Perhaps you remember Lessing’s fable
about the boy and the serpent.
Each one writes his history
according to his convenience.

— Rizal to Blumentritt
Leipzig, 22 August 1886

MORE THAN THREE CENTURIES after the Italian Antonio Pigafetta wrote his narrative of the European discovery of the Philippines, a young Filipino named Jose Rizal read what he had to say in the original Italian.

Rizal was on his second sojourn in Europe after a short visit to the home country, a visit troubled by the controversy surrounding the appearance of his incendiary novel Noli me tangere (1887). Having arrived at Liverpool on 24 May 1888, he proceeded to London and, in the next nine months, worked at the British Museum, poring over books and manuscripts in its great circular Reading Room. He sought out the help of Orientalists like Henry Yule, the former British military officer who was president of Hakluyt Society, and Reinhold Rost, librarian of the India Office in London. Empty Sunday afternoons Rizal spent at the house of Dr. Rost in Primrose Hill, browsing in Rost’s library or chatting at tea with the amiable and aging Orientalist.

It was at the British Museum that Rizal discovered Pigafetta. Writing to Marcelo del Pilar on 4 February 1889, he enthused: “I have here Italian manuscripts that deal with the first coming of the Spaniards in the Philippines. They are written by a companion of Magellan.”

Earlier, Rizal had reported to Ferdinand Blumentritt that he had read and copied the Pigafetta “manuscript.” That Rizal read what was the

Ambrosian Codex published in Milan by Carlo Amoretto in 1800 was remarkable. A Spanish translation of the Amoretto, based on the 1801 French edition of the text, appeared only in 1890.³

Pigafetta’s account impressed Rizal. Lamenting that he did not have the time to translate the text “on account of my numerous chores,” he urged del Pilar to get one of the Filipinos in Madrid to study Italian (which he said, with his customary zest for languages, can be learned in one month) and translate the discovery account to Tagalog or Spanish “so that it may be known how we were in 1520.”⁴

Rizal reading Pigafetta in Europe’s premier repository of knowledge in the fogbound heart of empire is a striking image of a key moment in postcolonial history: The colonized tracks down his lost past in the archives of the colonizing West. It is a moment rife with risks, mystifications, and opportunities. How Rizal (or, for that matter, Filipino intellectuals like Pedro Paterno, T. H. Pardo de Tavera, and Isabelo de los Reyes) read Western sources, with what motives or to what effect, is an interesting problem in understanding the genesis of nationalist historiography as well as the power and limits of that hegemonic discursive formation Edward Said calls “Orientalism.”⁵

THE PIGAFETTA NARRATIVE, the first substantial European report on the Philippines, was just one of many Western sources Rizal read. In his first European sojourn (1882–1887), Rizal was already driven by a large appetite for learning. Even as he grappled with his medical studies and the writing of Noli me tangere, he was stirred by the need to devour all that Europe’s storehouse of learning had to offer. Reading his travel letters—breathless catalogues of things seen in Paris, Berlin, Heidelberg, Vienna—one is struck by the avidity with which he tried to consume what Europe had accumulated of her past and the world. He studied languages with the same hunger (French, German, English, Italian, Dutch—twenty-two languages in all, it is said), convinced that studying a language “will open to you the treasures of a country; that is, the knowledge, the learning, treasured in the language.”⁶

It was not an aimless hunger. For Rizal, knowledge was, above all, knowledge at his country’s service. On his second year in Europe, he was already toying with the idea of a collection of essays on the Philippines to which members of the Circulo Hispano-Filipino in Spain would contribute. The book did not materialize, and Rizal himself was on the move, leaving Madrid for Paris in
1885 to continue his medical studies and work on the *Noli* (half of which he had written in Madrid, a fourth in Paris, and the remainder in Germany).

Germany—"the great laboratory of Oriental studies," a country Rizal would call "my scientific mother country"—gave him a great deal of stimulation. He was mostly contemptuous of Spanish scholarship and had problems accessing Spanish archives. Traveling through Heidelberg, Leipzig, and Berlin, he collected books, visited museums and libraries, and corresponded with European scholars who had done work on Asia. Important stimulation came from Ferdinand Blumentritt, an Austrian schoolmaster who was Rizal's senior by eight years and with whom he was to maintain a deep friendship until his death. Hearing of Blumentritt's interest in the Philippines (the Austrian started publishing on Philippine ethnological topics in 1879), Rizal wrote to him from Heidelberg in 1886, and subsequently visited the Blumentritt family in Leitmeritz (Bohemia, then a state of Austria-Hungary).

With Blumentritt's help, Rizal entered the world of European Orientalist scholarship. In 1886 and 1887, he came to know Hendrik Kern, a professor of Sanskrit at the University of Leiden; A. B. Meyer, director of the Ethnographic Museum in Dresden; Wilhelm Joest, a University of Berlin professor who had published on the Philippines; and Fedor Jagor, a naturalist who had traveled to Southeast Asia (including the Philippines) for the ethnological collections of the Berlin Museum. Jagor invited him to the meetings of the Geographical Society in Berlin and introduced him to other scholars, notably Rudolf Virchow, president of the Berlin Society for Anthropology, Ethnology, and Prehistory (Berliner Gesellschaft fur Anthropologie, Ethnologie und Urgeschichte). An eminent pathologist and member of the Reichstag (1880–1893), Virchow was an intellectual giant in his time. His work with Adolf Bastian in ethnology and the building of Berlin's Royal Ethnological Museum and Anthropological Society in the 1880s "founded" German anthropology. Through Virchow, Rizal became a member of the Anthropological Society, attended lectures on topics like Mecca and ancient Japanese tombs, and in April 1887 read a paper in German before the society on the art of Tagalog versification.

Stimulated by these experiences, Rizal was brimming with ideas and plans. He looked into pedagogical methods in the schools of Saxony. He spoke of devoting himself, on his return to the Philippines, to translating European classics into Tagalog. He found time to translate Schiller's *Wilhelm Tell* and the tales of Hans Christian Andersen. Such was the excitement of learning that he dreamed of devoting his life entirely to its propagation. He wrote to Blumentritt on 13 April 1887: "If I could only be a professor in my country, I would stimulate these Philippine studies which are like the *noscet te ipsum* [know thyself] that gives the true concept of one's self and drives nations to do great things." Again on 31 March 1890, he told Blumentritt that he dreamed of a life devoted to scholarship upon his return home: "I shall order a little house built on a hill. Then I shall devote myself to the sciences, I shall read and write history, I shall establish a school and if you can stand the climate, then you will be its director. I am sure that all the young men, the cream of the youth of the country, will come to us." It is clear however what Rizal's ambition was at this time. He was interested in the study of the Filipino past, a task that he and his colleagues in the Propaganda Movement considered essential in the creation of a Filipino national identity. He was impatient with the shallow and histrionic polemical exchanges Filipinos in Spain found themselves engaged in with the Quiaocuips (pseudointellectuals and journalists who dabbled in scurrilous attacks against Filipinos and things Philippine). He was convinced of the need to ground the assertion of Filipino nationality in the diligent application of science and reason.

It was at the British Museum, on his second European sojourn, that his research was most productive. He immersed himself in sources relating to the Philippines—the Spanish missionary reports of Gaspar de San Agustin, Pedro Chirino, Francisco Colín, and Diego Aduarte, and such historical and travel books as those of Jagor, Bartolome de Argensola, Alfred Marche, and Giovanni Careri. He ranged widely, looking into accounts of the voyages of Francis Drake, Thomas Cavendish, and Jules Dumont d'Urville; the writings on Malay-Polynesian culture of Wilhelm von Humboldt, Wilhelm Joest, William Marsden, and Alfred Russel Wallace; and non-European texts like Chao-Ju-Kua's *Chu Fan Chih* (1225) and Ibn Battuta's 1355 Arabic account of his travels in the Orient. No Filipino of his time (or long after) pursued learning with as much passion.

From London, Rizal wrote to Blumentritt on 12 October 1888: "I read assiduously all the old sources of the history of the Philip-
pines. I do not think of leaving London until I shall have read all the books and manuscripts which bear on the Philippines.” 14 Aware that he needed to explore a much broader field, he also told Blumentritt that he was devoting himself to “the study of everything related to the Far East.” 15

Knowing he did not have the time to do a full-length history of the Philippines, Rizal decided to annotate what he found, in a sparse field, the best general history of the country, Sucesos de las Islas Filipinas (1609), by Antonio de Morga, a Spanish lawyer who served as lieutenant governor in the Philippines in 1595-1603. The book appealed to Rizal since it was not only “the first history of the Spanish Filipinos to be written by a layman, as opposed to the religious chroniclers”; its author, Rizal writes, “witnessed the last moments of the ancient Filipino civilization and played a part in the coming of the new era.” 16 While Morga framed his account in the context of Spain’s mission civilisatrice, Rizal saw the Spaniard’s work as a convenient peg for tracing a counter-narrative of the Filipino past.

Rizal worked under pressure and at great speed. In September 1888 he finished handcopying Morga’s book and in October was working “day and night” on the annotations. He finished the work in Paris and in November 1889 the manuscript was in the press. In his introduction to the book, Rizal, speaking from Europe, addressed his fellow Filipinos:

Born and brought up, as almost all of you, in the ignorance of our Yesterday, without voice or authority to speak of what we neither saw nor studied, I considered it necessary to invoke the testimony of an illustrious Spaniard who directed the destinies of the Filipinos in the beginnings of the new era and witnessed the last moments of our ancient nationality . . .

If the book succeeds to awaken your consciousness of our past, already effaced from your memory, and to rectify what has been falsified and slandered, then I have not worked in vain, and with this as a basis, however small it may be, we shall be able to study the future. 17

The book had mixed reviews and its circulation in the Philippines was proscribed. Blumentritt, who wrote the book’s preface, praised the work fulsomely for giving the viewpoint of colonialism’s victims but said that Rizal “proves too much,” gently chiding him for a presentist and anti-Catholic bias. Even some of Rizal’s Filipino colleagues had reservations. Isabelo de los Reyes remarked that Rizal overstates the ancient Filipino’s level of civilization and Juan Luna suggested that Rizal may have exaggerated due to “excessive patriotism.” 18

Leon Ma. Guerrero, a modern historian, bluntly remarks that the Morga was “a waste of time,” it was “too scholarly for partisans, too partisan for scholars.” 19 Rizal, Guerrero says, “only wrote on the margins of the memoirs of a Spanish eyewitness.” 20 Indeed, Rizal’s Morga is marginalia. The principal text circumscribed the range of the annotator: A book of “civic description,” Sucesos chronicles the succession of Spanish colonial administrations and only in the last chapter takes up the customs and culture of the Filipinos. Rizal’s annotations are often thin and desultory, laced with what would seem today gratuitous, editorializing jibes at despotic friars and ineffectual colonial officials. Guerrero’s dismissive remark, however, ignores the fact that the work of annotation in the nineteenth century was a serious, respectable project of scholarship. 21

More important, he misses the subversive significance of Rizal’s act, the radical audacity of a “native” annotating an “official” European account of his country’s history. Speaking from the “margins” (or more precisely, since Rizal footnoted, from “below”), the native interlocutor corrects errors, exposes ethnocentric bias and “pious lies,” cites inconsistencies, adds clarifications and elaborations, draws critical connections between past and present, invokes more authoritative references, and, not the least, demonstrates his superior erudition. Annotating the official text, the annotator disrupts, breaks down its seeming wholeness and demystifies its authority by exposing it as a historically contingent product.

Moreover, the Morga project is not a freestanding performance but an act in a series of acts. Rizal had said that while the Noli presents the spectacle of the present, his essay into Morga traces the roots of this sorry drama in the past. It stands connected to his novels and the political and historical articles he wrote at this time, such as his piece on the Spanish academic Vicente Barrantes’s Teatro tagalo (1889) and, more important, Filipinas dentro de cien años (1889–1890) and Sobre la indolencia de los filipinos (1890), which develop ideas sketched in the Morga annotations. 22
Finally, Rizal saw his Morga as an instance in what he believed was a collective undertaking that involved not only himself but other scholars and partisans for the Filipino cause. Even as he was hard at work on Sucesos, Rizal conceived, early in 1889, the bold idea of promoting scholarship on the Philippines by forming an Association Internationale des Philippinestes which would gather scholars interested in the Philippines. He proposed a multiracial roster of officers: Ferdinand Blumentritt as president; Frenchman Edmund Plautch, vice president; Anglo-German Reinhold Rost, counselor; Filipino-Spanish Antonio Regidor, counselor; and Rizal himself (Malayo-Tagalo, he proudly writes) as secretary. The plan was to get noted scientists from major European countries for the association’s junta directiva and hold the association’s first “international congress” in Paris to coincide with the International Exposition to be held in that city in August 1889.

Rizal drafted the purpose of the association: “to study the Philippines from the historic and scientific point of view” and advance this aim through conferences, competitions, and the establishment of a Philippine library and museum. For the Paris congress, he drew up a program that encompassed a wide range of historical and ethnological topics. The core was history, with Rizal dividing Philippine history into three broad periods: the time before the arrival of the Spaniards in 1521; the period from 1521 to “the loss of Philippine autonomy and her incorporation in the Spanish nation” in 1808; and the period from 1808 to the Cavite Mutiny in 1872.23

Though Rizal received warm endorsements from Blumentritt, Rost, Yule, and others, various exigencies prevented him from pushing through with his plans. It would have been historic had Rizal pulled it off. A “native” organizes an international academic conference on his country in a world exposition where French-colonized Asians and Africans were exhibited as exotics in simulated ethnological villages for the thirty million visitors who came. It is a decentering coda lost to today’s students of what has been called the imperial “exhibitionary complex” who have largely ignored the fact that those who were “exhibited” were also present as spectators.24

IN BUILDING A NATIONALIST COUNTERNARRATIVE, Rizal and his contemporaries could not summon a body of indigenous writings or archaeological remains to shed light on the preconquest period. In Southeast Asia itself, the earliest extant written text in the Malay language, Sejarah Melayu—of which Rizal was aware—was produced only around 1500–1559.25 In the absence of written records, Filipino nationalists turned to European sources.

Rizal’s decision to annotate Morga was not merely dictated by expedience but the discursive formation in which the nationalists operated. They had to speak to, through, and against the European texts that had—by how they represented the past, present, and future of the country—“produced” a Philippines that the Filipino nationalists now desired to fashion as their own. They literally wrote “on the margins.” Annotation, commentary, tract, and the periodical essay were the favored forms in which the beginnings of a nationalist history were asserted. It is fitting that if the quintessential European Orientalist forms (as Said notes) were the imperial encyclopedia, “universal history,” and grand tableaux, the counterforms are mobile, quick, tactical, and combative.26

It is in the fugitive and contestatory mode of the forms he chooses that Rizal sketches the themes of “long history,” “high culture,” “vanished nationality,” and “loss and redemption” in sketching the Filipino past and interrogating colonial constructions of the natives and their culture. In these themes, and the temporal framework for a Philippine history he prepared for the aborted Paris congress, he traces the shadow of that “national narrative” he was not prepared to write—and, more important, could not be written since its subject, place, voice, the nation, did not as yet exist. It would seem that, at this time, only in the imaginary of fiction rather than the science of history did Rizal feel the nation narratable.

In his annotated Morga and La Solidaridad articles, Rizal mined Pigafetta and European sources for proof of “long history.” Carving out for Filipinos space autonomous and apart from Spanish colonialism, he argued that the Spaniards did not “discover” the Philippines. The existence of the archipelago, he says, had already been reported in Europe as early as the first century B.C. by Iambulus (Iamboule), a Greek who reached the Malay region and wrote an account of his voyage. Ibn Battuta’s Taiawisi and Chao-Ju-kua’s Magi, Rizal says, refer to the Philippines. Ptolemy’s Geographia indicates islands that point not only to places like Celebes, Java, and Borneo, but Mindanao, Leyte, and Cebu. Locations in the sixteenth-century Mercator world maps or vague references in the writings of
Marco Polo, Odoric of Pordenone, and Lucovico di Varthema were invoked or imagined by Rizal and the nationalists as references to the Philippines.

The Filipino propagandists were on thin ground since sources were sparse and speculative. While major islands and entrepots (like Java and Sumatra) appear in the European record before the fifteenth century, there is no clear reference in this record to the Philippines prior to the Magellan expedition. While the Portuguese, and possibly other voyagers from Europe and the Middle East, had visited the Philippines before Magellan’s coming, the first European reference to the archipelago appears only in the Portuguese Tome Pires’s *Suma Oriental* (1513–1515). While the stylized coordinates of Ptolemy’s *Geographia*—the first general description of Southeast Asia before the fifteenth century—mark out what we now know as the coast of peninsular Southeast Asia, many of its place names are unidentifiable. Hence, claims were made on the basis of dubious sources (such as the apparently apocryphal Iambulus) or the wishful reading of strange place names in medieval geographies.

This “long history,” Rizal and the nationalists add, is revealed in the people’s mythology and genealogies that, unfortunately, the Spanish missionaries exterminated and destroyed. While the argument of lost archives is not quite convincing—and the strain to see the islands in “the eyes of Europe” seems desperate—what is important is the strategic move not so much to find origins as create autonomous time and space outside the frame of colonial rule. Magellan did not discover the Philippines. History does not begin with colonialism.

The move to fix the limits of coloniality is suggested in Rizal’s attempt at historical periodization for the 1889 Paris congress in which he chooses the year 1808 to mark “the loss of Philippine autonomy and her incorporation in the Spanish nation,” referring to the first time the Philippines was granted representation in the Spanish Cortes (1810–1813) against the background of the French invasion of Spain and the collapse of the monarchy. Rizal’s curious choice of this historical timeline—highlighting what was a brief and largely symbolic concession to the colony (making her a constitutional part of metropolitan Spain to rally support against France)—expresses the time’s Filipino reformist discourse on constitutional representation. At the same time, however, it can be read as sign of that impulse to restrict and delimit the horizon of colonial rule.

More significant in this play of historical frames is the move to connect the Philippines to an ancient non-European civilization. Rizal explored hypotheses about the shared racial and civilization origins of Filipinos, Sumatrans, Polynesians, and even the Japanese. He inquired into connections among Philippine and Malay languages and the links that could be drawn from the study of customs and material culture in the Malay region and wider Asian world. Undaunted by the fact that the study of Southeast Asian precolonial history at this time (and long after) was a foray into a dense, polylilingual, and multiracial maze, Rizal examined the available evidence and worked furiously on an impressive array of sources in several languages, from British historical and anthropological accounts of the Malay archipelago (William Marsden, Thomas Stamford Raffles, John Crawfurd), to Dutch and Portuguese texts (Joao de Barros, Francois Valentijn, F. W. Junghuhn), to German philological studies (Humboldt, Franz Bopp, Max Muller). 27 Time and circumstance prevented Rizal from developing his ideas more systematically or fully, but it is clear in what intellectual directions he was turned.

At the same time, Rizal mined sources for proof of the “high level” of native culture in precontact times. He gleams statements from European reports to argue that the islands were endowed with natural wealth and had a dynamic local economy; early inhabitants were skilled and experienced in warfare and long-distance trade; and indigenous notions of justice were superior to Spanish colonial practice. Rizal emphasizes the superiority of “ancient morality” and invokes Western sources to point to elements in early religious beliefs that showed how precolonial Filipinos had a developed system of ideas about the supernatural that had parallels in the civilizations of Greece, Japan, and China. He quotes Pigafetta in Italian (as, elsewhere, he would also write Greek, the better for authoritative effect) to show that the early Filipinos were “peaceful, noble, respectful,” citing the courtesy and ceremony with which the inhabitants received Magellan and his men. In dealing with criticism of such native practices as debt slavery and the low value placed on chastity, he contests these as exaggerations and points to how the same vices are to be found in Europe itself.

At several points, Rizal is not above overarguing his case (as some of his contemporaries pointed out), misreading his sources (whether innocent or intentional) by selectively highlighting details,
leaving out others, or displacing contexts. Annotating Morga, for instance, he roundly asserts that before the Spanish coming “the Indios had schools where they learned to read and write in Tagalog, in which all of them were skilled.” Elsewhere, he says: “Every one, friend and foe alike, admits that every Filipino even before the arrival of the Spaniards knew how to read and write.”

The third theme in Rizal’s counterhistory is the existence of a precolonial “nationality.” The relation between Spain and the Philippines, Rizal argues, began with a pact between equals. Like M.H. del Pilar and other early nationalists, Rizal represented the pacto de sangre, the blood compact between Spanish conquistadors and local chieftains in the sixteenth century, as a reciprocal pact of friendship and alliance between two peoples. What the European conquistadors used as a seal of subordination and vassalage is turned around as a moral contract between equals. Though Rizal does not elaborate on “nationality” (nacionalidad), he is obviously evoking—in the Romantic, Herderian sense of the Volkgeist—an organic cultural entity rather than a distinct political formation. Ascribing agency to this “nation,” Rizal redefines the moral and political grounds of the Spanish-Filipino encounter. The Rousseauan theme of the “contract,” with its positioning of the native as colonialism’s interlocutor, appears not only in Rizal but runs through both elite and popular discourses in the anticolonial struggle.

A fourth theme deals with the “cultural loss” wrought by colonialism. Mining fugitive references in Western sources, Rizal argues that colonialism caused the degeneration of Filipino skills in shipbuilding, weaving, pottery, metallurgy, and agriculture. When Morga mentions that early Filipinos sent silk to Japan, Rizal wryly remarks: “In those times the Philippines exported silk to Japan from where the best now comes.” Old industries and local morality declined because of the abuses and disincentives of colonial rule. Summing up the effect of Spanish conquest, he writes that “the Philippines was depopulated, impoverished, and retarded, astounded by her metamorphosis, with no more confidence in her past, still without faith in her present, and without any flattering hope in the future.” In raising the image of a “high” culture aborted in its development by the intervention of colonialism, Rizal appropriates the discourse of evolution Spanish Orientalists used to represent precolonial Filipinos as a savage and degenerate race ruled by instinct, who owe to the missionaries what they now have of “culture and civilization.”

Rizal reverses the high-low categorizations, reinterpreting the evolutionary thesis to condemn colonialism.

Rizal’s arguments were determined by and deployed against the Orientalist representation of the Philippines. The theme of “long history” counters the colonialist denial of a history to Filipinos outside the framework of Spanish rule. The theme of “high culture” answers the colonialist denigration of the integrity and value of native culture. The theme of “ancient nationality” underscores a preexistent identity that colonialism had violated and erased. “Cultural loss” points to the trauma of colonialism and sets the basis for an agenda of recovery and self-assertion. In constructing a noble and autonomous past, Rizal and the nationalists pointed to a field of potentiality and promise that colonialism suppressed. More important, by constructing the image of a separate, integral history and culture, Filipino nationalists brought into play the agency of a “nation” with a past, present, and future, a nation to which Spain had to speak.

IN TRACING THE GENEALOGY of Rizal’s scholarship, it is interesting to consider how it is shaped by, and to what extent it subverts, the premises of “Orientalism.”

Eric Hobsbawm has said that for those in the world outside European capitalism, the challenge was “the choice between a doomed resistance in terms of their ancient traditions and ways, and a traumatic process of seizing the weapons of the west and turning them against the conquerors: of understanding and manipulating ‘progress’ themselves.” Rizal seized the weapons of the West.

He drew energy from the dramatic expansion of knowledge production in Europe in the nineteenth century. He read ethnological, linguistic, and historical texts produced by Europeans; consulted such imperial institutions as the British Museum and Bibliothèque Nationale; joined learned societies in Berlin; contributed to Orientalist publications (like London’s Trübner’s Record, edited by Reinhold Rost); and corresponded with, learned from, and aided German, British, French, and Dutch scholars. He was more fluent in Spanish than Tagalog, decorated his speeches with Western classical allusions, did his best work in a European form (the novel), ardently embraced the humanist ideas of Rousseau and Voltaire, and spoke with conviction of the “laws of history” and the inexorable march of Science and Progress.
It was not in London or Berlin, however, that Rizal first discovered Europe. In his teens, he was exposed to Virgil, Cicero, and Dante, and read Cesare Cantu’s *Historia universal* (1838–1846) and the works of Chateaubriand and Dumas. His education at the Ateneo and at Santo Tomas in Manila opened doors to a world of Greco-Latin learning and Western science. No matter how narrow and “narcotizing” this education may have been (as Rizal often said), he clearly learned from it, quickened by the possibilities of knowledge glimpsed as well as knowledge suppressed. Rizal came from a privileged home. Their house in Calamba, he wrote, had a library of more than a thousand volumes. Even as his mother, cultured and fluent in Spanish, warned him of the dangers of a “native” who aspires for too much learning, such warnings only stoked his desire for knowledge even more. Despite the fact that the colony was in the backwaters of a decaying empire, Manila was not a dead outpost of Europe. Rizal said that while the majority of the books for sale in Manila were “religious and narcotizing in character,” the works of Dumas, Sue, Hugo, and Schiller were read.

As member of a “subject race,” Rizal lived the contradictions between what modern education promised and colonial life denied. He did not have to go to Europe to know about error, bias, and deceit in European representations of the Philippines. Replying to a charge by Vicente Barrantes that his is “a spirit twisted by a German education,” Rizal says that the Spaniard could not possibly know what he knows:

If you did, you would not say that I am “a spirit twisted by a German education,” for the spirit that breathes in me I have had since a child before leaving the Philippines, before I had learned a word of German. My spirit is “twisted” because I have been reared among injustices and abuses, because since a child I have seen many suffer stupidly and because I too have suffered. My “twisted spirit” is the product of that constant vision of moral ideals succumbing before the powerful reality of abuses, arbitrariness, hypocrisies, farces, violence, and other vile passions.

Explaining the genesis of the *Noli* to Fr. Pablo Pastells on 11 November 1892, he wrote: “No German knew about my work before its publication, neither Blumentritt . . . nor Virchow, nor Jäger, nor Joest with whom I dealt in the societies to which I belonged.” The novel was moved, he said, not by personal rancor or “German inspiration” but by a clear vision of the reality of my motherland, the vivid memory of what was happening, and a sufficient dexterity to judge the etiology in such a way that not only could I paint the event but also divine the future, inasmuch as even now I see being realized with such accuracy what I called novel that I can say that I attend a performance of my own work, taking part in it.

Though Rizal privileges, at times stridently, personal experience and “the native’s point of view,” he was inescapably shaped by Europe. Given his ambition, colonial schooling, and the distribution of world knowledge at the time, it was inevitable that he would turn to Europe. He saw the value of Sanskrit, Arabic, Chinese, Japanese, and Malay sources but discovered them largely by way of Europe. This said, however, the intellectual itinerary he followed was not a simple move from the margins to the metropolis.

Alluding to that other side of Orientalism he puts outside the ambit of *Orientalism*, Edward Said notes the great imbalance in the flow of Westerners eastwards against Easterners going west as well as the radical disparities in the reason, purpose and effect of these moves. While Westerners traveled to the Orient to conquer and occupy, administer colonies, extract wealth, gaze at possessions, or create fantasies of the Other (and, in those fantasies, themselves), “the Eastern travelers in the West were there to learn from and to gape at an advanced culture.”

The reality is more complex than the image. Europe mesmerized Rizal as he traveled through her cities but he was no ordinary tourist. Almost obsessive in his need to encompass the world, he was well informed in the history of Europe and methodical in the way he explored her cities, walking up and down grids of streets, a modern Pigafetta complete with a Baedeker and a pedometer. The sense of “outsideness” and difference never left him nor the constant connections he made between this place and home. Describing a Paris department store in a letter to his family, he writes: “It occupies an entire block with all the floors of the building as large as the space between our house and the telegraph office.” The halls of Luxem-
bourb Palace are “full of Grecian, Roman, and Etruscan jars and amphorae . . . so numerous that there are enough for the whole province of Laguna.” Then again: “Fill with magnificent houses the entire area of Calamba, Cabuyao, and Santa Rosa and you’ll have Paris more or less.” All these may simply be the innocent device to make the foreign imaginable; yet this tacking to and fro between the alien and the homely is expressive as well of the impulse to maintain perspective, to contain the alien and keep it at bay.

In viewing what in many ways was Europe’s imperial loot, this flagrant accumulation of the world’s riches, it was neither envy nor anger Rizal felt but sadness at the coldness of the grandeur that remained—and, poignantly, sadness at his own country’s invisibility. Wherever he went he was often mistaken for Japanese (and, on one occasion, playfully assumed the role of one, impressing some tourists with his knowledge of the lives of Japanese artists). Viewing an exhibition of seized military trophies from all over the world at the Museum of Artillery in Paris, he wrote: “It seems incredible but the costumes and weapons of the savages of the small islands of Borneo are found there but those of the Philippines are not even remembered.”

What galled was not just victimhood but that it should go unacknowledged. It was precisely the need to assert presence and visibility that impelled Rizal to raise his country from its past, to summon forth, as he puts it in his preface to Morga, “the shadow of the civilization of our ancestors” that colonialism had erased from memory.

**READING EUROPEAN TEXTS**, Rizal was sensitive to the limits of these sources—discontinuous, debased, written out of a variety of philosophies, written from the outside. He appreciated that they required strategies of reading—and plain raiding—if he was to elicit from them what he needed. Writing to Blumentritt about the Morga book, he said:

Morga is an excellent book. It could be said that Morga is a learned modern explorer. He has nothing of the superficiality and exaggeration so peculiar to the Spaniards of today. He writes very simply, but in reading him one must know how to read between the lines, because he had been governor general of the Philippines and later justice of the Inquisition.

Commenting on Wilhelm von Humboldt’s study on Malayo-Polynesian languages, he remarked that Humboldt allowed himself to be led too much by his Spanish source who, “though a good author, has however committed pardonable errors for being a foreigner.” “I am sure that Humboldt’s genius, had he consulted better authors, would have discovered important connections between our languages.”

Reading between the lines, against the grain; raiding texts for usable data (“source-mining”); even misreading—Rizal sketched the beginnings of a Philippine anticolonial history. Alert to the bias of those who speak of the Philippines from a place of “authority,” Rizal was, with the rarest exception, contemptuous of the scholarship of Spaniards writing on the colony, particularly the religious and those traveling chroniclers who “remain only a short time in the Philippines” and “spend this brief time among Spaniards.” He gravitated towards the scholarship of countries without political interests in the Philippines, such as Germany and Austria. He praised Blumentritt, citizen of a country that is not “a colonizer,” for the Austrian’s disinterestedness.

Some write history to raise or to flatter the spirit of their nation, to depreciate or lower that of their enemies; others to support political, religious, or theoretical opinions with historical facts which they adapt and mutilate to suit their convenience; and others . . . ah! It is better not to speak of their ends and purposes! From Berlin on 12 January 1887, he wrote to Blumentritt:

We are indebted to German and English scholars for letting a little light penetrate our dark country. It is really marvelous that these strangers, without having visited our country, do not judge us according to deep-rooted prejudices, as others do, but rather with a liberal criterion and in a humanitarian sense.

Berlin, Paris, and London were the capitals of nineteenth-century Oriental scholarship (beside which Madrid was parochial and lethargic). Rizal relished the atmosphere of intellectual freedom in these places. Exiled in Dapitan, he yearned for “the incessant and
indefatigable scientific life of civilized Europe where everything is discussed, where everything is placed in doubt, and nothing is accepted without previous examination, previous analysis—the life of the societies of linguistics, ethnography, geography, medicine, and archaeology.48

Had Rizal allowed exuberance to becloud the fact that England and France, the greatest empires of the time, were not innocent of the wrong he condemned in Spain? At the time of Rizal’s visit, Germany was going through a militarist and expansionist phase rooted in a latent colonialism—what a scholar calls “a kind of colonialism without colonies”—that had been building up as part of the formation of a German “national spirit” in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.49 Chancellor Otto von Bismarck had just consolidated the German Empire with a victory over the French in 1870. In 1882, the German Colonial Association was formed, a pressure group that endeavored to convince Bismarck of the necessity to acquire foreign possessions for the Reich. In 1884–1885 (on the eve of Rizal’s visit), Germany annexed colonies in Africa and the Pacific and Bismarck thrust himself into the world stage by organizing the Berlin Conference of 1884, which forged a framework for a more coordinated scramble for territories in Africa among such powers as England, France, Belgium, and Germany.

Rizal entered Germany at a time when a romantic, bourgeois liberalism was still popular among German intellectuals. Such men as Virchow, Bastian, and Blumentritt criticized Bismarckian colonialism, espousing liberal notions of the “psychic unity of mankind,” that peoples around the world were bound together by fundamental similarities and followed the same patterns of cultural evolution.50 German scholarship on the Philippines, what little of it existed at the time, was unencumbered by any direct political interest in the country and largely limited to technical studies in linguistics, botany, and zoology.

Rizal was not politically naive. Explaining to his parents his plans to go to Germany in 1885, he cited not only the practicalities of living costs and the presence of good professors in Germany, he said that learning about the country would be useful because of the “Caroline question” (Bismarck’s annexationist ambitions) and Germany’s increasing commercial interest in Asia. Rizal wrote: “It is necessary that we prepare for what may happen so that we shall not be more exploited than we are now.”51 Despite these reservations, however, it is evident that the excitement of German intellectual life led Rizal to take a very generous view of German liberalism.

Rizal was aware that colonialism was a world phenomenon and that Filipinos shared conditions of oppression with peoples elsewhere. As Filipinas dentro de cien años shows, he was an acute observer of the expansionist ambitions of the world’s industrializing countries. Yet he was detached in his view of world politics. An episode illustrates this: Rizal was transiting on the Suez Canal in June 1882, on the way to Spain, when the Urabi Pasha uprising against the Khedive and the Franco-British presence in Egypt began. Learning about the disturbances from a Turkish quarantine officer with whom he conversed in French, Rizal shows he understood the meaning of the unfolding events (which would lead to the British occupation of Egypt); yet he relates the experience in letters home with no small trace of voyeuristic pleasure and cosmopolitan knowing.52

As he could be distant in his view of the world, he was single-minded and impassioned in his pursuit of the Filipino cause. In large part, he used the intellectual achievements, liberal-democratic policies, and “rational” colonial policies of countries like France and England as lever in his attack against Spanish colonialism. He appreciated the reality of intra-European rivalry and knew that Europe was not homogeneous or monolithic. In exposing Spanish misrule and the hollowness of what must have seemed to many in the colony a great and unshakeable power, Rizal frequently compared (in an interesting appropriation of Europe’s own evolutionist discourse) “laggard” and “backward” Spain with the more “modern” countries of northern and western Europe.

Rizal’s location in the scholarly world of Europe is important in assessing his relation to European Orientalism. Rizal was a novelist before he was a scholar and, as the latter, an amateur rather than a specialist.53 He was trained as an ophthalmologist and not as a historian, linguist, or anthropologist. His medical training—under the time’s leading ophthalmologists, Louis de Wecker and Otto Becker—is an aspect of his intellectual formation that has not been adequately commented upon. Yet, reading his clinical notes, one is already cued to the style and discipline with which he approached the “science” of society and history. Scribbling an intern’s residency notes: “Clinical history is the narration of pathological events with their anteced-
ents and final outcome were occurred in a patient. To be good it must be methodical, true, accurate and brief.” Breaking down the components of clinical analysis—amnthesis, diagnosis, prognosis, treatment, management—he foreshadows the logic with which he would dissect the problems of colonial society. (In the notes that have survived, it is interesting—given the literary uses to which he put the disease—that many of the cases he examined were carcinomas.) The clinical temper is shown in his fondness for medicophysiological analogies and the image of society as an organism, as when he writes of colonialism:

The existence of a foreign body in another endowed with strength and activity is against all natural and moral laws. Science teaches us that either it is assimilated, it destroys the organism, it is eliminated, or it is encysted.55

A polymath, Rizal drew from many sources, combining the moral passion of an artist with the mental armature of a scientist. He was in his element in nineteenth-century European ethnology, a field in which the ideas of natural science were popular. (Bastian and Virchow were themselves physicians.) He was, in brief, no rank amateur. His scientific preparation gave him that detached, pragmatic bent when making prescriptions for a nation as it armed him with that remarkable self-assurance that he could deal with the German scholars as peers rather than mentors.

He was a nomadic intellectual, straddling fields, moving at the margins of Europe’s learned circles. Though he joined learned societies in Berlin, his relations with these societies were tenuous. He was sought out as native informant, contact for the supply of specimens and artifacts, contributor of articles and primary data. The more durable relationships he struck were relations of friendship and parity. It is fitting that his closest association was with a peripheral figure in Orientalism, a reclusive scholar in a small Austrian town who did not only study the Philippines but deeply identified with it.

Rizal relates to Blumentritt his amusing first encounter with “the famous Virchow.” “The scholar (Virchow) told me jestingly that he wished to study me ethnographically.” Rizal did not miss a beat: “I replied that I was willing to submit to his study for the love of science and I promised to introduce to him also another example, my compatriot”—referring to his traveling companion, Maximo Viola, an even more “native” specimen than Rizal.56 Virchow is what is now called a “physical anthropologist” and had published a study on Igorot skulls; a formal portrait of the man shows him standing in his study, left hand resting on a human skull, right hand holding a caliper for cranial measurement.57 Virchow was a man to be admired, the model of a dynamic, politically engaged scientist, but the young Filipino did not come to Europe to study at the feet of Virchow (though he was obviously thrilled by the experience of having beer with the eminent scientist and other German scholars well into the night after a meeting of the Berlin Geographical Society). Rizal was on the hunt to learn what he could and use what served his purpose. He knew, too, that such “networks” as he built, and the learning gained, were useful for creating that “authority” with which to challenge the “authority” of the colonial experts in Spain and at home.

Rizal was an amateur uninhibited by the professional or ideological constraints of a discipline or “field.” He was all over the place. He was into comparative linguistics (studying Malay and Philippine languages like Bisayan, Subanon, and Mangyan; working on a Tagalog grammar; planning a “universal” dictionary of Philippine languages and dialects); he corresponded with colleagues on cartography and geography; maintained an active interest in the natural sciences (doing inventories of seashells, collecting botanical specimens); wrote on such topics as Tagalog poetry and popular religion; compiled notes on such arcana as the specifications for constructing military parapets; and, even in exile in Dapitan, tried to keep up with his literary readings, asking a friend in Europe to send him books by Russian writers. He did exercises in reading and writing Arabic scripts and Egyptian hieroglyphs and even copied fragments of the Zend-Avesta, the sacred book the translation of which, by the Frenchman Anquetil-Duperron in 1771, is considered one of the founding acts of the Orientalist renaissance in Europe.58 Rizal embraced the world of learning as his own.

RIZAL SPECULATED on issues current in Europe’s academic circles—the origins of races and languages, evolution and diffusionism, the nature of progress and the unity of human civilization. He was, however, no theorist or systematist (in the manner that Pedro Paterno
RIZAL READING PIGAFETTA

and Isabelo de los Reyes aspired to be); he neither had the space nor inclination to craft himself as one. He knew of Charles Darwin (and, like Bastian and Virchow, was skeptical of orthodox Darwinism) but there is no reference to his having actually read *Origin of the Species* (1859) or, for that matter, the book Karl Marx was slaving over at the British Museum some thirty years before Rizal got there, *Critique of Political Economy* (1859).

What mattered was the drift and direction of his intellectual practice. Strategically located, armed with a purpose, Rizal creatively engaged Orientalist knowledge. He used Europe’s high-minded Enlightenment rhetoric against Europe and invoked her authority to undermine that same authority. It did not matter (if he was aware of it at all) that Goethe and Chateaubriand essentialized the East, turning it into tapistry for their own private imaginings. Rizal drank of their sublime fancies to nourish his own dreams. Antonio Pigafetta’s benignant sixteenth-century view of the Bisayans may have more to do with the courtly conventions of the Italian Renaissance than Bisayan realities, while Thomas Stamford Raffles’s encyclopedic knowledge of the Malay archipelago was fueled by British expansionist aims in the East Indies (and, not least, Raffles’s own career ambitions). This did not prevent Rizal from dislodging them from their history and using them for his own.

Through readings or sheer osmosis, Rizal learned historicism from Johann Gottfried Herder, comparative linguistics from such pioneers as Humboldt, Eugene Burnouf, and Franz Bopp, and anthropology from German ethnologist Theodor Waitz (author of the monumental *Anthropologie der Naturvolker* [1859–1872], which Rizal wanted to translate). He proceeded to use this learning for his own purposes, giving to current ideas his own particular inflection as he stressed the liberative implications of Filipino culture in the struggle against colonialism.

He was attracted to comparative linguistics since this was a cutting-edge field in the nineteenth century for investigating the identity and relationships of cultures. Where European philologists, particularly the French, were enamored with grand classificatory and evolutionary systems (at the apex of which stood Europe), Rizal must have drawn inspiration from the more romantic, pluralist views of Wilhelm von Humboldt. The German savant did not only study Malayo-Polynesian languages (when everybody else, it seemed, was mining Sanskrit), he promoted the view that “every language has a structure worthy of study and every language has the infinite resources to assimilate the richest and loftiest ideas.” Rizal must have warmed to Humboldt’s thesis that language is “the work of nations, the proof of the spirit and individuality of a people:”

The comparative study of languages, the exact establishment of the manifold ways in which innumerable peoples resolve the same tasks of language formation that is laid upon them as men lose all higher interest if it does not cleave to the point at which language is connected with the shaping of the nation’s mental power.  

Rizal took a comparatist approach to issues of race and culture, but where the European Orientalist employed the method to privilege Indo-European or Aryan superiority, Rizal used it to advance his own people’s claims to anteriority. The strategy is illustrated in what seems an innocuous contribution to *Trumbner’s Record* (July 1889) in which he compared the Tagalog and Japanese versions of the fable of the tortoise and the monkey. Speculating on questions of origins, he surmised that the Tagalog version is older (it has “more philosophy, more plainness of form,” while the Japanese version has “more civilization and, so to speak, more diplomatic usage”); suggested the possibility of the Malay origin of the Japanese people; and raised the need for studying more versions of the tale in the Malay archipelago. The anciency of the tale, he concluded, shows that, before Spanish colonialism, there was “an extinct civilization, common to all the races which lived in that region [i.e., the Far East].”

In addressing a range of issues—whether public education, popular religiosity, or the Filipino personality—Rizal adopted a historicist approach that undermined Orientalism’s essentializing tendencies. Drawing from the ideas of Herder and the German romantics, he traced not only perceived weaknesses in the Filipino character, like indolence and apathy, to “natural laws” (such as the effect of climate) but, more importantly, the dynamics of social practice, upholding “Filipino defects” as the effect of oppressive colonial realities, and the lack of “freedom” and “national sentiment.”

While Orientalists deployed theories of race to confer superiority on the European, Rizal did not only assert racial equality but...
used the racialist discourse to blame colonialism for distortions in the development of races. There is no such thing as some races being born more intelligent than others, he argued, intelligence is a function of social and historical development. “Races which have been obliged to work with their brains on account of certain special conditions, have developed them more, then have transmitted them to their descendants who later have continued on, etc., etc.” The growth of intelligence requires “centuries of struggle” and the “wise combinations” of liberty, law, and traditions of free thought. 62 Impatiently dismissing the prejudices of race, he says: “In the matter of aesthetics each race has its own idea. . . . Right has no skin nor has reason noses.” 63

It is no easy task to trace the genealogy of a person’s ideas, yet it is clear that, despite Rizal’s disclaimer, a “German education” did influence his views. Rizal’s stay in Spain stirred his liberal sentiments, but his travels in northern and western Europe brought him into the very center of Western “modernity” at the time, in particular Germany of the 1880s. 64 Already drawn to the liberal passion of Goethe, Lessing, and Schiller, Rizal entered Germany when cultural studies were dominated by the ideas of Herder, Wilhelm and Alexander Humboldt, Bastian, and Virchow. This was the “Europe” Rizal admired, the intellectual site out of which he would critique that other “Europe” that Spanish colonialism represented. This is incidentally the same nexus out of which came Franz Boas, who trained under Virchow and Bastian and was about the same age as Rizal. When Rizal was in Berlin, Boas was finishing fieldwork in British Columbia, studying the Kwakwutl Indians, and would soon decide to relocate to the United States, where he became one of the founders of American anthropology. 65

Rizal was influenced not just by some generalized, diffuse “European humanism” (or Orientalism) but a specific articulation of this humanism, a nineteenth-century German historical and ethnological tradition that sought to reconcile the Enlightenment urge for universal criteria and essentializing statements about human nature with the Romantic interest in differential histories and the specificity of cultural creations. 66 Ideas in this formation Rizal must have found particularly productive included a pluralist notion of organic, internally coherent nationalities moving towards a common “humanity,” a racial equality premised on the “psychic unity of man-

kind” (as opposed to the racist views of thinkers like Ernest Renan and Arthur de Gobineau), a multilinear evolutionism that explains differences in the development of races according to factors of environment and history (as opposed to the determinism of orthogenetic Darwinists), and a premium on critical empiricism instead of the abstract and overgeneralizing categorizations characteristic of the French Enlightenment. While these views can be deflected or deployed (as they were) as ideological support for Europe’s “duty” to bring less-developed races under her tutelage, Rizal appropriated them as premises for the campaign to create the social and political conditions that would release the Filipino potential for creativity and growth.

UNDERSTANDING THE SPECIFICITY of Rizal’s location and interventions is more productive than simplifying statements about an underspecified “Europeanization.” Take the question of language. Rizal was more fluent in the colonial master’s language (Spanish) than his own, confessing to difficulties when he attempted to write a novel in Tagalog. Yet, as Benedict Anderson has shown, Rizal’s novels in Spanish are so richly impregnated with native experience and idioms, he creates ground for the interanamadry play of the local and extralocal and problematizes the relations of languages. 67 That Rizal slipped in and out of many languages meant that he was not captive of one. While the effects of his language crossings remain to be closely studied, it is clear that Rizal’s Europeanization is more complicated than it seems. He spent as much time thinking between languages as in a language.

Rizal appreciated not only the “treasures” locked in a language (as he told del Pilar), he knew how malleable, and yet forceful, words can be. Words like nación and civilización are designations for social states either potential or achieved, signs of desire as well as fulfillment, and in the debate over whether a Filipino nation or civilization exists, it all depends on who is speaking and where or how, in the discourse, one positions oneself. 68

In a study of how French Enlightenment intellectuals used such notions as universalism, science, race, and nation, Tzvetan Todorov shows how double-sided and dissembling these concepts are. 69 Universalism promotes an ethos of commonality, yet may function as Eurocentric charter for conquest and colonialism. Relativism can
lead to tolerance of diversity and respect for difference, yet can underlie racist hierarchies, exoticism, and an abstract indifference. Nationalism valorizes belonging to a group, yet can underwrite prejudice and imperialism. In the politics of contradictions and misrecognitions, intellectuals, while affirming the Enlightenment spirit, can foster ideas that represent a deflection of that spirit rather than its logical consequence.

Navigating the waters of these contradictions, Rizal was aided by the fact that he moved at the boundaries of languages and cultures (he moved around so much, it seems much of his life was spent in-between countries, crossing borders). More important, he never lost sight of the horizon towards which he was moving.

As Lessing’s fable in our epigraph indicates, Rizal had an acute sense of how politicized knowledge can be. In his philosophical exchange with Father Pastells in 1892, he wrote:

I imagine men who engage in the study of the truth like students of drawing who copy a statue. . . , some nearer, others farther, who from a certain height, who at its feet, see it in different manners; and the more they try to do their best in being faithful in their drawings, the more they differ from one another. Those who copy directly from the original are thinkers who differ from one another for starting from different principles, founders of schools or doctrines. A large number, for being very far, for not seeing well, for not being so skillful, for laziness . . . are contented with making a copy from another copy of the one nearest to them or, if they are willing, from what seemed to them best. . . . These copyists correspond to the partisans, the active sectarians of an idea. Others even more lazy, not daring to draw a single line in order not to commit a blunder, buy themselves a ready-made copy, perhaps a photograph, a lithograph, and they are contented and cheerful. To this group belong the passive sectarians, those who believe everything in order not to think.70

“Who is to judge the drawings of the others taking his own for norm?” Rizal was no postmodernist in a time warp, he simply understood that there were certain realities that resisted one’s totalizing moves: “For us, mathematical truths which are like plane figures present themselves only in one form. But religious, moral, and political truths are figures of extent and depth, they are complex truths, and human intelligence has to study them in parts.”

These philosophical doubts did not keep him from looking at what was needed in the short term. A nineteenth-century believer in the value of science, he was eager for whatever empirical knowledge can be obtained from any source or method. Conscious of the dearth of scientific studies on the Philippines, he encouraged and aided the work of such “Philippinologists” as A. B. Meyer, Hendrik Kern, and Blumentritt. Apart from its political value, he envisioned the Association Internationale des Philippinestes as a truly international group of scholars working on the Philippines. Yet, Rizal knew that in the end Filipinos themselves, building a visible intellectual community, will have to spearhead the effort, claiming the authority to speak for themselves. Thus he repeatedly urged the Filipino propagandists in Spain to “buy books by Filipinos; mention now and then names of Filipinos like [Pedro] Pelaez, [Vicente] García, [Jose] Burgos, Graciano [Lopez Jaena], etc.; quote their phrases.”71

Addressing the Filipinos in Barcelona in 1889, he encouraged them “to buy, read, but critically, the books about the Philippines that you may see there published.”

It is necessary that you study the questions that concern our country. Knowledge of a thing prepares for its mastery: Knowledge is power. We are the only ones who can acquire a perfect knowledge of our country, because we know both languages [Spanish and a Philippine language] and besides we are informed of the secrets of the people among whom we had been raised.72

This did not prevent conflict and jealousies among Filipino scholars. Both Rizal and M. H. del Pilar spoke of Isabelo de los Reyes’s “deplorable fecundity” and “excessive Ilocanism.”73 And almost everyone had something to say about the motives and quality of Pedro Paterno’s scholarship. The fact however remains that scholarship involved a contest over authority—originating texts, exercising power over a field—and Rizal knew that, in a world where others had done the speaking for the Philippines, it was “authority” Filipinos had to claim and exercise collectively. Rizal saw the importance of a national discourse (or in Said’s terms, a “strategic formation”) created
by the work of Filipino scholars, scientists, teachers, artists and writers. Speaking of a rising “enlightened class” of Filipinos, he said, warning Spain, that “if today [this class] constitutes the brains of the country, within a few years it will constitute its entire nervous system.”

RIZAL CHARACTERISTICALLY PRONOUNCES his opinions as his own and rarely invokes intellectual antecedents except in a general way or for rhetorical effect. Europe, however, has clearly shaped his thinking. This is shown in his basic assumptions about evolution, hierarchy, progress, modernity, and history. In speaking for his people, he was not above countering the essentializations of Orientalism with his own essentializing of the virtues of the Malay race. Oriented to an enlightened Europe as the image of the future, Rizal saw the exemplars of this Europe in the colony (himself and the most illustral of Filipinos) as the leading element of change. He privileged the values of Western science and literacy and, moved by the impulse to connect his people to the main streams of world civilization, he neglected to attend more closely to the vital elements of an indigenous culture. Spanish colonialism had not eroded, or the people’s creative reinventions of their own colonial experience.

Desiring to insert his country into a “universal” narrative of progress, Rizal did not push the idea of an “autonomous” history far enough. The argument of “lost mythologies” predisposed him to thinking in terms of modern, Western sources. Even Paterno and de los Reyes, who showed greater interest in religion and myth, could not quite escape (nor did they aspire to) the Judeo-Christian model in their study of religion. Theirs was a nationalist critique conditioned by the politics in which they were engaged, one that, at the time Rizal wrote, was still aimed at reform and assimilation rather than separation. Positioned as the “voice” of the people, they spoke to the West (and those among their people turned towards the West) and (even as they stressed their people’s individuality) accepted Europe’s macronarrative of progress and modernity. They did not seek to reject “Europe” but to partake of her more fully. It was, given their place and moment, a perfectly licit desire.

As in Pedro Paterno and even Isabeo de los Reyes, Rizal’s image of the nation remained inchoate, one that did not quite encompass Muslims, ethnic minorities, or the mass of the population beyond the pale of Manila and the towns where the light of Europe had began, if tenuously, to shine. It is interesting that it was Blumentritt who had to suggest to Rizal the inclusion of a section on “Races and Independent Regions” (referring to the Muslim sultanates and “independent tribes” like the Negritos) in the draft of the conference program Rizal prepared for the Association Internationale des Philippinistes. We cannot however—standing where we see the nation now—wholly fault Rizal (or, for that matter, Paterno or de los Reyes) for a failure of imagination. Despite what the nationalists said about an “ancient nationality,” there was, after all, no inclusive, bounded realm that antedated colonialism and only awaited a nationalist restoration. What the “flawed” nineteenth-century image of the nation simply shows is that, like the nation itself, Rizal was very much a work in progress.

Despite his sympathies, Rizal remained a consciousness set apart from his countrymen whom he imagined as “brutalized” by exploitation and poverty and benighted in the false consciousness of monastic indoctrination. Rizal in Dapitan is the figure not only of a prisoner of the state but an internal exile. Despite the passion with which he invoked “the native’s experience,” much of his knowledge of the country was bookish. A great part of his adult life was spent outside the country and he had never been farther south of Manila (if not for his exile) than his home province of Laguna.

Mentally fastidious, he was highly deliberative and rarely gave expression to self-doubt. And perhaps it is to his novels that we have to turn to find or imagine, in the unbidden revelations of the form, Rizal confessing through Ibarra: “I was not brought up among the people and perhaps I do not know what they need.” When revolutionary hostilities broke out in the waning days of August 1896, he was in a fog not only because he was kept incomunicado on a Spanish cruiser off Cavite, he could not quite imagine, except in the abstract, that revolutions do happen (and perhaps always do) in the most unfastidious ways.

At the same time, Europe never completely claimed Rizal. (And though this is another story, neither did the “Europe” Rizal mediated enter Philippine colonial space unchanged.) Rizal positioned himself in the divide between European Orientalism and the “Orient” that was the Philippines. He used European Orientalist writing and, by selective appropriation and rearticulation, used the words of the
Europeans themselves to witness against them. He probed into the cracks of “Europe,” knowing Spain was not Germany nor Germany England, and deployed the advances of one as argument against the backwardness of the other. He adopted Orientalist ideas and methods to create his own counterhistory, using the tools of comparatism to “prove” the priority, coherence, and comprehensibility of Filipino culture, or the theory of evolution to explain that a “high” ancient culture had degenerated because of a retrograde colonialism. He invoked “the fatal laws of History” to tell his people (and the Spaniards) that colonialism was doomed. He took his in-between location, knowing both worlds, to create his own distinctive authority.

Rizal was the sojourner who never stayed put in one place but never lost sight of home, an imagined Filipinas, as his point of reference. His personal and intellectual itinerary remained complex even in his final years: Barred from his own country, he considered going to Borneo; exiled in his own country, he elected to go to Cuba. Even then, it may all have been another prelude to another return—if his execution had not intervened.

And then we must not forget that though he seemed so old (something he often said of himself), Jose Rizal was, when he stood in the Luneta that fateful morning, only thirty-five years old.

NOTES

This was written during a sojourn as Visiting Fellow at the Center for Southeast Asian Studies in Kyoto University (June-December 2000). I wish to thank the excellent staff and librarians of the Center.

For the fable Rizal alludes to in the epigraph, see Classical Readings from German Literature (Tübingen: Horst Erdmann Verlag, 1969), 37–38.

1. Rizal’s Correspondence with Fellow Reformists (Manila: National Heroes Commission, 1963), 275.

2. The Rizal-Blumentritt Correspondence (Manila: Jose Rizal National Centennial Commission, 1961), II: 1, 201–2, 203.


4. Rizal’s Correspondence with Fellow Reformists, 275.


11. Ibid., II: 2, 344. See Rizal’s prospectus for a “modern college” in Miscellaneous Writings of Dr. Jose Rizal (Manila: National Heroes Commission, 1964), 141–44.

12. Quiaoaquianismo, a label Filipino propagandists used for the vulgar Orientalism of the Spanish press, comes from the pseudonym of the Spaniard Pablo Feced (Quiaoaquio), author of Filipinas: esbozos y pinceladas (Manila: Estab. Tipog. de Ramirez y Compania, 1888), a collection of satirical articles and diatribes against Filipinos.


Rizal accessed Chu-Fan-Chih—which contains the first positive description of the Philippines in Chinese records—from a translation by German Sinologist Friedrich Hirth (part of which was published in Spanish in La Solidaridad on 15 September 1894). See Rizal-Blumentritt Correspondence, II: 1, 220; "Filipinas en el siglo XIV: un geografo Chino" (15 September 1894), La Solidaridad, trans. L. Mañero (Metro Manila: Fundacion Santiago, 1996), VI: 408–13.

15. Ibid., II:1, 349.


20. Ibid., 219.


23. *Rizal-Blumentritt Correspondence*, II: 1, 229–32.


26. For Said’s reference to the encyclopedia and tableaux, see *Orientalism*, 126–29, 284.

27. See Rizal’s notes “The People of the Indian Archipelago” and “Notes on Melanesia, Malaysia, and Polynesia,” *Political and Historical Writings*, 364–71, 372–82. These papers, the originals of which have not survived, appeared in Manila’s *The Independent* (4 May and 27 April 1918, respectively). See “Bibliografia de los Escritos de Rizal,” *Pensamientos de Rizal* (Manila: Comision Nacional del Centenario de Jose Rizal, 1962), 80, 81.


32. “Philippines a Century Hence,” *Political and Historical Writings*, 130.


35. His education in Manila included such subjects as Greek, Latin, French, philosophy, geography, geometry, physics, chemistry, botany, and natural history. For a list of courses, see *Reminiscences and Travels of Jose Rizal* (Manila: Jose Rizal National Centennial Commission, 1961), 18–21. For lists of “books, pamphlets, periodicals bought, given to, read, or owned by Jose Rizal,” see Esteban A. de Ocampo, *Rizal as a Bibliophile* (Manila: Bibliographical Society of the Philippines, 1960), 27–52.


37. Rizal to Vicente Barrantes, February 1890 (in Jose Rizal), *Miscellaneous Correspondence* [Manila: National Heroes Commission, 1963], II:4, 131–32.

38. Rizal, Dapitan, 11 November 1892, to Father P. Pastells (in *Miscellaneous Correspondence*, II:4, 204–5).

audience from a location in the West, takes up the “other side” of Orientalism but focuses on the British, French, and American empires and twentieth-century examples of resistance.


41. Reminiscences and Travels, 240.

42. Ibid., 244.

43. Rizal-Blumentritt Correspondence, II:1, 201. Rizal’s understanding of source-criticism is shown in his ill-humored riposte to Isabela de los Reyes, “A Reply to Mr. Isabela de los Reyes,” Political and Historical Writings, 266–73.

44. Rizal-Blumentritt Correspondence, II:2, 500–1. Rizal’s citation of Esguerra as the Spanish source probably refers to the Jesuit Domingo Esguerra (1601–1670), who wrote Arte de la lengua visaya de la provincia de Leyte (Manila, 1663; 2d. ed., 1747).


45. Rizal-Blumentritt Correspondence, II:1, 9–10.

46. Ibid., II:1, 1. Also see 73–74.

47. Ibid., II:1, 37–38.

48. Ibid., II:2, 461.


50. By the time Rizal was in Germany, Bastian and Vichow had softened their opposition to German expansionism (see Smith, “Anthropology and German Colonialism,” 39–57). For a more extended discussion of the political views of Vichow and other German scholars, see Smith, Politics and the Sciences of Culture in Germany, 104, 153–54, 162–70.


52. Reminiscences and Travels, 68, 216, 221.


71. Rizal, Paris, 19 March 1889, to Mariano Ponce (in *Rizal’s Correspondence with Fellow Reformists*, 302); also see 308.


73. *Rizal’s Correspondence with Fellow Reformists*, 267, 273.

74. “Philippines a Century Hence,” *Political and Historical Writings*, 140.


The Brief and Blessed Life
of Miguel Ayatamo

IN SPANISH COLONIAL TEXTS of the Philippines, the native stands peripheral, distanced, and dimly visible. Dissolving the remoteness, foregrounding the native, has been an important project in contemporary Philippine historiography.1 In this project, however, one contends not merely with the crude and simple exclusions of racial or political bias but the historicity of modes of representation. To study these modes may not resurrect the native in full-bodied form but, by enhancing our appreciation for the processes of saying, it will lead us to a clearer sense of the unsaid—even if, for the moment, it must remain so.

There is perhaps no mode of representation more intriguing in this context than lives. What we conjure today as biographies, autobiographies, or memoirs, promise a direct apprehension of persons, defined in time and space, promising history at a most intimately empirical level. Yet, the promise is illusory. Notions of personhood, or of biography (“the inscribing of lives”), are not universal. Lives do not always offer what, to our liking, are lives. We can illustrate this by exploring early examples of the “life” (Spanish, vida) in Spanish colonial literature.

What may be the earliest published biography of a Filipino is an account of the life of an early Christian convert in Bohol named Miguel Ayatumo (1593–1609). Entitled *Vida de un mancebo Indio, llamado Miguel Ayatumo, natural de Boholito en Filipinas*, this forty-nine-page account is appended to a manual on the good Christian life by Jesuit Pedro de Mercado, *El Cristiano virtuoso.*2 Mercado, a Spanish creole born in Riobamba, Ecuador, was rector of the Jesuit colegios of Tunja (Colombia), Honda (Colombia), and Quito (Ecuador). He was never in the Philippines (as far as I can determine) and, in his book, he addressed himself to Spaniards. His vida of Ayatumo