NOLI ON TV: Adaptation Criticism as Metacriticism

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> When we seek to make sense of such problematical topics as human nature, culture, society, and history, we never say precisely what we wish to say or mean precisely what we say. […] Moreover, in topics such as these, there are always legitimate grounds for differences of opinion as to what they are, how they should be spoken about, and the kinds of knowledge we can have of them (Hayden White, Tropics 1)

ABSTRACT

The paper's project is adaptation criticism. But the paper is also, more importantly, engaged in metacriticism. It is concerned with the broader discourse of nationalism, which finds unique poignancy in Rizalian adaptation. The components of the paper are mutually enabling: the transformation of *Noli Me Tangere* from print to screen problematizes the motivations, processes, and implications of adaptation;

while adaptation criticism, in turn, seeks to contribute to the critical tradition which engages Rizal and his impact on Philippine history and nationalism.

One can presume that the screen adaptations of Rizal and his works are produced because film is a "popular" and "mass" medium. If so, Rizal adaptations always presuppose the value of the original texts, especially in relation to their nationalist context, vis-à-vis a particular conception of what the popular or mass audience is like, needs, or can appreciate. It is, therefore, of great significance and interest to address the first and only screen adaptation of the Noli for television. The paper analyzes how the intervening historical gap between the original novel and the screen adaptation, a period which has seen the rise of the "Rizal industry" and the passing of the "Rizal bill," has been textualized in the adaptation.

Keywords: Rizal, Noli Me Tangere, Adaptation Criticism, Television Studies, nation,Literary History

NOLI ME TANGERE: THE ONE AND THE MANY READINGS

The "Rizal Bill" as Marker of Reading Histories

Jose Rizal's Noli Me Tangere (1887), along with its sequel El Filibusterismo (1891), is without a doubt a fundamental touchstone not only of Philippine literature but also of Filipino nationalist thought. Innumerable responses, critical studies, translations, adaptations, and commemorations have taken for granted that the two novels are, in the words of literary critic, Caroline Hau, "[not] simply…Filipino masterpieces, [but] 'master-narratives' which have attained an extraordinarily exalted status,…as "originary," if not founding, fictions of the Filipino national community"(48). She underscores how "Philippine literature valorizes [the] theme of inventing the Filipino through the concept of the singular text" – that is, through the novel form concretized in a specific novel – and how "[the] emphasis on the singularity of the text…and the creativity of its author has greatly contributed to legitimizing Rizal's public authority as a writer"(49).

In one section of her Necessary Fictions, Hau examines how the regimented reading of Philippine literature in general and Rizal's Noli in particular are influenced and organized in the "distinct spatial and temporal structure of the classroom" in order to produce, as far as the nationalist project is concerned, "subjects of thought and action" (15-47). One of her main premises is that nationalism is ineluctably related to the pedagogical imperative; and this

relationship between "nation" and "education," which is analogously the relationship between action and thought, is mediated by literary studies and canonical works, foremost of which are Rizal's novels.

In this regard, the so-called Rizal Bill is one of the most forceful and definite expressions of using Rizal and his writings in the service of the nationalist project, recognizing "a need for a re-dedication to the ideals of freedom and nationalism" (2971). In 1956, as the Philippines emerged from the ruins of the World War into the Third Republic and marched into a state of new independence, Republic Act No. 1425 (the Rizal Bill) was passed. This piece of legislation mandated the inclusion "IN THE CURRICULA OF ALL PUBLIC AND PRIVATE SCHOOLS, COLLEGES AND UNIVERSITIES, COURSES ON THE LIFE, WORKS AND WRITINGS OF JOSE RIZAL, PARTICULARLY HIS NOVELS NOLI ME TANGERE AND EL FILIBUSTERISMO" (2971).

A particular kind of reading, therefore, was institutionalized – the one done "in the classroom," required and facilitated by teachers, and directly influenced by but exceeding the Rizal Bill. This reading is aimed at a constancy of reading expectations, a reading that would rehearse the "timeless" lessons of the novels (cf. Ongoco; De Guzman et al). In this way, a historical reader brings into the text a variety of interpretations conditioned by historical contingencies, but his or her reading is tempered by the constancy of popular and official eisegesis (according to what is required or recommended by the State's Department of Education), the reading of the presumed importance or meanings into the novels. The guide questions found at the end of every chapter or the introductions found in the beginning of many abridged versions of the Noli attest to the regimentation of reading Rizal.

The Rizal Bill is, therefore, a move not only to canonize the novels in the discrete field of literary studies, but also, beyond that, to hold them up as "charters of nationalism" as they have been so described for their role at the onset of nation-formation, but now so regarded outside of their original historical specificity.

Ironically, the specificity of the historical moment when Rizal wrote and published the Noli has been much emphasized by (literary) historians. In his pioneering study of the novel form in the Philippines, for example, Resil Mojares carefully locates the Noli in the context of specific social and technological developments in the archipelago, in the context of a society "in which the imperatives for a restructuring of power are already present" (146).

Moreover, Rizal himself regarded the Noli not only as "the history of the last ten years" (Rizal-Blumentritt v.1 61), but also, as he identifies it in his preface to Morga, the "[sketching] of the present state of our country" [italics mine] (Rizal-Morga Preface). It is the specificity of the historical moment, its "present-ness," therefore, that is fundamental in Rizal's project in "divining the future" of his motherland.

The novel's historicity, its opportune and decisive arrival, is all the more profound considering how the novel was received in its own present time. The Spanish colonial authorities found cause to execute the Noli's author as a "revolutionary" (cf. The Trial). And it is now widely taken for granted by historians and critics, farther and farther in historical time after Rizal's percipient and catalytic execution, that Rizal's writings, foremost of them his novels, have launched the revolution against Spain, the first revolution in Asia, that began the birthing of the nation in 1896 (Castro 1; cf. Ocampo, "The Trial"; Cruz and Chua).

The Rizal Bill, as such, is ironically premised on the uneasy relationship between the subject matter of Rizal's novels – that is, the corruption of individuals that impedes the development of a corrupted society into a healthy nation – and the historical significance of the novels as catalysts of a revolution that is yet unfinished (cf. Hau 214-242; Ileto, Filipinos; F.S. Jose). In other words, as long as the society is corrupt and the nation is poised in a state of becoming, the novels' efficacy is presumed or expected to continue indefinitely in time.

Underlying the Rizal Bill, moreover, is another irony. As Hau asserts,

> Literature has no place in Philippine everyday life and culture, since few Filipinos read it; yet literature is invested with a great deal of social, indeed subversive, significance since it is viewed, and taught in the schools, as a document of the achievements, development, and transformation of Philippine society, culture, and nation. (Hau 4-5)

Furthermore, while Rizal is ubiquitous, he is largely unread "in the original and unexpurgated versions," as the law requires, if at all (Almario, Si Rizal 3-4; Ocampo, Rizal Without 90; Hau 4).

The Rizal Bill, when it was passed gave birth to the "Rizal industry," producing an overabundance of Rizaliana: textbooks, primers, abridgements, anthologies, biographies, monographs, translations into English

and vernacular languages, conference proceedings, and ephemera. This casual enumeration does not yet include popular versions of the two-novel canon in komiks, annual stage adaptations required for students, and screen adaptations.

Yet how many students have really and seriously read the Noli and the Fili–not to mention several volumes of Rizal's letters, prose, and poetry–instead of relying solely or largely on secondary texts, to merely pass academic requirements? As Ambeth Ocampo emphatically writes, "[It] is accepted that the [novels] are highly regarded but seldom read (if not totally ignored). Therefore, one asks, how can unread novels exert any influence" (Rizal Without 90)?[1]

All this Rizaliana constitutes another particular kind of reading – the polymorphous appropriation and adaptation of Rizal's life, works, and the various possible meanings and tangents of their narratives, forms, and themes. These appropriations and adaptations have various uses and are materialized in various media, ranging from markings of Rizal's likeness or name on currencies, business trademarks, and school-names to re-creations of aspects of his life or works in novels, plays, and film.

This particular kind of reading–appropriation, adaptation, re-creation–maintains the historicity and historicalness of, among other things, the traditions and conventions that influence the meaning of "Rizal," but also signify the adaptable quality and fluidity of any singular Rizalian text as it circulates and becomes a part or aspect of any new appropriation, adaptation, re-creation. Each new adaptation, whether explicit or implicit, is conditioned not only by the specific historical place and time of its production and consumption but also by the specificity of its media and its use. And each new adaptation is a rereading and a re-creation of "Rizal," shuffling between regimented readings and historical-critical readings.

The historical-critical reading, which is another particular kind of multifarious reading, influences, rejects, engages, and/or overlaps with the regimented and adaptive readings. It is registered as a history of critical receptions, ever-shifting from the time of the novels' first publication, dynamic in searching for new meanings and efficacies in the novels, more systematically politicized and explicitly ideological, and always self-interrogating and challenging of existing and unquestioned assumptions about Rizal, his works, and the place of both in (literary) history.

"What the law inaugurated," Hau contends, "was…not a single reading [of the Noli and the Fili], but constant reading, a history of certain kinds of reading" (3). Or, one may say, that the law served as a marker of reading histories, laying to bare the constancy but also the variety in the reading of Rizal before the Rizal Bill, which logically led to it–that is, the high regard for and omnipresence of Rizal in the national consciousness–and after the passing of the Rizal Bill–that is, the compulsory reading of Rizal, the requirement to remember or take him to heart, so to speak.

The nation as discourse is the ground of "the choice of a paradigm of explanation, which gives to…arguments a specific shape, thrust, and mode of articulation" (White, Tropics 67), and the novels of Rizal are always located at the center of it, in a present time between the nation's history and destiny. That is to say, while the novels have been published at certain historical junctures addressing specific historical concerns and actualizing specific historical events, they have been elevated by law almost above history as a constant, hovering signifier of the agenda of nation-formation; or, rather, the novels' historicity and perceived historical efficacy in their own present have been made as if permanently adaptable to any particular present, any given set of contemporary circumstances.

The particular kinds of reading outlined, each involving a kind of historicity, historicalness, and historical relationship, if not with each other, at least with Rizalian primary texts, exhibit the kind of tension between ascertaining the meaning of Rizal at any given historic(al) moment for a specific reader and the perpetual reinterpretations that put them in constant conflict with the historical specificity of each reading, criticism, and adaptation. All these readings are also rewritings, in the senses of "writing again" and "writing anew." Each new reading, therefore, is exacting and iconoclastic.

One answer, then, to Ocampo's question of how unread novels exert any influence is, ironically,–by being read, through regimented, adaptive, and critical readings.

THE TV-NOLI: THE MANY AND THE ONE READING

A Continuity of the Noli in Popular Dissemination

The Noli is the most adapted Philippine novel onscreen (cf. Lanot et al; Garcia). The most notable adaptations of the novel as a whole were produced in 1930 by "The Father of Philippine Cinema," Jose Nepomuceno;

in 1961, shortly after the passing of the Rizal Bill, by National Artist, Gerardo de Leon; and in 1992, as a made-for-TV miniseries, by National Artist, Eddie Romero.

The last, the miniseries by Romero, produced by the Cultural Center of the Philippines (CCP), is emblematic of how the many reading histories of the Noli converge in one adapted work and how such a work is contained within the discourse of nation. It stars, among others, Joel Torre as Crisostomo Ibarra, Daniel Fernando as Elias, Tetchie Agbayani as Sisa, Ruben Rustia as Kapitan Tiago, and Chin-Chin Gutierrez as Maria Clara. And it was aired in 1993, on People's Television (PTV) 4, a government free-TV channel, once a week for thirteen weeks.[2]

The history of the popular memory of the Noli structurally built into creative adaptations, tempered by regimented readings, and problematized in Rizalian criticism, dates back to the novel's first arrival in the Philippines. Nick Joaquin claims that Rizal canonized the written text in a predominantly oral culture when he wrote the Noli (Discourses 67-9). This may be true, considering how the novel has been historicized in the nationalist literary discourse. But the Noli was poorly disseminated, especially among the "masses," at the time of its arrival (Guerrero 149-61). Apart from the limitations of disseminating print material and the nature of its consumption and determination as private (cf. Mayne), the coming of the novel moreover had been preempted by the scent of scandal. It was eventually condemned by the Church.

Hau accounts for the subsequent popular reception of the scandalous novel, notwithstanding its poor dissemination and subsequent banning. She sums it up thus:

> Official censorship, the exclusivity of the language in which the *Noli* was written, the vehement condemnation of the religious orders, and Rizal's own amateurish handling of the distribution all ensured that the novel would be read only by a small number of people, mostly Spaniards and educated Filipinos.
>
> […] *Most people in Rizal's time had no access to the novel and had perforce to obtain access secondhand, that is, by hearsay*. […Rather] than curtail the circulation of the novel's ideas, censorship made possible the production of

> a specific *form of reading* that sidestepped proscription but permitted, nevertheless, a relaying of the novel's "content." This specific *mediation* of the *Noli* took the form of *rumors*. [italics mine] (Hau 54, 55; cf. Ocampo *Rizal Without* 89-90)

And so, in spite of all the hurdles, the Noli is said to have influenced the "masses." The popular dissemination by hearsay, as a kind of mediated reading, has continued to this day as popular memory, informing both creative adaptations of the Noli as mediation and the reading of any adaptation.

Adapting the novel for television for the first time, therefore, is a major step in relocating the Noli in the mainstream of vernacular forms, even beyond the movies. As television critic, John Corner, asserts,

> The narrative practices of television, incorporating both speech and enactment and frequently addressed to the viewer within domestic space and within the time-frames of the routine and the everyday, are a principal feature of modern popular culture. (Corner 59)

Television is ubiquitous and generally free (the TV-Noli was accessible for free), and its consumption strikes a balance between a public social practice (vis-à-vis the private novel) and domestic privacy (vis-à-vis the movies) (cf. Storey 76-127).

Produced under the long-shadow of the Rizal Bill, the TV-Noli, according to Justino Dormiendo, "was intended to *popularize* the novel among mass audiences, particularly *the student sector who stood to benefit* from the weekly screening…" [italics mine] (20). It seems unnecessary to state, given the range of meanings already taken for granted in this short comment about the TV-Noli, that the adaptation is meant to popularize the Noli.

Even before the TV-Noli was produced, the Noli was already and still is the most adapted novel onscreen in the Philippines. Rizal was already "popular" in his own lifetime, more popular after his execution, and practically omnipresent after the Rizal Bill. But to state the need to popularize the Noli by adapting it in a popular medium for a mass audience is more than a mere tautology. It bespeaks the necessity and propensity to reread and re-create the Noli as a pedagogical imperative of nation-formation.

The TV-Noli's serial form does not only reconnect the Noli with popular culture, but also reconnects the popular medium with pedagogy. The

television serial's reliance on the concise repetition of previous episodes condensed in the opening of each new episode, like the school drills, quizzes, and assignments, serves to "increase familiarity with the main characters, with the setting, and with background story-lines which may run throughout the entire series" (Corner 57). Corner also asserts that the "possibilities offered by having an established fictional world already known to the viewer are increased in the serial drama" (58).

Interestingly, the pacing, episodic structure, and narrative density of the Noli fits the soap opera format, which "is a slow-moving, multi-decker project, heavy with character depth and biography, and with the implications which actions, words, and looks carry, often to be teased out in subsequent episodes" (Corner 58). The viewer who follows the narrative every week is sutured into the very fabric of the network of characters and their entanglements.

To the degree that the TV-Noli is successful as a television serial, they "[viewers] typically experience episodes of their favourite soap opera as a routine engagement with an imagined world running concurrently with their own real one" (Corner 59). Such a perception of an alter-reality makes up for the remoteness of the period narrative, which loses the immediacy and scandal of the Noli as a novel of the historical present. Every week, the narrative becomes a now, and by force of repetition and routine, the narrative is remembered at the moment, simultaneously in many places where there is free television.

Moreover, if the adaptation successfully connects with the viewer, then its continuity with Noli as hearsay is rehearsed. As Corner maintains,

The lack of final closure in soap narrative, the depth of the virtual relationship which viewers enjoy with characters (either positively or negatively), and the sense of coexistence between real and fictive worlds which frames the viewing experience, all produce a distinctive socio-aesthetic profile. […] Around successful series, there develops a dense culture of gossip, exploiting the possibilities of star/role ambiguity [italics mine] (Corner 59).

The TV-Noli and the Convergence of Reading Histories

The TV-Noli opens with an image of dark skies on a stormy night. Flashes of lightning punctuate the swaying of coconut palms. The next image, which is that of a desperate man trying to break an already wet earth with a spade, is muted by the sound of thunder and hard rain. This dismal, portentous

imagery markedly differs from the original novel's bright and lively opening chapter, which pictures a momentous dinner party at the house of Kapitan Tiago, written in Rizal's signature and much-studied subversive humor (cf. Hau 69-70, Almario, Si Rizal 85-127; Bernad).

A man digging during a storm.

The memory of the original novel – or for most of its readers, the memory of the novel in translation – and of the presumed intention of its author plays a crucial role in understanding any new adaptation of the Noli. Even the lack or faintness of firsthand memory is just as crucial, for instance, in cases when the viewers of the adaptation have not read the primary text (i.e., the novel itself), but have read secondary texts such as summaries or abridged translations; or in cases when the viewers, having read neither primary nor secondary texts, have the memory of the narrative elements or the presumed significance of the original novel.

Returning to the opening images of the TV-Noli, with neither context nor explanation other than it is entitled *Noli Me Tangere*, the initiated viewer could very well determine what the scene is depicting, without necessarily realizing the adaptation's sleight of hand – that in the novel this scene was not rendered dramatically, as presently unfolding, but only recounted as part of an expository dialogue in Ch. 13, aptly entitled "Presaging of the Storm."

The scene depicted and made presently palpable in the TV-Noli is that of the gravedigger, hollowing out the corpse of Don Rafael Ibarra, the father of the Noli's protagonist, Crisostomo Ibarra, under the orders of the

Ibarras' nemesis, "Padre Garrote," Damaso Verdolagas. The exact place and significance of the scene in the narrative chronology and the characters involved in the action – the gravedigger, Ibarra, Damaso (the latter two visually absent in the first televisual scene) – are reflexively identifiable for the initiated.

Narrative theorist, Seymour Chatman, elucidating on the notion of the implied narrator, asserts that "unlike the narrator, the implied author… instructs us silently, through the design of the whole, with all the voices, by all the means it has chosen to let us learn" (Story 148). And the TV-Noli, as demonstrated in the audiovisual economy of its first scene, is animated by memory, as if memory were the implied author, structurally inseparable from the narrative itself. The remembrance of the plot and the unqualified recollection of the author's presumed "textual intention" (Chatman, Coming 104) is assembled by the viewer on the basis of all the textual components, which bear, as Gerard Genette describes the implied-author effect, "an image of the author in the text" (141).

But "the image of the author" and his "intention," as they are perceived in the adaptation, are by now inextricably linked with the various histories of reading – regimented, adaptive, and critical. In this sense, the screen narration approximates "the ideological value system that the text, indirectly and by combining all its resources, presents and represents" (Lothe 19) with "a set of implicit norms" (Rimmon-Kenan 88), especially as they cue a range of presupposed meanings as they are circulated in culture through the brandishing of the novel's importance and its historical author's greatness.

One sees this subtly at work when one divines the TV-Noli's assumptions about its viewers. The adaptation apparently presupposes a specific kind of audience – the implied reader in narrative theory – that would remember, no matter how imperfectly, to take on a "role…to assemble the meaning of the text" (Ian Maclean qtd. in Lothe 19), to read the TV-Noli from a limited and limiting standpoint. This is so, because the premises of the narrative adaptation are based on conventions of meaning-making – a repertoire of sociohistorical and cultural norms that regulate the conception, production, and reception of Rizalian meanings which have matured over time.

Returning once again to the opening scene, one hears, over the image of the stormy night and the gravedigger in haste, a modulated voice-over, saying,

> Bayan ko, giliw, sa pagnanais kong malunasan ang kanser
> na lumulupig sa'yong katawan, gagayahin ko sila noong

> araw. Dadalhin kita sa may pinto ng Simbahan, upang doo'y ipamata at iamot ng dalangin sa mga mananawagan sa Diyos.
>
> [My beloved motherland, in my desire to render cure for the cancer that is destroying your body, I will do as they did long ago. I will bring you to the doorway of the Church for all to see, so that those who are praying to God may covet God's attention in prayer for you.][3]

Once the initiated viewer hears these words, he or she would recognize the lines from the Noli's dedication, which is also a standard point of discussion in secondary texts that seek to answer the question, "Why did Rizal write the Noli" (Ongoco 1)? In the original, Rizal's dedication is a paratext, an appendage in the beginning of the printed book and not part of the main narrative. But the adaptation very subtly reintroduces the historical author into the texture of the diegetic world. The initiated viewer knows that Rizal wrote the Noli, but Rizal does not speak as Rizal in the novel itself; in the TV-Noli, without naming whose voice is speaking, the screen narrator absorbs the authority of Rizal as narrator over this adaptation.

Rizal, as the historical author, is the least accessible in the Noli, because his relationship to the text upon reading is indirect and mediated by language and the literary techniques that he uses. As a matter of fact, identifying when it is "Rizal himself" that is speaking when his characters are speaking and with which character "Rizal himself" identifies the most has always been a bone of contention in Rizalian criticism. Is Rizal Ibarra, Elias, Tasio, Simoun, Padre Florentino, or somebody else?

This insertion of Rizal's voice in the TV-Noli renders practically null the distinctions between narrator and author, presupposing at the onset that the Noli and its adaptations are Rizal's; and it is Rizal's voice that one hears in it, his point-of-view that one uses to see.

The maze of his texts is Rizal, and Rizal is his texts; there is no going behind the texts to the author. But by inserting the historical author into the narrative, the adaptation reclaims textual authority and confirms the textual inseparability that is unique to Rizal and his writings, especially necessary because of the ambiguity and debates that have accrued over the name of Rizal and what he believed, espoused, stood for, and meant.

This insertion of "Rizal" in the narrative is achieved with a series of sleights of hand. The reference to "ancient temples" in the original dedication, which situates Noli in the mainstream of world literature by virtue of allusion,

is substituted with the more familiar image for the Filipino viewer of "Simbahan" ["Church"]. More remarkably, the word, "giliw," is interjected with an emphatic pause, referencing Rizal's image of Filipinas as a "beloved." This reference to the adored motherland is not in the original dedication of Noli, but is an image which occurs elsewhere in Rizal's writings.

"Giliw" ["Beloved"] echoes the first line of the very popular poem now known as Mi último adios. Originally untitled and unsigned, it is now imputed to Rizal and considered by many as his greatest poem. In it, the persona expresses his gladness in sacrificing his life for the motherland he adores. Furthermore, the persona speaks of humble anonymity, of willingly subjecting himself to the ravages of time and forgetfulness, so long as he can offer his life to his native land.

> Y cuando en noche oscura se envuelva el cementerio
> Y solos sólo muertos queden velando allí,
> No turbes su reposo, no turbes el misterio
> Tal vez acordes oigas de citara ó salterio,
> Soy yo, querida Patria, yo que te canto á ti.
>
> Y cuando ya mi tumba de todos olvidada
> No tenga cruz ni piedra que marquen su lugar,
> Deja que la are el hombre, la esparza con la azada,
> Y mis cenizas antes que vuelvan á la nada,
> El polvo de tu alfombra que vayan á formar.
>
> [And when the dark night wraps the graveyard around
> With only the dead in their vigil to see
> Break not my repose or the mystery profound
> And perchance thou mayst hear a sad hymn resound
> 'T is I, O my country, raising a song unto thee.]
>
> [And even my grave is remembered no more
> Unmark'd by never a cross nor a stone
> Let the plow sweep through it, the spade turn it o'er
> That my ashes may carpet earthly floor,
> Before into nothingness at last they are blown.][4]

These two verses from the poem ring ironically, when one considers that Rizal himself wished for anonymity, for a barely marked grave (Documentos

Rizalinos 91), and yet, quite the contrary, he is remembered; and when one considers how this poem is juxtaposed with the first scene of the TV-Noli, which depicts the rape of the grave of a great man. It is as if the dead man, whose body would have been better forgotten than desecrated like this, is Rizal himself, once more given a voice to speak.

As the gravedigger in the opening scene throws away his spade and uses his bare hands to scour the mud, the camera frames him in front of a backdrop of crosses and whitewashed gravestones. The voice-over continues, "Para dito, sisikapin kong ilahad ang iyong kalagayan nang buong katotohanan…" ["For this reason, I will give my utmost to speak of your condition truthfully"]. From here, it is revealed that the man is digging out a casket, which he is now, without shame, trying to pry open. The voice-over proceeds, "… sukdulang masadlak kami sa kahihiyan, sapagkat kami man na mga anak mo'y nagtataglay ng iyong karupukan" ["even if this means that we all should be shamed, for we your children bear the same defects that you have"]. By the end of this voice-over, the gravedigger has successfully opened the casket, and the camera zooms into what he is now grasping – a corpse, monstrous and faceless, a rotting body dressed in white.

To reiterate, the opening scene is here rendered which was in the novel only recounted by dialogue. What is noteworthy is how this first scene, as in many of the scenes in the TV-Noli, economizes a network of meanings and plot details succinctly and symbolically. From a novel of 64 chapters and an Epilogue, the miniseries was aired in thirteen 50-minute episodes only.

It could very well be that, instead of the dinner party in the first chapter of the novel, this choice for an opening scene is more "cinematic," if not more sensationally "revolting," and therefore more fitting as a televisual opening. Whatever the exact intention, the opening approximates the scandal that attended the arrival of the Noli, which, more than a century later, has now been absorbed, if not dulled, by official memory.[5]

Instead of the skillful exposition of time, place, and social types of the Noli's own historical present, for which Rizal was much praised (Almario, Si Rizal 85-127, 192-5; Bernad), the TV-Noli eludes the remoteness of period narrative with a "revolting" opening. It symbolically limns, at the onset, the key humanist themes of the Noli – the physicality of sickness (voice-over) and death (mise en scène) and how it is embodied by corrupt individuals (the gravedigger, Damaso). Taking the place of Ch. 1, which situates the novel in a precise cultural, social, and historical context, the adaptation instead plunges

the viewer into the heart of "human nature," as it were – the act of digging up a corpse and the image of a stormy night being objective correlatives of human nature's darkness and inscrutability.

But the insertion of the voice-over of "Rizal," addressed to "bayan ko" ["my motherland"], anchors the adaptation on the discourse of nation. The voice-over is an implicit cue that what is being referred to by the title "noli me tangere" should still be understood as a specific society suffering a "social cancer" and not merely some corrupt individuals. And just as the doctor must touch the irksome diseased body to find a cure for it, the TV-Noli purports to shamelessly unearth a casket and reveal hidden skeletons.

"Para dito, sisikapin kong ilahad ang iyong kalagayan
nang buong katotohanan…"

Moreover, the translation of the Noli's dedication as adapted in the voice-over is altered to mean that the narrator/author speaking is in solidarity with his audience – in the case of the TV-Noli, the Filipino mass audience; that is, they are all, together, members of one and the same corrupt society. Consider the original dedication by Rizal.

> Y a este fin, tratare de reproducer fielmente tu estado sin contemplaciones; levantare parte del velo que encubre el mal, sacrificando a la verdad todo, hasta el mismo amor propio, pues, como hijo tuyo, adolezco tambien de tus defectos y flaquezas.

> [And to this end, I will strive to reproduce thy condition faithfully, without discriminations; I will raise a part of the veil that covers the evil, sacrificing to truth everything, even vanity itself, since, as thy son, I am conscious that I also suffer from thy defects and weaknesses.][6]

Apart from the omission of some phrases (e.g., "levantare parte del velo que encubre el mal, sacrificando a la verdad todo"), what is noteworthy is the change in the person of the pronouns used, from first person (reflexive) singular, "myself" ("hasta el mismo amor propio"; "como hijo tuyo, adolezco tambien de tus defectos y flaquezas") to the first person plural, "we" ("sukdulang masadlak kami sa kahihiyan"; "sapagkat kami man na mga anak mo'y nagtataglay ng iyong karupukan.").

The narrator/author is dissolved into the very texture of the narrative present; the authorship and historical particularity of the dedication omitted (i.e., "The Author. Europe 1886" is erased) turning each viewing, as the drama is perpetually in the present tense, into now; and the particularly positioned autonomous "I" in time and space is rendered as an anonymous and mass-disseminated "we." The singularity of the text and the author and the specificity of the historical moment are now dispersed for a popular mass audience.

Tasio, Adaptation, and the Future of the Nation's Present

"Fidelity" has been conventionally used as a critical concept for evaluating the merits of any screen adaptation of a canonical novel. And, in an important sense, this should be more crucial when adapting not just any canonical work, but the master-narrative of the nation. Dormiendo, for example, stresses that the TV-Noli

> was a modest effort to faithfully preserve Rizal's novel in the film medium, its rich gallery of characters…as well as the period in which they lived. Moreover, the TV series successfully adhered to the original flavor of the novel, with the dialogue retaining, for the most part, the essence of Rizal's message. [italics mine] (20)

This comment on the TV-Noli, considering how much the adaptation departs from the original ending, is both false and true, with regard to how the TV-Noli figures in the discourse of nation as circumscribed by the Noli. The TV-Noli is anchored on fidelity to "the essence of Rizal's message" (Dormiendo 20), as previously demonstrated in the reading of the adaptation's first scene – that is, by the adaptation's reification of aspects of the Noli's various reading histories and its invocation of popular and official memory through the economy of the audiovisual medium. But when the last scene unfolds, a scene altogether new and not found in the novel, the adaptation begins to take on a trajectory apparently at cross-purposes with the very project of the Noli as the first half of Rizal's diptych.

The Noli's last chapter before the Epilogue, ironically entitled "Christmas Eve," is one of the saddest chapters in the whole novel (Noli Ch. 63).[7] It ends with the tragic deaths of the hapless Sisa and the selfless Elias, both of whom the reader has followed throughout the novel, from one disfranchisement and misfortune to another.

Sisa, who goes mad after losing both his sons, gains one last occasion of lucidity and recognizes her son, Basilio, before she dies in a secluded forest. Meanwhile, Elias, who is fatally wounded by the civil guards in his attempt to save Ibarra (Noli Ch. 62), also arrives in the same forest to die. The boy, Basilio, then buries the body of his mother, Sisa, and burns the remains of "the stranger," Elias, when they expire. And, so, the wretched mother dies, a victim until the end. The selfless hero's sacrifices and death are unsung, and even the fumes of his body are despised. The fate of Ibarra, the only man who could redeem the name and history of the heroic stranger, is unknown. And the poor boy is now alone in a dark forest, an orphan, and without a certain future.

The narrator then draws up the symbolic image of the storm once again in the Epilogue. Amidst a raging storm is pictured an apparition of a "ghost… [as] beautiful as the Virgin." After the storm, when the skies clear up, the novel does not end on a positive note, but with the dismal allusion to how Maria Clara succumbed to madness and was "never spoken about" again.

Both these endings – the deaths of Sisa and Elias and the dementia and "disappearance" of Maria Clara – presage the storm that was coming in the Noli's sequel, El filibusterismo. Fili chronicles a storm arguably fiercer than the one depicted in the Noli, and at the center of it is now Ibarra turned into the revolutionary anarchist, Simoun.

The last episode of the TV-Noli, meanwhile, has the un-ironic and hopeful title, "Pasko at ang Bagong Taon." Its very last scene is the denouement that is properly absent in the original novel. In it we find three characters, two of whom we will no longer see in the closing of the Noli – Basilio, Ibarra, and Filipo Lino.

Two weeks have passed since the tragic deaths of Sisa and Elias, and all is quiet one bright afternoon. In the open field where Basilio buried the body of Sisa and burnt the body of Elias, the boy is tidying up a plot of ground marked with a mound of stones. This tableau is the reversal of the TV-Noli's opening mise en scène, therefore indicating a symbolic reversal – the skies are clear and the dearly departed are remembered with respect.

Basilio and Filipo beside the marked graves
of Sisa and Elias.

The boy is approached by Filipo, the former teniente-mayor, who, in the original novel, may be considered a "minor" character, relative to Ibarra, Elias, Maria Clara, and even Sisa, and their places in popular memory. Filipo asks what the boy's plans are now; Basilio admits that he has none, except that he wished to be educated. Filipo invites the boy to live with him and his wife, so that Basilio could help them out with some chores, at the same time, be taught how to read, write, and do math. The tail end of their exchange is as follows:

Filipo

Ano sa palagay mo?

[What do you think?]

Basilio

Ewan ko po. Ayaw ko po kasing magsilbing pabigat sa ibang tao.

[I do not know. I just do not want to be a burden to anyone.]

Filipo

Hindi. Ito'y isang bagay na gusto kong gawin at pabor pa nga sa akin. Pagisipan mo.

[No. This is something I want to do. You would even be doing me a favor. Think about it.]

Basilio

Maraming salamat po.

[Thank you very much.]

Filipo

Wala 'yon. Ako pa nga ang tutulungan mo.

[It is nothing. If ever, it is you who would be helping me.]

In the novel, as in the adaptation, Filipo is characterized as one of the few undoubtedly conscientious young men of San Diego, who would stand up against the Spanish colonial authorities, sometimes with cunning but always without fear (Noli Chs. 20, 35, 40). But in the TV-Noli's last scene, Filipo is portrayed as being more than just brave and scrupulous at specific moments in the narrative present, but selfless and giving in his willingness to be accountable for the future of the orphan boy.

After Filipo makes his offer, Basilio secretly walks off to Ibarra, who is sitting behind a tree, pensive but with a very peaceful mien and a faint smile. This portrayal of Ibarra is contrary to what the reader of the original Noli, who knows what Ibarra will become in Fili, would expect.

It is revealed that Basilio had been doing errands for Ibarra, who was still in hiding, and that the latter had helped the boy through the weeks following his being orphaned. The exchange of Basilio and Ibarra is as follows:

Basilio

Nais po niya [Don Filipo] akong patuluyin sa kanila. Tuturuan raw po niya akong magbasa at iba pa.

[Don Filipo wants me to board with them. He says he will teach me to read, among other things.]

Ibarra

Wala nang mas magaling pang guro at mas mabuting tao.

[You could not have a better teacher, who is also a good man.]

Basilio

Paano po kayo?

[But how will you manage?]

Ibarra

Labis na ang 'yong nagawa para sa'kin. Salamat sa tulong mo, mas ligtas na'ko ngayon.

Wala nang naghahanap sa'kin at wala nang nag-aabang na ako'y magkamali at masira. Makapupunta na ako kahit saan at magagawa ang kahit anumang naisin. Sa ngayon.

[You have done me more than enough already. Thanks to you, I am safer now.]

[No one is pursuing me anymore, and no one is waiting for me to commit a grave mistake and be ruined. I can now go anywhere and do anything I please. For now.]

Basilio

Hindi ko po mababayaran ang lahat ng ginawa n'yo para sa'kin.

[I can never repay you for all the things that you have done for me.]

Ibarra

Bakit hindi?

Mababayaran mo ako sa pamamagitan ng pagtulong sa'yong kapwa. Higit sa lahat, tulungan mo silang matutong tumulong sa kanilang sarili. 'Yan ang pinakadakilang magagawa ng isang tao para sa kanyang kapwa.

Nauunawaan mo ako?

[Why not?]

[You can repay me by helping your countrymen. Above all, help them to help themselves. That is the greatest thing a person can do for his fellowmen.]

[Do you understand?]

Basilio (nodding)

Gagawin ko po ang lahat ng aking makakaya.

[I will do everything that I can.]

Ibarra (smiling)

'Yon lang naman ang magagawa ng kahit sino.

[That is the only thing that anyone can do anyway.]

After this exchange, Basilio leaves Ibarra, in a sense freed from any debt of gratitude for his survival and for the earlier efforts of Ibarra to bring justice to Basilio's family (to no avail). But in another sense, with Ibarra's admonition to pay the debt forward, Basilio – as connoted by the term, "utang na loob" ["debt of gratitude"] – is permanently in debt, this time, to others (i.e., his countrymen).

Therefore, if Basilio begins with himself, develops self-determination, and leads others to the same disposition outside of the narrative timeline in historical space and time, then Rizal's dream of a nation "without slaves and without tyrants" would have become a reality, because the debt will always be owed to others permanently, always to be settled presently.

In other words, the TV-Noli, while leaving the nation's narrative future open to the actions of Basilio, is no longer as open as the Noli, which has been described as having "an embarrassed and inconclusive ending," without the Fili (San Juan, "Toward" 527).

It seems that after his misfortunes, and based on his final words to Basilio, Ibarra "has learned his lesson." It seems also that the lives sacrificed are enough to end the thread of vengeance which cuts across the Noli and the Fili. Basilio as a metonym for the whole of his generation, the representative of Filipino youth, has burnt the bodies of martyrs, has paid respect to their barely but symbolically marked graves, and is now expected to initiate a new beginning beyond the narrative present.

The last image of the TV-Noli is that of Filipo, waiting for a limping Basilio to catch up with him on his way home. Tenderness and concern mark Filipo's

query about Basilio's "favorite fruit" and their "small talk" about how trees in season are now bearing fruits. The setting sun, framed in the background of their silhouetted figures, has turned the whole landscape now darkened with shadows into gold. Filipo and Basilio walk off into the sunset with jovial gait.

Filipo and Basilio walk off into the sunset
with a jovial gait.

This is a symbolic ending, complete unto itself in its portrayal of the relationship between the nation's present becoming and future being. Filipo's adoption of Basilio is the concretization in action of Ibarra's words – the helping of others, the teaching of others to help themselves, and the paying of the debt of gratitude forward, which must permanently underlie the future of nation-formation.

But to whom is Filipo indebted?

The TV-Noli, mediated, limited, and shaped by the conventions of the television series, presents a very subtle departure from the Noli in its characterization of Don Anastacio, more popularly known as Pilosopo Tasio – the man from whom Filipo owes a debt of gratitude.

It has been remarked by Radaić that "[hindi] lubhang mahalaga ang tauhang ito [Tasio] kung pag-uusapan ang pagkakabuo ng nobela" ["the character of Tasio is not very important if the whole of the novel is to be considered"] (89). This opinion, I presume, is based on the fact that in the Noli's plot, Tasio contributes no decisive action and, in this sense, makes no contribution to the "overall makeup of the novel." In a very important sense, "all he does is

talk," and, as such, he is a marginal character in the mainstream of narrative action.

While he does not contribute any of the major actions that would move the plot of the original novel, Radaić grants that "mahalaga ang kaniyang kaisipan" ["his thoughts are valuable"] (89; cf. Agoncillo 48-57). Agoncillo describes Tasio as "malalim at matalinghaga" ["deep and mysterious"], and this, I presume, is based on what Tasio says (instead of does) and how he says it. As in the epigraph of this chapter, quoted from White, when Tasio "seeks to make sense of such problematical topics as human nature, culture, society, and history, he never says precisely what he wishes to say or means precisely what he says" (Tropics 1).

On the one hand, this meaning/not-meaning and saying/not-saying are born out of the necessity of discourse (even in its simplest meaning of verbal expression), which must shape in thought, mediate in words, and therefore always limit the quiddity of what Tasio seeks to mean at any given moment. That is why, as Agoncillo observes,

> [hindi] siya [Tasio] nagsasalita ng pabigla-bigla – sinusukat muna niya ang kausap bago magtangkang maghayag ng pala-palagay na inaakala niyang tumpak, sapagkat napaliming mabuti at napagbiling-biling sa kanyang isipan ang lahat ng bahagi ng isang suliranin. (Agoncillo 49)
>
> [Tasio does not speak in haste – he first sizes up the one he is talking with before he even attempts to state opinions which he believes are correct because he has pondered them and thoroughly thought out in his mind all the sides and points-of-view of the problem.]

This is also revealed in Tasio's frequent use of aphorisms to capture succinctly, if not always ironically, the many dimensions of "hidden truth" behind situations and events he happens to observe. For instance, in Ch. 12, "All Souls' Day," Tasio talks to a couple of gravediggers who condescend toward him, because he has the reputation of being a fool. Rizal writes, "'You're like the grave you're digging,' apostrophized the old man nervously. 'You don't know the value of what you lose'" [italics mine] (86).

On the other hand, and related to the foregoing excerpt, Tasio's meaning/not-meaning and saying/not-saying are framed by how different people

understand him differently and by how he shifts his "tone" and changes his "diction," depending on how (he thinks) he would be understood. Agoncillo sums up how people are divided in relation to Tasio thus: "Baliw o pantas? Ito, ayon sa nakatatarok ng kanyang isipan; at yaon naman, ayon sa mga karaniwang mamamayang dayukdok…" ["Lunatic or sage? This, according to those who fathom his mind; and that, for the poor and commonfolk"] [italics mine] (Agoncillo 48).

While Tasio's interaction with the folk is marginal and always coded in aphorisms and apostrophes, his interaction with Ibarra and Filipo (Noli Ch. 25 and 53, respectively), the two characters who appear in the last scene of the TV-Noli with Basilio, are characterized by sagacity. In Ch. 25, "At the Philosopher's House," Ibarra visits Tasio to ask for the old man's advice on the matter of putting up a school to venerate the memory of Ibarra's father. Tasio, among other things, advises Ibarra to "consult the curate, the gobernadorcillo, and all persons in authority. They will give you bad, stupid, or useless advice, but consultation doesn't mean compliance."

This advice is essentially Tasio's mode of discoursing – adapting one's own discourse to suit its hearers. Not to say what one means to say in order to put truth to use in actuality is also Tasio's advice to Filipo in Ch. 20, "The Meeting in the Town Hall." But in Ch.53, "Il Buon Di Si Conoce Da Mattina," Tasio, already on his deathbed, still expresses concern about the practical, political matter of Filipo's resignation as teniente-mayor at a time when Filipo is at odds with the Civil Guard.

> "Really, I don't know whether to congratulate you or not that your resignation has been accepted. […] Now that you are engaged in a contest with the Civil Guard it's not quite proper. In time of war you ought to remain at your post," [Tasio said].
>
> […] "You alone, nothing; but with the rest, much. You should have taken advantage of this opportunity to set an example to the other towns. Above the ridiculous authority of the gobernadorcillo are the rights of the people. It was the beginning of a good lesson and you have neglected it." [italics mine] (406)

Here Tasio convinces Filipo that open defiance against the powers that be is necessary, even without positing eventual victory or vindication. Being in the right and on the side of the people, standing up to the colonial authority

– the act, and not the mere words – would be an example, a lesson by one who knows to the many who do not.

Tasio advises Ibarra to "bow," "seek support and humble himself," because, even with Ibarra's wealth and influence to effect social change, he could not do anything alone; and while Ibarra has not even planted the seeds of change, it would be premature to have him uprooted so soon without his even trying to bend.

Meanwhile, Tasio is asking Filipo not to bow, not to bend, but to exert his efforts to defy the powers. Seeing that he has not the means of Ibarra, Filipo's defiance would serve as an example at present to the many that appear to be powerless as well. The few that rule, indeed, do not possess real power; real power is with the people (Noli Ch. 53). For Tasio, Filipo was not to mean his words in the town meeting in the matter of the fiesta, but was to mean his actions in the matter of upholding his duties, obligations, and rights louder than words.

Tasio also speaks to Filipo about the good seed planted at present and expected to take root and eventually bear fruit in the future. To this Filipo expresses incredulity,

> "Still, the new seed is small," objected Don Filipo….
> "If all enter upon the progress we purchase so dearly, it may be stifled." (408)

And with conviction and finality, Tasio declares,

> "Stifled! Who will stifle it? Man, that weak dwarf, stifle progress, the powerful child of time and action? When has he been able to do so? Bigotry, the gibbet, the stake, by endeavoring to stifle it, have hurried it along." (408)

In short, Tasio discursively frames the different but related tasks of Ibarra and Filipo at present in view of a singular future being of the nation.

Tasio, therefore, as can be divined in the last excerpted line, is a dreamy idealist, like Ibarra; his tears for Ibarra's school project, whose failure he already predicts, but whose success he wishes with all of his heart, are tears born out of the same idealism and optimism (Noli Ch. 25). On his deathbed, Tasio defends his dreaminess by saying

> "You [Filipo] are thinking of how easily I may be mistaken.... Today I am feverish, and I am not infallible: homo sum et nihil humani a me alienum puto, said Terence, and if at any time one is allowed to dream, why not dream pleasantly in the last hours of life? And after all, I have lived only in dreams! You are right, it is a dream! Our youths think only of love affairs and dissipations; they expend more time and work harder to deceive and dishonor a maiden than in thinking about the welfare of their country; our women, in order to care for the house and family of God, neglect their own: our men are active only in vice and heroic only in shame; childhood develops amid ignorance and routine, youth lives its best years without ideals, and a sterile manhood serves only as an example for corrupting youth. Gladly do I die!" [italics mine] (410)

It would seem in this monologue that Tasio, against his better judgment and the obvious anti-progressive circumstances of the present which he himself observes, closes his eyes before he dies to cast his hope on a dream. It is for this reason that Radaić believes that Tasio needed to die in the narrative after finally stating in its barest words his idealist view of the future, because the novel cannot proceed on this dreamy note as a realist novel (98). Thus Radaić argues this place of Tasio in the novel:

> Ninais ni Rizal na dalhin ang kaniyang tauhan sa kanyang di-kilala ngunit may tunay at pangalawang buhay, tamasahin ito, at mula dito ay bumalik sa kanyang normal na realidad, taglay ang mga natutuhang aral, kahit na katambal nito'y pinapangarap na pantasya. (97)
>
> [Rizal wanted to bring his readers to an unknown but real and second life, to experience it, and to return from there back to their normal reality, possessing new lessons learned, even if these lessons are coupled with hopeful fantasy.]

In the TV-Noli, Tasio's characterization is altered. The portrayal of Tasio's last days would highlight this point. On his deathbed, the old man is visited by Filipo and Doray (only Filipo visits him in the original), and Tasio is far from happy and dreamy. Recognizing Filipo's voice, the old man, now without vision, strokes Filipo's arm affectionately and, in spite of his own

ails, expresses his concern for the young man. And then, in fits and starts, convulsing, this already scrawny figure is reduced to a broken-down penitent. Tasio begins to weep like a child – a manner of behavior and a frame of mind so far removed from Tasio in the Noli.

Filipo and Doray visit Pilosopo Tasio,
the broken-down penitent.

Listen to Tasio's exchange with the young couple, Filipo and Doray, before he dies in the TV-Noli.

Tasio

Sino ang makakaalam kung naririto pa'ko bukas?

[Who knows if I will still be here tomorrow?]

Filipo (joking)

Ayoko ng ganyang usapan. Pagdating ng linggo ng umaga, inaasahan kong naroroon kayo sa paborito niyong lugar sa simbahan at kinukumbinsi ang lahat na kamuhian ang kanilang sarili. […]

[I do not like that kind of talk. On Sunday morning, I expect you to be there in your favorite spot in the church, convincing people to be angry at themselves.]

Tasio

May hihilingin ako sa'yo. 'Wag kang tatawa.

[I would like to ask of you a favor. Do not laugh.]

Filipo (suddenly serious)

Opo.

[Yes.]

Tasio

Gusto ko'ng dinggin mo ang aking kumpisal. Batid ko'ng hindi ka makapagbibigay ng kapatawaran, pero eto na ang pinaka-mainam na magagawa ko.

[I want you to hear my confession. I know that you cannot absolve me, but this is the best that I can do.]

Filipo (taken aback)

Akala ko'y seryosong usapan ang gusto n'yo? Ano'ng klaseng biro ito?

[I thought you wanted no-nonsense talk. What kind of a joke is this?]

Tasio

[…] Maniwala ka sa'kin, hindi ako nagbibiro.

[Believe me, this is no joke.]

Filipo

Makinig kayo sa'kin. Hindi lamang sa hindi ako pari, pero gaya ng alam ninyo, ako'y mas makasalanan pa kaysa sa inyo. […]

[Listen to me. Not only am I not a priest, but, as you know very well, I am more sinful than you.]

Tasio (fitfully)

Utang na loob. 'Wag mo na itong pahirapin pa.

Pagod na ako sa pakikipagtalo. Ang kailangan ko lang talaga ay isang kaibigang makakaunawa sa aking sinasabi. At makatutulong sa aking unawain ang aking sarili. […]

Bagamat ako ay nagtitika, ang hinihiling ko ay makalimutan na lang ako, hindi kapatawaran.

[Please. Do not make this any harder.]

[I am tired of debating. All I need is a friend who would understand what I am saying and would help me understand myself.]

[Even if I am being a penitent, my only wish is to be forgotten, not to be forgiven.]

Doray [crying unrestrainedly]

Iba na lang po ang hilingin n'yo, dahil hindi po namin kayo makakalimutan.

[You can ask for anything else but that, because we will never forget you.]

Here Tasio explicitly bemoans the fact that no one could understand him except, perhaps, Filipo, to whom he now "confesses his sins." He also confesses that he is tired of playing the gadfly. This characterization of Tasio, as the foregoing discussion has made implicit, is not consistent with the characterization in the original Noli. Moreover, what Tasio wishes for in the TV-Noli is to be forgotten, which is also contrary to Tasio's activity in the Noli.

Doray's response to Tasio's cry of personal despair in the TV-Noli complements the implicit desire of Tasio in the Noli to be remembered. Doray openly negates the self-image of Tasio in the TV-Noli as misunderstood and liable to be forgotten. Earlier in the novel (Ch. 14), Doray was scandalized by Tasio's rhetoric against Roman Catholic doctrines, and yet, now, she admits that she will not forget the old man.

The combination of Tasio's inactivity coupled with his idealism is apparently what the TV-Noli is correcting. If in the novel, before he dies, he is still able to criticize the young people for their indifference to the nation's future (Noli Ch. 53), in the TV-Noli he puts the blame on himself and absolves all others at his expense. Tasio continues,

Tasio (fitfully)

Iniwas ako ng Diyos sa kahirapan, karamdaman, at pagdurusa... sa hinabahaba ng aking buhay. Pero ang sinukli ko sa kanya ay paglibak sa kanyang pagpapala.

May malaking kayamanan akong ginugol para sa karunungan na hindi nagdulot ng kapakinabangan sa tao. Hindi ko isinugal ang aking kaginhawaan para sa aking mga paniniwala, dahil natatakot akong matanggihan.

Hindi ko nakuhang magbigay ng paggalang at pagmamahal kanino man....

[...] Natuto man ako ng tunay na pagtitika, subalit, kailanman, hindi ako naging bahagi ng buhay ng iba. Ang

inaasaahan ko na lang ngayon ay makalimutan ng Diyos na nilikha niya ako.

[In my long life, God kept me from poverty, sickness, and suffering. But in return I mocked his blessings.]

[I invested great riches to gain knowledge, but this was of no benefit to the people. I did not risk my own comforts for my beliefs, because I was afraid of being refused.]

[I could not even show love and respect to anyone.]

By this confession of inactivity, Tasio is trying to atone for his sins of omission and the TV-Noli is trying to reposition Tasio's character's thematic efficacy. In the Noli, he had been negatively condescending toward the many, because he could see something about the present and the future that they could not. Tasio, in the adaptation, is, in effect, saying, 'It was not enough that I had knowledge; I did not do anything. It was not enough that I knew something for myself; I did not do anything for others.'

In the novel, it is the knowledge of Tasio gained from books which is emphasized. As "an old scholastic" (Noli Ch. 53) and not necessarily a man of action, Tasio is associated with books, the printed matter, and dissociated from palabas ["mere show," literally, "outward"] (Noli Ch. 40; cf. Fernandez). The house of Tasio is filled with books (Noli Ch.25), and he admits his fear of losing them, his only material investment (Noli Ch.14).

Meanwhile, always purposefully playing up his own image as a fool, Tasio calls the fiesta celebration "foolish" (Noli Ch. 29); mocks the religious procession and the icons (Noli Ch. 38); describes the very popular komedya (also, moro-moro), which the Church uses to entertain and (mis)educate the natives, "nonsense" (Noli Ch.40); and claims that the piously awaited sermon of the frayle is more amusing than the incredible komedya (Noli Ch. 30). In short, in "matters of consequence," Tasio believes in the private and individually activated efficacy of the printed text, but not in the mass-consumed and regressive fantasies of the komedya.

In the nationalist inflection of Philippine media studies, the komedya occupies an ambivalent space, especially as it relates to the "masses" and its perceived influence on them. Clodualdo del Mundo Jr. likens Philippine television to the komedya (42-44). He writes,

The core of the free televisual world, like that of the moro-moro, values a world of order. The ultimate end of moro-moro TV is order. After having

their fill of fun and entertainment, the masa come out of their euphoria and return to their own worlds. […] Each class remains in its place, but the status quo has become more tolerable. Order, therefore, is maintained. And the moro-moro goes on and on. The next day promises another carnival. (44)

In this regard, it is as if, analogously, Tasio sides or can side with the folk, but – or, precisely, because – he remains essentially outside of the public sphere. He remains only in the sidelines – looking on at the procession or the preparation of the theatrical performance, interacting with people during fiesta, waiting outside the church before the sermon – all the while convincing everyone of the folly of popular cultural practices. He is for the common folk, but he is not "one" of them, because he cannot accept the status quo embodied and maintained by the moro-moro.

The pioneering scholar of the komedya, Nicanor Tiongson, asserts that

> Dahil sa kosmopolitanisasyon, sa mapagpalayang pamamaraan ng pag-iisip na binuo ng kilusang repormista at iniluwal ng Himagsikan…nabuksan ang mga mata ng ilustradong Pilipino sa "kamangmangan" ng moro-moro. (Kasaysayan 95)
>
> [Because of cosmopolitanization, the liberative manner of thinking conceived by the Propaganda movement and birthed by the Revolution…opened the eyes of the "enlightened" Filipino to the "ignorance" of the moro-moro.]

However, as he argues elsewhere, the few artists and viewers who are "enlightened" do not share the mass audience's "tastes [which] have been miseducated for centuries by traditional theater and film" ("From Stage" 94). He adds that "the Filipino cinema's heritage from traditional theater [including the komedya] explains its backwardness and its popularity" ("From Stage" 93), and that "many an 'artistic' film by a new, budding and obviously talented director has flopped precisely because the director has not understood the traditions of the Filipino film ("From Stage" 84).

The TV-Noli, then, reconfigures the character of Tasio in relation to the adaptation's task at hand. In it, Tasio is portrayed as being repentant for his remaining separate from the common folk, for not positively condescending, as it were, to the level of the crowd. This is implicit in the notion of "popularizing" the Noli and the raison d'être of many Rizal adaptations.

But in the TV-Noli, Filipo belies Tasio's self-deprecating words with Filipo's own words and actions. The young man answers the penitent old man,

> ***Filipo***
>
> Patawarin ninyo ako, subalit hindi ko matatanggap ang inyong pagkukumpisal…
>
> [Forgive me, but I cannot hear your confession.]
>
> ***Tasio*** (intensely)
>
> Bakit?!
>
> [But why?!]
>
> ***Filipo***
>
> …sapagkat kayo ay totoong mapagbiro. Kahit sa banig ng kamatayan, nakukuha n'yong magsinungaling.
>
> Ilang tao na sa bayang ito ang inyong naiahon sa kawalan ng pagasa? Ilan na ang tinulungan n'yo na hindi n'yo man lamang pinagisipan? Ilan na ang napatawa tungo sa inyong pagiging isang walang kwentang hangal? Ilan na ang hiniya n'yo hanggang sa matutong magisip para sa kanilang sarili?
>
> Ito ba ang walang saysay?
>
> [Because you are certainly joking. Even in your deathbed you jest.]
>
> [How many people from this town have you lifted from hopelessness? How many have you helped without even thinking twice about it? How many have laughed at you for your being a useless fool? How many have you shamed, so that they would be forced to think for themselves?]
>
> [Is this what you mean by futility?]

In short, Filipo is trying to convince Tasio that he has already done much. In a scene unique to the TV-Noli, even Padre Salvi imputes the seeds of action to Tasio, when the kura maliciously blames the old man for the plot of rebellion against the colonial government, a rebellion which he the Church itself orchestrated.[8] In the presence of the clamoring wives and mothers whose husbands and sons were arrested for being implicated in the rebellion, Padre Salvi hisses at Tasio.

> Sapagkat lubhang dinibdib n'yo ang nangyari sa pinuno ng paghihimagsik [i.e., si Ibarra, kasama si Filipo], Don

> Anastacio, dapat siguro'y personal niyong sadyain ang mga awtoridad upang ipagtanggol ang mga kaibigang n'yong kayo ang dambana at inspirasyon.
>
> [Since you have taken what happened to the leader of this uprising [i.e., Ibarra, along with Filipo] so seriously, Don Anastacio, perhaps you should personally visit the authorities in order to defend your friends who consider you their idol and inspiration.]

But more than impute the seeds of action to Tasio in relation to the plot twists, the TV-Noli repositions Tasio as one whose contribution – even in his apparent inactivity – to change is more permanent than any other character's contribution to the mainstream of action. Tasio was right, after all; Ibarra's wealth and influence are of no use now. Elias is dead. Of the men of the TV-Noli, it is now only Filipo who is in any position to do something, but he, too, is already powerless, having relinquished his political position.

But Filipo's activity, by the TV-Noli's end, is now shifted from the sphere of politics to the sphere of education, from the sphere of the present to the sphere of the future. Indeed, if Tasio is forgotten by neither Filipo nor Doray, then certainly all that the old man taught and stood for will be bequeathed to Basilio, their adopted son. This is why Ibarra, as mentioned earlier, remarks to the orphan boy that there is no better teacher than Filipo; because Filipo learned from the best teacher. And now, with Filipo paying the debt forward, and Basilio admonished and expected to do the same, then the present and the future of the nation is discursively bridged.

In conclusion, I have attempted to demonstrate how the adaptation criticism of Rizal onscreen, which narrowly addresses specific literary and audiovisual works, also addresses the wider and more fundamental question of the nation. Metacritically, it illuminates how the TV-Noli, as one instance of Rizal screen adaptation, resolves, contains, and negotiates: a) the dictates and limitations of the televisual (or cinematic) mode of production in the sphere of popular culture vis-à-vis the literary achievement of Rizal; and b) the need to reify ambivalent Rizalian thought through narrative vis-à-vis the diverse, many times disparate, critical and popular opinions on Rizal and his ideas on forging the nation. Each new adaptation, therefore, necessarily reconfigures the three reading histories marked by the Rizal Bill and refunctions the constancy and compulsion of reading Rizal at any one historical and crucial now.

Acknowledgment

Noli Me Tangere TV Series
Produced by the Cultural Center of the Philippines
Directed by Eddie Romero

ENDNOTES

[1]Ocampo, who is a current Rizal scholar, popular for his editorial column devoted to Philippine history in the newspaper, Philippine Daily Inquirer, admits to not having read the novels until he had to teach them in a college Rizal course (Rizal Without 90).

[2] The 13-episode adaptation is still being sold by the Cultural Center of the Philippines as six VHS-format tapes at P12,000. See http://www.culturalcenter.gov.ph.

[3]All English translations from the TV-Noli are the author's.

[4]The English translation is by Charles Derbyshire (1911). Rizal's Mi Ultimo Adios and his two novels have been translated numerous times, but Derbyshire's translations are here used, because they have been the first and official English versions to be published in the Philippines; widely used and disseminated in textbook form for school use since their publication; one of the most reprinted versions and still practically the most immediately accessible for free online; and, for these reasons, arguably the most popular translations to this day (cf. Castro 15; Ocampo 103). While not asserted as the "best" translations or as having had direct influence on later adaptations, these characteristics of Derbyshire's translations fit well the project of the present paper, which deals with the official/regimented and popular dimensions of reading Rizal.

Notably, in the context of screen adaptations, these translations may be considered as significant for ushering in the "American Rizal," along with the first ever Rizal films, which are also, significantly, the first films ever produced (by Americans) in the Philippines, Edgar Meyer Gross' La Vida de Rizal (1912) and Albert Yearsley's El Fusilamento de Dr. José Rizal (1912). The two adaptations, preceding the influential American-framed biography by Austin Coates, Life, Lineage, and Labors of José Rizal (1913), controversially battled for box-office sales and both were patronized by "throngs" of Filipinos (Pareja 21-22).

[5]The scandal, though, was rehearsed when the Rizal Bill was authored. See Totanes.

[6]All English translations from the Noli are by Charles Derbyshire (1912). See note 4.

[7] In Ch. 63, the reader meets important characters whose equally tragic lives will be depicted in the Fili, including Tandang Selo, Tano, Huli, and Kabesang Tales.

[8] In the novel, Tasio does not live long enough to see the release of the men implicated in the rebellion, including Filipo and Ibarra. In the TV-Noli, Filipo is freed and, with his wife, Doray, gets to visit the old man on his deathbed one last time. The dialogue here quoted at length is from this scene of Filipo's visit.

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