is an amusing description of how the priest, Padre Damaso, Ibarra's principal antagonist, lost money in the betting. There could be no stronger contrast and readers are left in no doubt that the "*actos de devocion pura y grande*" described by the correspondent mask the sordid reality of corruption and depravity.

The point made, Rizal can then turn back in a more lyrical vein to the love affair between Maria Clara and Ibarra by including as the final example of correspondence in the chapter a letter from her to Ibarra, saying how much she is looking forward to seeing him the following day.

Amusing as the satire is, anyone not familiar with the situation in the Philippines might wonder why this relatively mild criticism of Spanish colonial attitudes and the irreverent reference to the priest should have

elicited such strong condemnation from authorities. The answer is of course that the portrait which Rizal paints is cumulative in its effect and by the end of the novel, the reader is left in doubt of the villainy of the priests and, by implication, of the whole religious establishment in the Philippines. It is they, Rizal affirms, who bear the responsibility for the injustices suffered by the people of the Philippines, and the secular colonial Government is guilty of maladministration by association inasmuch as it condones clerical abuses and refuses to concern itself with the welfare of the people and is thus renegeing on its responsibilities.

By the time of writing the *Fili*, Rizal had certainly grown somewhat disillusioned with the cause of reform. The copies of the *Noli* which he had sent to the Governor-General and the Archbishop of Manila had produced no tangible results beyond Rizal finding himself labeled as a *filibustero*. Nonetheless, he himself was profoundly hostile to the notion of revolt and rebellion. As he perceived it there were simply no political options available at the time to someone like himself, and the best he could do in the circumstances was to repeat the message of the first novel, this time putting his case in stronger terms and directing his observations much more to the *ilustrado* youth of Manila, in an effort to raise their political consciousness where in the past he had failed to make any impression on the Spanish themselves.

Much of the satire of the second novel is, then, targeted at the easy-going political apathy of the students and the failure to understand and react to the political constraints to which they had to submit. Yet there is clearly a great deal of nostalgic affection invested in the chapters about the students and student life in Manila. These interludes constitute the only moments of lightness and humour to weigh against the oppressive presence of a Simoun set fast in his inexorable pursuit of vengeance, and the unremitting gloom of the poor provincial peasantry who become in their different ways the victims of the rapacity and lust of the clergy.

In contrast with the general tone of the novel's pessimism, the humorous accounts of student escapades, their seriocomic love affairs and their ineffectual political campaigning provide not only light relief, but also a suggestion, never fully worked out, of a hope for the future, a potential agency for change. In the central chapter which both gently mocks the idealistic enthusiasm of the students and at the same time evokes a memory of a critical period of Rizal's political education, his

years at the University of Santo Thomas before he left Manila, the reader finds a description of a gathering of students at a university hostel. To capture the spirit of the place Rizal sketches in quick succession a number of small student groups each engaged in different tasks, some studying, some playing games, some reading, some indulging in mild horseplay. In this context, a serious discussion suddenly gets underway among the senior students about proposals made to the Government that Spanish should be the medium of instruction. The subject quickly arouses emotions, since the issue has obvious implications for education in general, and in particular for the development of what we would now call oppositional politics and demands for equal treatment in the colonies.

The satire and the political criticism it contains are framed through the perspective of four representative “typical” characters: the hypocritical opportunist Juanito Pelaez; the sceptic, Pecson; the idealist – and closest to Rizal himself – Isagani; and the bombastic Sandoval, not a native of the Philippines, but a peninsular completing his studies in Manila. As they speak on the issue of the use of Castilian to make their point, and as they interrupt each other, denounce the government or the clergy, or simply make a humorous intervention, their characters are brought out, and Rizal through a deliberate confusion of politics, satire and the celebration of youthful energy draws the reader sympathetically into this student milieu while at the same time forcing an engagement with a politically topical debate.

The animated discussion among the students about what will happen next and what their reaction should be to a Government decision which might be unfavorable culminates in a rhetorical speech from Sandoval. Here he entered upon a defence in beautiful phraseology of the government and its good intentions, a subject that Pecson dared not break in upon.

“The Spanish government,” he said among other things, “has given you everything, it has denied you nothing! We had absolutism in Spain and you had absolutism here; the friars covered our soil with conventos, and conventos occupy a third part of Manila; in Spain the garrote prevails and here the garrote is the extreme punishment; we are Catholics and we have made you Catholics; we were scholastics and scholasticism sheds its light in your college halls: in short, gentlemen,

we weep when you weep, we suffer when you suffer, we have the same altars, the same courts, the same punishments, and it is only just that we should give you our rights and our joys.”

As no one interrupted him, he became more and more enthusiastic, until he came to speak of the future of the Philippines.

“As I have said, gentlemen, the dawn is not far distant. Spain is now breaking the eastern sky for her beloved Philippines, and the times are changing, as I positively know, faster than we imagine. This government, which, according to you, is vacillating and weak, should be strengthened by our confidence, that we may make it see that it is the custodian of our hopes. Let us remind it by our conduct (should it ever forget itself, which I do not believe can happen) that we have faith in its good intentions and that it should be guided by no other standard than justice and the welfare of all the governed. No, gentlemen,” he went on in a tone more and more declamatory, “we must not admit at all in this matter the possibility of a consultation with other more or less hostile entities, as such a supposition would imply our resignation to the fact. Your conduct up to the present has been frank, loyal, without vacillation, above suspicion; you have addressed it simply and directly; the reasons you have presented could not be more sound; your aim is to lighten the labour of the teachers in the first years and to facilitate study among the hundreds of students who fill the college halls and for whom one solitary professor cannot suffice. If up to the present the petition has not been granted, it has been for the reason, as I feel sure, that there has been a great deal of material accumulated, but I predict that the campaign is on, that the summons of Makaraig is to announce to us the victory, and tomorrow we shall see our efforts crowned with the applause and appreciation of the country, and who knows, gentlemen, but that the government may confer upon you some handsome decoration of merit, benefactors as you are of the fatherland!”

Enthusiastic applause resounded. All immediately believed in the triumph, and many in the decoration.

“Let it be remembered, gentlemen,” observed Juanito, “that I was one of the first to propose it.”

The pessimist Pecson was not so enthusiastic. "Just so we don't get that decoration on our ankles," he remarked, but fortunately for Pelaez this comment was not heard in the midst of the applause.

When they had quieted down a little, Pecson replied, "Good, good, very good, but one supposition: if in spite of all that, the General consults and consults and consults, and afterwards refuses the permit?"

This question fell like a dash of cold water. All turned to Sandoval, who was taken aback. "Then -" he stammered.

"Then?"

"Then," he exclaimed in a burst of enthusiasm, still excited by the applause, "seeing that in writing and in printing it boasts of desiring your enlightenment, and yet hinders and denies it when called upon to make it a reality - then, gentlemen, your efforts will not have been in vain, you will have accomplished what no one else has been able to do. Make them drop the mask and fling down the gauntlet to you!"

"Bravo, bravo!" cried several enthusiastically.

"Good for Sandoval! Hurrah for the gauntlet!" added others.

"Let them fling down the gauntlet to us!" repeated Pecson disdainfully. "But afterwards?"

Sandoval seemed to be cut short in his triumph, but with the vivacity peculiar to his race and his oratorical temperament he had an immediate reply.

"Afterwards?" he asked. "Afterwards, if none of the Filipinos dare to accept the challenge, then I, Sandoval, in the name of Spain, will take up the gauntlet, because such a policy would give the lie to the good intentions that she has always cherished toward her provinces, and because he who is thus faithless to the trust reposed in him and abuses his unlimited authority deserves neither the protection of the fatherland nor the support of any Spanish citizen!"

The enthusiasm of his hearers broke all bounds. Isagani embraced him, the others following his example. They talked of the fatherland, of union, of fraternity, of fidelity. The Filipinos declared that if there were only Sandovals in Spain all would be Sandovals in the Philippines. His eyes glistened, and it might well be believed that if at that moment any kind of gauntlet had been flung at him he would have leaped upon any kind of horse to ride to death for the Philippines.

The "cold water" alone replied: "Good, that's very good, Sandoval. I could also say the same if I were a Peninsular, but not being one, if I should say one half of what you have, you yourself would take me for a *filibuster*." Sandoval began a speech in protest, but was interrupted. "Rejoice, friends, rejoice! Victory!" cried a youth who entered at that moment and began to embrace everybody.

"Rejoice, friends! Long live Castilian tongue!" An outburst of applause greeted this announcement. They fell to embracing one another and their eyes filled with tears. Pecson alone preserved his sceptical smile. (Charles E. Derbyshire's translation of the *Fili*, "The Reign of Greed", 1912 : 132-135)

One notes immediately that as in the passage quoted from the *Noli*, much of the humour derives from the effusive declamatory language of Sandoval's speech, with the difference that Sandoval's youthful sincerity is allowed to excuse his absurdity, whereas no such excuse exists for the journalist. Furthermore, there is a self-conscious ironic dimension to what he says. The references to the garrotte, absolutism and the friars are designed not only to elicit smiles from his audience, but to establish an appropriately critical distance between the reader and Sandoval: the latter in other words is not to be taken too seriously. And yet the reader is invited to acknowledge the genuine liberal origins of the arguments which he puts forward and his obvious belief in Spain's goodwill towards the Philippines. A further point here is to note how typical of the discourse of the late 19th century it is, a discourse which Rizal so patently shared, that Spain should be reified in such a positive way, which precludes an unpacking of the notion into categories of power and authority and institutions of the State.

The applause with which Sandoval's speech is greeted can be read off as the response of the ilustrado class to the professions of liberal

Spanish intellectuals, a fictional echo of Rizal's own experience of his fellow students wining and dining in Madrid and making common cause with sympathetic Spanish radicals. The scepticism of Pecson is Rizal's own response to the superficial euphoria and the probing, "what then?" "but afterwards?," are Rizal's own questions directed at himself and his own youthful vain longings for the triumph of liberal reforms. In the event neither Pecson in the certainty of his skepticism, nor Sandoval in his confidence in the ultimate victory of justice, have the answers to the questions, once more their ineffectualness mirrors Rizal's: because he could find no answer to his own questions, his frustrated response was withdrawal. The very writing of the novel recapitulates the argument: because there is no answer to the question of "what then?" if the appeal to justice is not acknowledged, the only recourse of the writer/campaigner is to repeat the appeal, to rephrase it in different ways, of which perhaps the most powerful is the political novel.

There is of course one possible answer, rebellion and revolution, but that is one which Rizal rejects out of hand, both through his own refusal to engage in any insurrectionary movement or become in any way committed to a political campaign, and through the positive decision to write the novel which becomes his mode of political action. Furthermore, the whole narrative thrust of the novel with its condemnation of the anarchic madness of Simoun restates Rizal's vision of the futility at that point of doing anything more than indicate evermore graphically and stridently the dangerous explosiveness of the situation in the Philippines. Rizal would have surely endorsed the words of another writer whose anniversary we also celebrate in 1998 that in times of war, "all a true poet can do is warn."

The students, then, represent for Rizal a hope for the future, but the detached amusement with which he depicts their naivete also hints at a note of despair, at least for the present. There is nothing either he or they can do or know how to do, despite their best efforts. The satire which mocks so scornfully and witheringly in the *Noli* has undergone a transformation in the second novel. Superficially, there are similarities: the foibles and fashions of the Manila elite are still held up to ridicule, the assorted cast of characters commit the same absurdities, and the same playful use of contrasting speech styles and language usage are exploited to amusing effect; but whereas it was, with the exception of the philosopher Tasio, only political opponents who were the object of critical

attack, now in the *Fili* it is friend and foe alike who merit criticism. When the satirist writes out of self-confidence in attacking the weaknesses of his opponents, he implicitly claims superiority for his own values and vision; when the satire begins to turn inward, then this is a sure sign of a creeping doubt and a loss of certainty. The humor and sharp political edge to the writing are still there in abundance in the *Fili*, but this time Rizal is not joining in the reader's laughter. ❁

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