The Fiction of a Knowable Community

Few novels exercise as gripping a hold on the Filipino nationalist imagination as José Rizal’s *Noli me tangere* and *El filibusterismo*. Not simply touted as Filipino masterpieces, they are “master-narratives” which have attained an extraordinarily exalted status—not unlike that of the nineteenth-century “national novels” of Latin America (Sommer 1991, 4)—as “originary,” if not founding, fictions of the Filipino national community. For his role in tracing the contours of nationalist thought and determining the substance of some of its most important debates in postindependence Philippines, Rizal has been called the “First Filipino” (L. Guerrero 1963, 492).

But what kind of community did Rizal conjure up? More important, how did he go about representing this community, by what means, and with what kind of implications? This chapter focuses on the complex process through which the *Noli me tangere* emerged as the founding text of Philippine nationalism. It addresses the ways in which Rizal approached the problem of rendering, specifically through literary procedures, a Philippine national community that was different and separate from Spain, even as he involved himself in the equally arduous task of exposing the colonial government’s evils and institutional violence.

Rizal’s novels constructed a knowable “Filipino” community by deploying a narrative of development defining the new, “modern” community in temporal (by providing a political chart of the progress of the human condition) and spatial (by adumbrating the external and internal conditions of the nation-state) terms. Rizal’s literary project of conjuring up the Filipino nation is also one of the most important and influential attempts by a Filipino to address and think through the “problem of modernity” that is central to nationalist discourse and practice. The “problem of modernity” is concerned with the question of freedom in a historical context seen as increasingly secular, technicized, and “international” (Beardsworth 1996, 49).

Philippine literature attests to Rizal’s effort to invent the “Filipino” in two respects. First, it narrates this effort of invention and makes the effort one of its key subjects. Second, Philippine literature valorizes this theme of inventing the Filipino through the concept of the singular text. Rizal’s *Noli*, for example, calls itself a “Novela tagalag,” or Tagalog novel, and its critical reception as a *Filipino* literary work is deeply informed by presuppositions regarding the privileged status of its author, the “Filipino” patriot José Rizal. The emphasis on the singularity of the text, the novelty of its vision and its presentation of ideas, and the creativity of its author has greatly contributed to legitimizing Rizal’s public authority as a writer. This public legitimation highlights the intimate and privileged relationship between the author and his work, thereby investing the author with the public authority to influence, through explication, the interpretation of his work. Standard literary criticism of the *Noli* draws on the “special” relationship between Rizal and his novel, and uses Rizal’s letters and other writings to explain how Rizal shaped his novel. His declarations concerning how his novels were to be interpreted (that is, as an accurate depiction of “Tagalog” society viewed as a microcosm of Philippine society), therefore, deeply inform readings of his novels.

Rizal anchors his literary invention of the “Filipino” national community in his narrative project of forging a concept of modern nationhood out of the vicissitudes of colonial rule. For Rizal, the problem of representation involves not only fictional representation, in the sense of speaking about the nation, but also political representation, in the sense of speaking in the name of the nation. The project of using narrative language to make sense of Philippine colonial society entails the inevitable, but nevertheless difficult, acknowledgment that writing itself means writing from a position. The very act of constructing a Filipino community as “knowable,” therefore, is never just a matter of artistic imagination, but an ethical and political decision to speak of “the Philippines” to fellow Filipinos.” This ethico-political decision that claims to speak of—and
sometimes for—the Filipinos is, however, attended by an ineluctable risk, consisting of the awareness that the one who speaks can always and only do so from a specific social location. The challenge of imagining a community, therefore, demands nothing less than adopting a critical attitude toward the very act of imagining that community as Filipino.

Fantasizing about Rizal and the “Modern”

In August 1887, five months after the publication of *Noli me tangere* in Berlin, José Rizal returned to the Philippines. He had spent the last five years traveling and studying in Europe, and something of his general itinerary can be gleaned from the account with which he later provided the Jesuit Pablo Pastells concerning the novel’s writing. “Half of the *Noli*,” Rizal stated, “had been written in Madrid; one quarter of it in Paris, and the rest in Germany” (Bonoan 1994, 92, 139).

The last country was of particular significance for Rizal, who called it “my scientific homeland” ([*mi patria científica*] (1938, v. 5, pt. 1, 120) and acknowledged the “peculiar calm” that living amidst its people—“free, hard-working, studious, well-governed, full of hope in their future and master of their own destinies”—exercised on his imagination and his writing. Germany held a special attraction for Rizal because it was the seat of scientific learning and philosophy. Moreover, German scholarship on the Philippines was relatively untainted by Germany’s participation, dating from the 1880s, in the European imperialist scramble for colonies and by its outright political and military intervention in Africa and parts of the Pacific. Until the nineteenth century, Germany had been considered a fragmented and backward country, and its subsequent unification and meteoric accession to the world arena must have seemed, to Rizal, an inspiring example of what any country, no matter how disadvantaged, could achieve by dint of talent, diligence, and willpower.

Rizal arrived in Manila in time to observe, firsthand, the reactions to his novel (Schumacher 1973, 82–93). Since only a small number of copies had found their way into the Philippines—the rest being held up at customs—the *Noli* was much in demand, and copies changed hands at escalating prices. The rector of the University of Santo Tomás appointed a committee that submitted a report condemning the novel for being “heretical, impious and scandalous in the religious domain, and antipatriotic, subversive of political order, offensive to the Government of Spain and to its method of procedure in these Islands in the political domain” (Retana 1907, 128–29). The report reached the Spanish governor-general of the Philippines, who asked for a copy of the novel from Rizal himself. The Comisión Permanente de Censura subsequently submitted a report that recommended a total ban on the importation, publication, and circulation of the book.

Although Rizal once told fellow reformist Mariano Ponce that the *Noli* was “written for the Filipinos, and it is necessary that it should be read by the Filipinos” (1938, v. 2, 29), the fact that the novel was written in Spanish would seem to undermine Rizal’s declared purpose from its inception because few “Filipinos” in Rizal’s time—and since—understood and used Spanish. Rizal acquired considerable notoriety not simply because of the spirited discussion and arguments generated by the *Noli*, but because of certain, and in retrospect, important “misunderstandings” that collected around his name.

For rumors, indeed, played a role in disseminating Rizal’s—and the *Noli’s*—proper name among those who had no access to either Rizal or his book. Almost immediately upon his arrival in the Philippines, Rizal was caught in a swirl of rumors about himself and the *Noli*. In a letter to Ferdinand Blumentritt, Rizal enumerates the various stories that reached his ears: “They take me for a German spy, agent of Bismarck, Protestant, freemason, wizard, a half-damned soul, etc.” (5 September 1887, 1938, v. 5, pt. 1, 202, and 216. Retana 1907, 144). In this respect, the importance of the *Noli* resides not so much in the impact it had on “the few who have understood it” as in the effect it had on those who could not and did not read it.

The fantasy about the nation that figures in the *Noli* is tied to a certain fantasy about Rizal himself that has figured in the reading of his novels. The question at the heart of both the internal drama of his novels and the critical drama—the controversy over meaning, language, and context—that these novels have subsequently provoked in Rizal’s time and beyond, is a question not only of what a Filipino nation is or should be, but also of how this nation is actualized. The question of substantiating the nation is principally posed as a question of appropriating “modern” ideas and practices identified as having a “foreign” (from the viewpoint of Rizal’s subsequent Filipino critics) and “external” (from Rizal’s viewpoint) provenance.

Modernity, then, must be understood not only as a specific conjuncture of world-historical forces, dating back to the seventeenth century, which were instrumental in shaping Philippine history through the fact of European colonialism. One might also understand it as a form of thinking about that period of history. This thinking concerns itself with the "how and wherefore of human freedom in an increasingly secular, tech-
nical and international context" (Beardsworth 1996, 49). As a discursive
term of reflection upon the problem of human freedom, modernity not
only has a descriptive component, but an equally important normative
one as well.

Rizal and his novels have for a long time served as commonsensical
markers—in historical and literary terms—of the emergence of the Fil-
pino nation, but the preceding discussion also underscores the need for
examining more carefully the relationship between Rizal, his novels, and
the nation they not only helped imagine, but bring into being. Rizal's
novels constructed the nation by deploying a narrative of development
that invoked, yet also questioned, the universal norms that define a spe-
cifically "modern" community in both temporal and spatial terms. This
argument, however, represents my own reading of Rizal and should not
be construed as his explicitly acknowledged position.

The fantasy of the nation forming the major theme of Rizal’s novels
should be considered Rizal’s way of thinking through the "modern" and its
implications for the Philippines. That Rizal and his novels are "modern",
would seem obvious to any Filipino student of history. Yet this view of
Rizal's modernity rests on the assumption of the modularity of the novel
and nation forms, that is, the idea of their flexibility and adaptability
to contexts different from their point of origin. As dominant artifacts
of the modern age with specific associations with "the West," the novel
and the nation provide the form and content—both the technical
means and substance—of Rizal’s attempts to determine the "Filipino’s"
understanding of community in relation to existing “colonial,” “inter-
national,” and “technical” processes. It is in the space of thinking through
a Philippine modernity that Rizal located the political possibilities of
nationhood.

Rizal’s novels may be read as attempts at describing a historical con-
text in which the nation form had already achieved normative status in
other places as the principal mode of social organization and political
imagination. But in reflecting upon the possibility or impossibility of
Filipino freedom in a secular, technical, and international context, Rizal’s
novels had to deal with the problem of formulating a notion of Filipino
nationness, based on the narrative of progress, development, and change
that ran up not only against the assumptions, disciplinary power, and
practices of the colonial regime in the Philippines, but also against the
idea of a certain kind of internationalism wrought by the existence of com-
peting European colonial powers (“The Philippines a Century Hence,”
1964, 154–62), and an emergent socialism as well.

The various, often conflicted, ways people who live within the grip of
colonial life experienced it give the lie to confident claims of universal
history and their promise of freedom and transcendence, since the reality
of colonial life imposes particularly recalcitrant material constraints on the
symbolic and practical capacities of the colonized to realize their freedom.
Rizal's imagined nation is one peculiarly fraught with hope and risk be-
cause its conception of the ethical imperative of development and change
is tied to a recognition of the vicissitudes and contingencies shaping the
relationship between and among rulers and ruled. This is borne out in
Rizal's adoption of an inside-outside narrative perspective in the Noli me
 tangere, a narrative double stance registering the presence of an "excess"
of competing cognitive standpoints that derive from the colonial experi-
ence of various inhabitants in the Philippines, and complicate the novel's
rhetoric of universal historical development, change, and progress.

How did Rizal deal with this "problem" of freedom and agency, and
how did he and his novels, in doing so, end up prefiguring this problem
in a way that differs from, and potentially challenges, most of the subse-
tuent critical appropriations of Rizal and his works?

To be sure, Rizal’s contemporaries and contemporary Rizal biog-
raphers have strikingly similar preoccupations. Although separated by three
republics, two world wars, and three foreign colonizers, the reactions of
Rizal’s contemporaries dovetail with the critical reception of Rizal by
subsequent generations of Filipinos insofar as they are concerned with
the idea of the “modern,” as well as its implications for the present-day
Filipinos’ capacity for transformative thought and action. This idea of the
modern, with its notions of radical transformation and emancipatory
capacities, crops up with monotonous regularity in almost all discussions
of Rizal’s novels. Not only is Rizal often depicted as an epitome of the
modern (Renaissance) man, his literary feat of imagining a Filipino com-
...
and that his subsequent persecution and martyrdom in the hands of the Spaniards helped crystallize popular resistance against the colonizers. It has also been argued that Rizal was an American-sponsored hero, the product of American efforts to contain the recalcitrant, revolutionary energies of the Filipino people, the better to implement American colonial rule over the islands (Constantino 1982; Constantino and Constantino 1975).

These explanations tend to occlude rather than illuminate the question of Rizal’s influence, for how exactly did Rizal establish a reputation that, even in his time, made him the potential rallying point of forces that coalesced into anticolonial movements? Such a question necessarily invokes a notion of public reputation cutting across several sections of social life and classes. Indeed, Rizal was known beyond the circle of hispanized Filipinos who agitated for reforms in Manila and Europe. Rizal had written about the “great deal of uproar” the Noli created (1961d, v. 1, 135). In the same letter, Rizal treats us to an account of his meeting with the governor-general of the Philippines. “You have written a novel that aroused much comment,” Rizal reported the governor as saying, “they tell me that there are subversive ideas in it. I wish to read it.”

The above quotation from Rizal’s letter offers us some insights into the nature of the novel and of Rizal’s reception. The governor first heard about the novel and the comments it elicited, then he wishes, in fact, to read it. It is indicative of the novel’s popularity that Rizal himself had to admit to the governor that he did not have a copy of his own book at hand, and had to go around town looking for one (1961d, 135-36). In his biography of Rizal, León Ma. Guerrero enumerates the factors that worked against the dissemination of the Noli and its ideas by the usual means of circulation among the reading public. Rizal had had two thousand copies of the Noli printed, but, as mentioned above, only a small number of these copies found their way into the Philippines. 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 only be read by a small number of people, mostly Spaniards and educated Filipinos.3

Yet, for all these obstructions, Guerrero acknowledges that “one of the most extraordinary things about the Noli is that withal it changed the history of a nation” (1963, 149). Guerrero does not provide any explanation for this conundrum, merely subsuming it under his argument that Rizal’s influence lay in the fact that he “taught his countrymen that they could be something else, Filipinos who were members of a Filipino Nation” (496). Having thus declared Rizal the “First Filipino” by virtue of his accomplishments, Guerrero feels compelled to add that Rizal “is also the first Filipino because he is first in the hearts of the Filipinos” (497). These statements mean to account for Rizal’s extraordinary impact on the imagination of his countrymen, but Guerrero merely affects a sleight-of-hand in his effort to explain Rizal’s influence, for he substitutes description for explanation. Rizal is, in other words, influential because he is Rizal. In spite of Guerrero’s attempts to provide a perspective on Rizal that differs substantively from the usual hagiographies of the national hero, his biography is, in the final analysis, not very different from those against which he wrote.

Since Guerrero does not provide an adequate explanation of Rizal’s influence, we will need to seek the answer from Rizal himself. In Rizal’s letter to Blumentritt, instead of a discussion generated by the circulation of the Noli among the reading public, another form of circulation that precedes the act of reading is at work and takes the form of rumors. “Proscription by the colonial state and especially by the friars made the book controversial, and perhaps effectively impeded the further dissemination of the ideas expounded and embodied by the novel. Most people in Rizal’s time had no access to the novel and had perferv to obtain access secondhand, that is, by hearsay. The state and the clergy had not counted on the effect that their censorship would have on public reception of the novel, for, rather than curtail the circulation of the novel’s ideas, censorship made possible the production of a specific form of reading that sidestepped procription but permitted, nevertheless, a relaying of the novel’s “content.” This specific mediation of the Noli took the form of rumors.

The most interesting aspect of these rumors is, of course, that they are repeated in supposedly reputable newspapers. The fact that these rumors were taken to be the truth by everybody, including the so-called indios, appears to have greatly disturbed the writer of Época:

En tales circunstancias llegó á Filipinas, procedente de Alemania, el calámeño José Rizal, quien reunió de seguido al más granado de su pueblo, y entre aquellas sencillas gentes divulgó con pertinaz insistencia ideas rabiosamente opuestas á los españoles, á las autoridades y en particular á los religiosos, á ciencia y paciencia de los que debieron impedir tales predicaciones. Rizal ha inspirado entre sus paisanos odio á la religion católica, y sus mas adeptos han
abandonó toda práctica religiosa, cumpliendo en esto fielmente con lo que enseña en su novela *Noli me tangere*, antipatía profunda á los religiosos, desprestigiándolos y diciendo de ellos que son los explotadores del indio de Calamba, y otra porción de cosas por el estilo, depresivas, no ya para los dominicos, sino también para todas las demás comunidades, y nada digamos de como pinta á la raza españoles.

...Cuántas responsabilidades tiene sobre si ese germanófilo, pues con sus teorías ha venido a producir mil disgustos a muchos de sus paisanos! En Calamba no se habla sino de los triunfos de Rizal, de sus promesas, de la acogida que le dispensan los sabios (?) de Europa; de sus viajes por Alemania; de sus poder y grandes influencias (?) en esa nación; de que se va a traer una escuadra alemana (!?): de que él les ha de dar a sus paisanos la propiedad de la hacienda de Calamba; de que allí se ha de constituir un gran Estado, una Republica modelo... En fin, mil paparruchas que tienen totalmente perturbados á aquellas gentes de un modo tal, que es ridículo y absurdo, pero exactísimo, que en Calamba á los que siguen á Rizal se les apoda el partido de Alemania, y á los que son leales á los padres dominicos se les llama el partido de los frailes. (quoted in Retana, 1907, 141–42)

In such circumstances, the Calamboño José Rizal arrived in the Philippines from Germany, and immediately joined the most select of his people. And among those simple people, he popularized with tireless persistence ideas that are rationally opposed to the Spaniards, to the authorities, and, in particular, to the religious, to the learning and efforts of those whose duty it was to impede such preachings. Rizal has inspired hatred among his countrymen toward the Catholic religion, and his closest followers have abandoned all practice of religion, faithfully complying with that which he teaches in his novel *Noli me tangere*, [namely,] profound antipathy to the clergy, deprecating them and saying of them that they are exploiters of the *indio* of Calamba, and things of that kind, insulting things, not only as concerns the Dominicans, but also all the other orders, not to mention how he portrays the Spanish as a race.

How much responsibility does this Germanophile bear, with his theories which have produced a great deal of revulsion among his countrymen! In Calamba there is no talk save that of Rizal’s triumphs, his promises, of the welcome afforded him by the sages (?) of Europe, of his travels through Germany, of his power and great influence (!) in that nation, of how he would bring a German fleet (!!), of how he is to give to his countrymen the ownership of the Calamba hacienda, and of how a Great State, a Model Republic would be established there... In summary, [all these are] a thousand hoaxes that have totally disturbed those people in such a (ridiculous, absurd but most effective) way that, in Calamba, those who follow Rizal are tagged "The Party of Germany," and those loyal to the Dominican fathers are called "The Party of the Friars" (my translation).

Although the article writer expresses the fear that Rizal’s novel would stir up opposition to the Spanish clergy and the government, he is more alarmed by the idea that Rizal’s rumored association with the Germans appears to be generally believed by one and all. *La Época* concords yet tries to contain the rumors by decanting them into a Calamba that threatens to dissolve into factions like the Party of the Friars and the Party of Germany. But the unexpressed fear is that this factionalizing can very easily spill over and inundate other parts of the country and other members of the Spanish civil and ecclesiastical orders. Ironically, by repeating these rumors, the newspaper may have done more to lend credence to them just by the mere fact that they were printed at all. Furthermore, Rizal’s "scientific homeland," Germany, becomes a signifier of potential opposition to the Spanish authorities because of the vilification the Spaniards heaped upon it. Retana comments that Spanish anxiety regarding the dispute with Germany over the Carolinas at that time explains the virulence directed toward the novel that, "as was natural," was supposedly more pronounced in the Philippines than anywhere else.  

The vehemence with which Rizal’s detractors attacked him is equally only by the avidity with which the "natives" received Rizal himself. Writing to Blumentritt, Rizal describes a Mount Makiling outing that quickly spawned rumors that he had planted the German flag at the summit and proclaimed German sovereignty over the Philippines (1938, v. 5, pt. 1, 202 and 216; Retana 1907, 144; L. Guerrero 1963, 174). What could account for the ease with which Rizal attracted followers (if only for an outing) from among the *indios*? Guerrero suggests a religious reading of the ordinary people’s enthusiasm for following Rizal around: "How else are we to explain why the peasants should follow him on his continental-style outings at dawn to admire scenic views from a mountain-top? He himself might believe that he was only leading a party of mountaineers *à la* Leitmeritz; the simple men, women and children gathered round him,
one might surmise, in the expectation of a second Sermon on the Mount” (Guerrero 1963, 175). Historian John Schumacher has also suggested viewing the folk reception of Rizal through the lenses of Reynaldo Ileo’s pathbreaking _Pasion and Revolution_, which analyzes the masses’ notions of change and revolution in terms of the religious idiom of the Passion of Jesus Christ (1991, 188; Ileo 1989; Ileo 1982b, 278–337). Guerrero’s and Schumacher’s analyses would thus confer on Rizal the same prophetic, Christ-like aura (further reinforced by his martyrdom) with which he appeared in folk perception.

Yet there may be another way of appreciating the complex inlay of representations surrounding Rizal’s stay in the Philippines, a way of drawing attention back to Rizal’s German connection. Austin Coates and Carlos Quirino’s biographies of Rizal both report an anecdote concerning the reputation that Rizal had established as a “German doctor” soon after he opened a clinic in Calamba in 1887. Here is Quirino’s version (1940, 135):

[Rizal] became known as the “Doctor Uliman,” a Tagalog corruption of the Spanish word for German. Among the peasants, Rizal assumed legendary proportions and tales of his miraculous cures were whispered around. Once a _tao_ stood outside the Mercado home, undecided whether or not to come in. Rizal saw him and asked him to come up.

“I want to see, sir, the Doctor Uliman,” said the peasant.

Rizal revealed that he was not an _uliman_ although that was the name they called him.

“SUSNARIOSEP!” exclaimed the surprised _tao_, crossing himself. “So, it’s only you—thank you very much, sir—don’t bother.”

In Coates’s version, Rizal is merely pointed out as “Doctor Uliman,” and the man, who comes from another town, exclaims “in very rough Tagalog ‘Oh, that!” and goes away in disgust” (1968, 130). The anecdote is ostensibly about a certain kind of colonial mentality—the man hears of the miraculous cures performed by a “German doctor,” who turns out to be an _indio_ just like himself. But if one suspends this judgment and focuses instead on what exactly it was the man had expected of “Doctor Uliman,” then the moment the _uliman_ dissolves into an _indio_ appears not as a mere case of colonial mentality, but rather, as an implicit expectation of and curiosity about what _Doctor Uliman_ represents. These secondhand accounts, passed on for generations, offer a telling glimpse of a kind of popular discourse in which the “modern” becomes an object of curiosity and reflection. That a German doctor would be an object of curiosity can no longer have been unimaginable in Rizal’s time since descriptions of the trappings of the modern which appeared one after another in the last half of the nineteenth century were likely to have been disseminated beyond Manila to neighboring provinces like Laguna.7

The man that the _tao_ (ordinary person) expects has two attributes: he is a doctor, and a foreigner. The _tao_ ’s disappointed “oh, that,” therefore, signifies a moment of knowledge: the _indio_ who appears before him, and in one version even answers to the foreign-sounding name Doctor Uliman is not foreign but “one of us.” The exclamation of disappointment already encapsulates a set of assumptions about what is known, about what is “foreign” and what is not; yet it also encodes a kind of desire, a set of assumptions about what _needs_ to be known. The _tao_ is curious about the appearance of someone “modern,” where “modern” is defined here as secular (Doctor Uliman is not a priest), technical (Uliman is a doctor), and “international” (Doctor is “Uliman”).

Rizal’s arrival thus takes on the drama and excitement of the appearance of the modern. In his overcoat and derby hat, pale from years of living in a temperate climate and already afflicted with prickly heat rash, and furthermore believed to have recently arrived from Germany and able to successfully cure people of their eye ailments, Rizal lent himself to a species of rumor mongering that incorporated the oppositional connotations of Germany (Protestant, enemy of Spain) and applied them to an _indio_. Moreover, rumors about the subversive content of the _Noli_, as well as news of Rizal’s reception by the authorities, did nothing to dispel the “misunderstanding” of Rizal.

If the anecdote is indeed true, it would seem that most people went to see Rizal hoping to see a white man, and were surprised that “Doctor Uliman” turned out, miraculously, to be _indio_. This disappointment, however, does not explain why the people around him would follow him around, and still call him “Doctor Uliman” anyway.

But perhaps this incident explains more successfully the expectations of Rizal’s biographers, for we need to ask why the biographers chose this incident as illustrative of Rizal’s reputation in the Philippines. Rizal’s biographers have repeatedly remarked on his metamorphosis into the miraculous “Doctor Uliman.” Guerrero and Coates, for example, both dwell on Rizal’s “foreign” appearance during his execution. Guerrero writes: “How strange he must have looked, in his black European suit and black derby, facing the eight Filipinos [sic] of the firing-squad in their tropical campaign uniforms and straw hats. It was almost as if this somberly
garbed man between the two lampposts had been indeed a foreign agent from some cold and hostile kingdom, and his executioners the true defenders of their native land" (1963, 490). And Coates: "Aged thirty-five, short and slender, pale after two months in prison, he was impeccably dressed in European style, black suit, spotlessly white shirt and tie, and wearing a black derby hat, much in vogue at that time in Europe. His appearance was almost English in its formality and taste" (1968, xvi).

In these biographers' accounts, Rizal hovers in that moment between the foreign and native; for both Guerrero and Coates, Rizal's role in the formation of Philippine nationalism hinges on his access to the Europe's "modern" ideas and his ability to translate and appropriate such ideas in the Filipino context. These obviously symbolic descriptions of Rizal's foreign appearance can themselves be read as scholarly versions of the Doctor Uliman anecdote, because they all dwell on the moment of recognition, of transformation even, in which Rizal becomes the living proof that one can be both native and modern. For a "native" to be taken for a German doctor, it seems, proves that the "native" can be "modern," that the two terms are not, as the colonizers would insist, mutually exclusive. Coates himself, in fact, characterizes Rizal's achievement in terms of Rizal's ability to seem modern and therefore relevant to the realities of Philippine history in the present time. The ideas expressed in Rizal's novels, too, stand as testaments to his modern sensibility: It is Rizal's "acceptance," in Coates' assessment, "of the inevitability of Asia developing in the full utilization of the science and technology of the West that gives him the sense of modernity he conveys today, rendering him of all the national leaders of Asia the most considerable, balanced, and far-seeing" (1968, 355).

In the biographies, as in the rumors, Rizal assumes the stance of someone who comes both from inside and outside, who crosses the borders of colonial distinctions with apparent ease. The main difference, however, is that in the rumors, curiosity about Rizal stemmed from the fact that the people believed Rizal was, indeed, a "Doctor Uliman"; whereas in the biographies, there is never any doubt that "Doctor Uliman" was an indio doctor (or, more accurately, a "Filipino"), or that an indio could take on the "modern" attributes of Doctor Uliman. Indeed, and unlike the biographies of Rizal that seek to explain the moment in which a native doctor can be mistaken for Doctor Uliman (the modern), the rumors of Doctor Uliman and his miraculous cure are much more unsettling since they do not always end in the nationalist recognition that a Filipino can be modern. The strength of the rumors lay not in the domestication of Rizal's "foreign" (and modern) attributes, but in the highlighting, indeed naturalizing, of it—a showcasing of his connections to the modern "outside." Rizal hovers between the foreign and native, and the sliding between these categories shows how unstable an appellation such as "Filipino" was in Rizal's time, and how powerful and influential Rizal's figural reappropriation of the term "Filipino" to encompass the erstwhile indio had become, less than a century after his novels were published and proscribed.

The Novel and Nation as Modern Artifacts

Far from being an idiosyncrasy, the intense preoccupation with the foreign condensed in the Doctor Uliman anecdote figures prominently in a number of literary studies on Rizal. Like the biographies that turn the national hero's life story into a case study of nationalism and its roots in the question of what is modern and how the colony can be imagined as a modern nation, the main insights of some of the most influential literary studies on Rizal's import in Philippine literature hinge on the same identification of Rizal with the modernity of nationalism.

In his pioneering and comprehensive study of the novel form, Resil Mojares situates the Noli me tangere within the context of a cultural nationalism that emerged out of specific historical and technological developments in the Philippines, notably the formation of an incipient print culture and the rise of a hispanized class whose scions were educated in Europe. Crucial to the novel's development was the further crystallization of empirical and mimetic tendencies already at work in colonial prose narratives before the nineteenth century. Mojares is concerned with locating Rizal's novel in a native prose tradition already ending towards a synthesis of empirical and fictional stances in writing (Mojares 1983, 150). At the same time, he states that Rizal's novels represent a "dramatic and qualitative leap" in the development of the novel. Thus, Mojares sees Rizal's novels as a "culmination" of developments in local literature leading up to 1887 as well as a "full demonstration" of the novel form as it was being used canonically in Europe. He writes: "Indeed, with Rizal's works the fully developed novel as it is known in Europe comes upon the local scene" (137). The language of Mojares's observation is strongly reminiscent of that used by Guerrero and Coates to describe Rizal's arrival in Manila after five years' absence.

Mojares rightly states that the Filipino novel emerged at a time when the novel form itself was already fully developed in other countries. He notes that the specificity of the Noli's textual history—"written and pub-
lished on foreign soil, and shaped by the impulses of a broad European tradition”—could account for why there appears to be a lack of continuity in the development of the genre between Rizal’s novels and later novels written in the vernacular languages around the turn of the century. The uneven development of plural strands of the Philippine literary tradition—a reflection of the uneven development characteristic of colonialism under Spain and the United States—would seem to account for the tentativeness of the novel form exhibited in the early twentieth century, notwithstanding the example Rizal’s pathbreaking novels set (225).

Yet Mojares observes that Rizal’s novels remain “the most important literary works produced by a Filipino writer, animating Filipino consciousness to this day, and setting standards no Filipino writer can ignore” (137). Mojares credits the novels with portraying a society “in which the imperatives for restructurings of power are already present” (143). In similar terms, he explains the novels’ avowed intent of “going down to the roots of national consciousness” in terms of parallel developments in the cultural concerns of Germany, Italy, France, and other European countries (119).

The thorny question for Mojares, though, is the degree to which Rizal’s novels can be considered “Filipino,” given their provenance and implication in “foreign” spaces and contexts. Mojares argues against the commonsensical treatment of Rizal’s novels as emerging “Minerva-like from the head of Zeus” (137) and instead stresses that the novels lie within the “native, developing tradition” of prose narratives. To reinforce his claim that Rizal’s novels are Filipino, Mojares splits the novels into form and content analysis. His basic argument is that the novel “in the European, nineteenth century sense of this form” is nevertheless Filipino in “the particularity of motive, subject and content” (150).

John Schumacher, in his analysis of the Noli, makes a similar, but more problematic move. Like Mojares, Schumacher uses Rizal to mark the convergence of material and ideological forces instrumental in defining the aspirations of native “Filipinos” in nationalist terms. He thus considers the Noli as a “charter of nationalism for Filipinos,” a catalyst of revolution (1991, 91-101). According to Schumacher, Rizal provided the most “thoughtful” articulation of the Filipino struggle for unity, equality, and freedom, and in this sense, the 1872 native clergy’s aspirations that preceded Rizal’s were but precursors whose incipient visions awaited full and mature articulation by Rizal.9

The Noli provided a “new direction in Filipino art and literature in relation to nationalism,” writes Schumacher. As evidence, he compares the Noli to Ninay (1885), a novel written by Pedro Paterno, a fellow reformist and friend of Rizal’s. Typical of the costumbrismo genre, Ninay interweaves a melodramatic plot with descriptions of scenes and customs from Philippine life (L. Guerrero 1963, 128-36). Schumacher writes: “The subject of Ninay could have taken place in some European country just as well as in the Philippines. No one can say that of the Noli. It is pre-eminently, as Rizal proclaims it in the subtitle, ‘Novela tagala,’ even if it be written in Spanish. In it we find Filipino life at its worst and best, written unmistakably by Filipinos and directed to Filipinos” (1991, 122).

León Ma. Guerrero also has a low opinion of Paterno’s novel, calling Ninay an “illustrated travelogue” (1963, 134). He notes the similarities in the rather melodramatic plots of the Noli and Ninay but is at pains to point out that the political message of the Noli, as well as its revealing descriptions of the “realities of the country” through vivid character sketches, is what distinguishes the two novels. For if the plot were the main basis of evaluation, according to Guerrero, then the Noli would rank with Ninay; or worse with ‘Maria Nun’ and other slanders on the ‘mysteries’ of convents” (130-31). For Schumacher, Guerrero, and Mojares, the Noli’s ability to depict—if not actually politicize the depiction of—Filipino life made it influential. Thus, the publication of the Noli is heralded as a watershed event in Philippine history in that it not only illustrates but, more importantly, signifies the emergence of nationalist consciousness.

Now, if it is the (political) content that separates Rizal’s Noli from travelogues and “slanders,” how are we to think about the novel’s form? Unlike Mojares, both Schumacher and Guerrero leave out any consideration of the possible mutations the European realist novel form can undergo in the articulation of a “Filipino” content, focusing instead, only on the way the European novel form determines Rizal’s portrayal of the country’s “realities.” In doing so, they actually establish a dichotomy between form and content. Nationalism is, for all purposes, a question of essence, a content that fills a basically “foreign” form. The overly simplified dichotomy that Guerrero and Schumacher establish in discussing the transplantation of western forms like the modern novel, nation, and colonial state to the colony, resolves through simple evasion the issue of what happens during the process of translation or adaptation. It operates on a hidden assumption that opposes a “native” content to a foreign form” in a commonsensical, a priori way without posing the question of how these terms relate to each other, and what effect the interaction between the terms would have on the terms themselves.
But what does it mean to have a “Filipino” novel and nation? What is the relationship between them? This would seem a commonsensical question, given that the novel almost always carries its nationality with it, so that we can speak offhand of the “English novel,” the “Spanish novel,” and the “French novel.” The link between the nineteenth-century realist novel, the nation, and Filipinoness forms the basis—but, alas, an often unexamined basis—of the preeminent place Rizal’s novels occupy in Philippine history, as well as in Philippine literary history. For both fields of inquiry—literature and history—the question of nation and the role culture played in the formation of the nation are sine qua non. Yet it is precisely this link that, being commonsensical, is not elaborated fully.

The question of the novel, when conjoined with the question of the nation, inevitably provokes a debate on how these “foreign” (i.e., Western European) forms take on a “Filipino” content. But what are the conditions under which this very question is posed as a problematic dichotomy in the first place? What makes the novel a particularly canonic vehicle of nationalist thought? Are Rizal’s novels really, simply “western” in form and “Filipino” in content? Or is there another way of providing a more nuanced account of the “transplantation” of the western novel to the colony? What do our attempts to answer the above questions tell us, in turn, about the relationship between literature and history, fact and fiction, nation and narration?

In his 21 March 1887 letter to Blumentritt, Rizal called the Noli “the first impartial and bold book about the life of the Tagalogs. The Filipinos will find in it the history of the last ten years” (Es el primer libro imparcial y atrevido sobre la vida de los tagalos. Los filipinos encontrarán en él la historia de los últimos diez años) (1938, v. 5, 96–97). In a magical feat of extrapolation, Rizal turns a novel about Tagalog life into a history not of the Tagalogs, but “of the last ten years.” He goes on to explain the motive behind the writing: “Here, I answer all the false conceptions that they [the government and the friars] have written against us and all the insults with which they have tried to humiliate us” (Aquí contestó todos los conceptos falsos que se han escrito contra nosotros y todos los insultos con que se ha querido deprimirnos) (97). His goal? “It is better to write for my countrymen...I must wake from its slumber the spirit of my fatherland...I must first propose to my countrymen an example with which to struggle against their bad qualities and afterwards, when they have reformed, then many writers will rise up who can present my fatherland to proud Europe, as a young damsel enters society after she has completed her education” (291–92). To this effect, “I have unmasked the hypocrisy which,

under the cloak of Religion, came among us to impoverish us, to brutalize us; I have distinguished the true Religion from the false, from the superstitious, from that which traffics with the sacred word to extract money, to make us believe in foolishness which Catholicism would blush at if it had knowledge of it. I have unveiled what lay hidden behind the deceptive and brilliant words of our government; I have told our compatriots of our faults, our vices, our culpable and shameful complacency with these miseries” (1963, v. 2, bk. 3, 83–84).

Here Rizal sets out primarily to do two things: answer the callumns of the colonizers heaped upon his people, and portray the country’s realities to propose a “cure” by example. Rizal’s favorite metaphor for the writing process and motive—one not unexpected given his profession—is clinical diagnosis. In dedicating the Noli to the “Motherland,” Rizal writes:

Regístrate en la historia de los padecimientos humanos en cancer de un carácter tan maligno que el menor contacto le irrita y despierta en él agudísimos dolores. Pues bien, cuantas veces en medio de las civilizaciones modernas he querido evocarte, ya para compahiararme de tus recuerdos, ya para compartarte con otros países, tantas me presentó tu querida imagen con un cancer social parecido.

Deseando tu salud que es la nuestra, y buscando el mejor tratamiento, haré contigo lo que con sus enfermos los antiguos: exponiéndolos en las gradas del templo, para que cada persona que viniése de invocar a la Divinidad les propusiese un remedio.

Y á este fin, trataré de reproducir fielmente tu estado sin contemplaciones; levantaré parte del velo que encubre el mal, sacrificando á la verdad todo, hasta el mismo amor propio, pues, como hijo tuyo, adoro tambien de tus defectos y fauces.

In the annals of human adversity, there is etched a cancer, of a breed so malignant that the least contact exacerbates it and stirs in it the sharpest of pains. And thus, so many times amidst modern cultures I have wanted to evoke you, sometimes for memories of you to keep the company, other times, to compare you with other nations—many times your beloved image appears to me afflicted with a social cancer of similar malignancy.

Desiring your well-being, which is our own, and searching for the best cure, I will do with you as the ancients of old did with their afflicted,
expose them on the steps of the temple so that each one who would come to invoke the Divine, would propose a cure for them.

And to this end, I will attempt to faithfully reproduce your condition without much ado. I will lift part of the shroud that conceals your illness, sacrificing to truth everything, even my own self-respect, for as your son, I also suffer in your defects and failings.

There are several features worth noting here. One, Rizal establishes an analogy between the natural body and the social condition, implying that both entities are governed by certain laws that, in the case of phenomena such as the human body and society, are basically knowable. He compares the social condition of the country to a diseased body, and suggests that the way to solve the country’s problems is by diagnosing the disease that afflicts it in the first place.

Two, Rizal’s diagnosis hinges on the question of truth, of accuracy and veracity—of objectivity, in other words—since no cure can be proposed unless the physician gets his “facts” and diagnosis right. The determination of causality is thus an important component of the analysis. Knowing what causes the disease is already a step towards curing the patient.

Three, and interestingly, Rizal refers to himself in the text, and identifies both with the doctor who diagnoses the social cancer, as well as with the patient who suffers from the disease. The novel’s founding act is based on a double consciousness split between one who knows and one who is, or who submits to being, known.

More tellingly, however, Rizal proposes to use a set of literary procedures, associated with the novel form, to create a discourse that is, in an important sense, scientific, and therefore, not “real” or literature. Rizal wrote the Noli at a time when journalism and history were already held to be distinct from literature, as nearly a century of development separated these “fields” of discourse from a previously general and undifferentiated “novel/news” discourse. Rizal’s attitude toward the Noli is most evident in a letter he drafted on 5 March 1887, probably intended for Filipino painter Felix Resurrección Hidalgo: “The incidents [in the Noli] that I relate are all true and they happened; I can give proofs of them. My book may have—and it has—defects from the artistic or aesthetic point of view. I don’t deny it; but what cannot be questioned is the impartiality of my narration” (1963, 84). In his response to Vicente Barrantes’ attacks on the artistic merits of the Noli, Rizal wrote scathingly: “And as I did not write for myself nor to be admitted to the porter’s lodge of the Academy, but only to denounce abuses and unmask hypocrites, my purpose having been achieved, what does the rest matter to me?” (1964, 192). (But of course the aesthetic claim did matter, for he later planned to write a novel that was more “profound and perfect” than the Noli.)

Although even a cursory glance at the Rizal-Blumentritt correspondence provides plenty of evidence to support the fact that Rizal evinced a lifelong fascination with ethnography, we need to ask ourselves why Rizal chose to write a novel rather than, as his contemporary Isabelo de los Reyes did, an ethnographic or properly historical account, given Rizal’s avowed goal of representing Philippine society. The obvious answer would have been that the novel form’s fictional conventions allowed for something more than a portrayal of the present that would have been unavailable in ethnography. How, precisely, does the novel form’s fictional quality allow its practitioners to do something more than simply depict contemporary affairs, a feat that, had it been attempted in ethnography, would have made the writer much more vulnerable to charges of partiality?

Yet, perhaps the answer could also very well have been that both the colonial and precolonial natives hardly left any historical documents, thanks to the missionaries’ religious zeal; the few surviving accounts of precolonial and colonial life were written by the Spanish colonizers. To be sure, Rizal did turn to ancient documents when he published his annotations of Antonio Morga’s Sucesos de las Islas Filipinas (1609) in 1890, a year before his second novel El filibusterismo appeared in print. But this account of “the last moments of our ancient nationality” (los últimos momentos de nuestra antigua nacionalidad) (1962, v) has to admit the mediation, albeit relatively untainted with racial bias, of the colonizer, so that the account of precolonial Philippines also becomes, at one and the same time, the account of its conquest and vanishing (1962, vii).

Reynaldo Ileto has argued that Ilustrados like Rizal operated on a nineteenth-century European conception of “total history” that purported to account for differences between societies by reading and subsuming them under the sign of a universal system of values, a coherent worldview. According to Ileto, it was “[t]he lack of a continuous, uninterrupted history of Filipino consciousness that lay behind the Ilustrado nostalgia for lost origins” (1982b, 280–85). This nostalgia for lost origins is, therefore, inherently contaminated by the sense of a “Fall” of pre-Hispanic native culture, a fall that was blamed not only on Spanish colonial rule, but on the natives who, in their ignorance, “hastened to abandon what was theirs to take up what was new.”


Rizal's novels, however, not only attempted to fill the gaps of history, albeit necessarily focusing on the present instead of a glorious past; they also attempted to effect a *coup de force* in relation to the literary tradition that they inherited, but which they did not simply want to repeat. The Spanish clergy's vociferous reaction to the *Noli* showed precisely the novel's success at being taken as a source of local and independent expression. One might further explain this by saying that the novel was written and published abroad, and that perhaps Rizal's personal ambition echoed the aspirations for recognition in Spain that the hispanized native and mestizo middle class from the Philippines sought.

The Spanish government had proved intractable about granting the Philippines representation in the Spanish Cortes, and because they were denied access to the political sphere of the colonial and imperial centers, the reformists strove to achieve recognition in the cultural field. The only space open to them was the "universal" realm of culture. It was in the cultural scene that the Filipinos could claim participation in the normative culture of Europe, which claim constituted the primary means and venue available for proving themselves the Spaniards' "equal" (Schumacher 1997, 120–21). Like the situation in most Third World countries, Philippine nationalism took root first in the religious, cultural, and political arenas, while remaining, for the moment, separate and distinct from the domain of the state.

Ironically, because the narrative ended up working too well, thereby binding Rizal to the thoughts and characters of his novel, Rizal was forced to invoke the fictional quality of his novel to dissociate himself from the charges that critics like Vicente Barrantes made regarding the ideas the novel expressed: "I don't know, Most Excellent Sir, if the academicians *ambarum domorum* have already laid down as law that the ideas expressed by the characters in the novel have to be precisely the writer's own convictions and not what are suitable to them considering their circumstances, beliefs, habits, education and passions...Does Your Excellency by chance persist in your opinion that the characters of a novel must all conform to the convictions of the author?" (1964, 183, 191).

How do we explain the seemingly contradictory move Rizal made in claiming the simultaneous veracity and fictionality of his novels? Implicit in Rizal's line of reasoning is the assumption that literature has the capacity to intervene in history, to help construct it. For Rizal, literature operates as a force of its own in history, but it is also history. Literature enters history through its exposition of a "knowable community." This phrase must be read two ways: literature depicts the knowable community, and the knowable community generates literature that describes it as a knowable community. Rizal's treatment of the relationship between literature and history takes the relation between the two to be one of reciprocal interaction. Writing to Pablo Pastells, Rizal takes the relationship one step farther and links the truth-generating capacity of his work to its active intervention in shaping the "future": "What I had were a clear vision of the real situation in my fatherland, vivid images of what was going on, and enough skill to diagnose the disease, so much so that not only was I able to portray what took place but also foretold what was to come. Inasmuch as at this very moment I see the story of my 'novel' unfolding itself with so much accuracy I can really say I am watching, and at the same time taking part in, the performance of my own work" (Bonoan 1994, 139).

For Rizal, the basic problem of "knowing" a community took the form of finding a position from which a community can be known. Moreover, this position had to be convincingly experienced by his readers for the knowable community to be known as such. But known to whom? And by whom? The usual answer would be: by the Filipinos.

Yet the term Filipino itself poses the challenge of differentiation and integration. Who, indeed, counted as Filipino? Rizal's selective appropriation of the hitherto restricted term Filipino to encompass creoles, natives, mestizos, even the infidel *sangley*, is partly based on the notion of affective ties to a territorially bounded, indeed determined, entity. *Las Islas Filipinas.* It is also obvious, however, that Rizal was writing to address non-Filipinos. Answering the Spaniards' calumnies and insults would have demanded addressing the Spaniards themselves, answering representation with representation. The opening chapter of the *Noli* actually comes right out and names its own putative readers:

Since no porters or servants ask for the invitation cards, let us go up. O, you who read me, friend or foe (oh tú que me lees, amigo o enemigo), if you are attracted to the sounds of the orchestra, to the bright lights, or by the unmistakable tinkling of glass and silverware, and wish to know how parties are in the Pearl of the Orient—I would find it more pleasurable to spare you the description of the house, but this is just as important. (underscoring added, modified translation)

In the opening chapter, the narrative persona actually functions as a kind of guide, an insider who leads his reader (whether friend or enemy, insider or outsider) through the Philippine natural and social terrain. The stance the narrative voice takes may be characterized as a kind of double
address, of being both inside looking out and outside looking in. This curious double address—directed at insiders and outsiders, so to speak—cannot be merely dismissed as a narrative device that Rizal decided to adopt on a whim for the *Noli*. For the inside-outside position Rizal constructed is precisely the participant-observer position through which the “Filipino” community is rendered knowable. Such a position binds the representational capacity of novel writing to the “objective reality” of nationness, the act of signification to a “signified” out there.

This intimate connection between the novel and nation constitutes the main terms for the novel’s exposition of the problem of the knowable community. And, in fact, by the nineteenth century, the novel had become a self-conscious genre; it was the privileged form most eminently given to the exposition of the knowable community. How is this so?

Benedict Anderson made the link between the nineteenth-century European realist novel and the nation in his influential *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (1991). The *Noli* is, in fact, the typecase of Anderson’s analysis of nationalism, which differs from other accounts in its treatment of nationality, or the more multilayered “nationness,” as a “cultural artefact” (1991, 4). Anderson argues that the novel form provided the “technical means for ‘re-presenting’ the kind of imagined community that is the nation” (25, 26–29). Anderson compares the *Noli* with *Florante at Laura*, a metrical romance in Tagalog by Francisco Baltazar (Balagtas) written in the late 1830s. Balagtas’s work has been widely hailed as the most important example of the reworking of the romance into a form capable of generating a “self-conscious” reference to native society. But the distinctions that Anderson makes between the novel and the romance point to the fact that there occurred an important shift in the modes of apprehending the world. For the romance is set in a distant past, whereas the novel locates the action in a recent setting. The romance is based on the epic, whereas the novel is modeled on history and journalism. The romance is usually set in a remote and exotic location (like Albania) whereas the novel tends to set in the author’s locale. Romances, perhaps more importantly, blend fact and fiction to create a fictional plot, whereas the novel tends to deny its fictionality and claims to be writing history or rendering life as it is (Anderson 1991, 28; Davis 1983, 40).

Anderson analyzes the “nation” on the basis of its being a specific, shared system of signification which emerged out of a highly specific convergence of historical forces during the later medieval period. The features Anderson attributes to the nation would seem to have a lot in common with the notion of ideology. For example, the imagined community is both imaginary and real, and in fact, exploits and obscures the dichotomy between fact and fiction. Like ideology, the nation naturalizes signs in order to appear free, universal, and self-generating. Like ideology, the nation denies its mode of production by rooting its history in antiquity. Like ideology, the novel’s frame of reference is not history, but the social process of signification, the world of “lived” as opposed to “actual” experience. Anderson, however, takes pains to differentiate nationalism from ideology, and instead compares it to two distinct social formations—kinship and religion. The term ideology, with its often negative and restrictive associations, fails to communicate and explain the capacity of the nation to command affective loyalties, nor does it fully suggest the nation’s function in explaining human mutability and mortality. This function suggests a crossing of paths between the nation and the novel, since the latter often deals with the issues of mutability and mortality.

One thing that the novel and nation have in common is the inseparability of their conception as forms from assumptions about their modularity. Having once attained an institutional stability as a self-conscious form—that is, a “there-ness” permitting people to speak of nations and novels as such—they are held to acquire a kind of translatability, a universalizing, generic form that can be carried on to other places. Translatability also brings up the possibility of comparison. As the dedication page in the *Noli* made clear, Rizal conjured up his Motherland “amidst modern cultures.” The idea of comparison was there from the beginning—evoking his motherland was not only meant to “keep him company” (or soothe his nostalgia); it also entailed comparison with other nations.

It is usual to explain the emergence of the novel and the nation by looking at the changes—the development of printing technology; the rise of capitalism and crystallization of the bourgeoisie as a class; urbanization, secularization, and reformation—then sweeping Europe. Since these have been treated in greater detail elsewhere, there is no need to repeat the arguments. Instead, I would like to look into the mechanisms of the shift in consciousness that we usually classify as the growth of empirical and scientific attitudes, and the growth of modern literary realism. The realist novel itself is often held to be indissolubly tied to the changing conceptions of the “out there,” the means of representing it, and the question of whether representation is possible in the first place (Levine 1981, 6).

For Mikhail Bakhtin, the modern novel signifies the prominence of a new kind of consciousness, a “new cultural and creative consciousness
[that] lives in an actively polyglot world" (1981, 12). Polyglossia—the coexistence of two or more languages within a single cultural system—becomes an active and important component in written literature. Thus, the novel was born of the awareness of other languages within a shared system of signification. "Languages throw light on each other: one language can, after all, see itself only in the light of another language" (12). What becomes thinkable here is not the preexistence of several languages, but an awareness of several languages. The "awareness" of polyglossia is preconditioned by the possibility of comparison, of translation, and language becomes "national" through this comparison. That this happened in Europe during the Renaissance can be explained by the greatly expanded scope of European voyages of "discovery" that added a spatial dimension to the Renaissance consciousness of period (McKeon 1987, 40).

Bakhtin's concept of polyglossia provides an important basis for examining and explaining the novel, for it sets the grounds for modern criticism's sensitivity to the "contractual" or "institutional" capacity of literary genres. Rizal's reliance on the European novel form is, therefore, not a mere consequence of individual preference, since the novel attained its institutional stability and coherence as a self-conscious form during the eighteenth century precisely because of its power to formulate and explain a set of problems central to the "modern" experience. One of these problems was the instability of generic and social categories. The first registered an epistemological crisis, a major change in attitudes toward the representation of "truth" in narratives. The other registered a cultural crisis in attitudes toward the relationship between its members external, social order and internal, moral state. Michael McKeon calls the first the question of truth, and the second the question of virtue. Both are articulated as problems of signification: "What kind of authority or evidence is required of narrative in order to permit it to signify truth to its readers?" And "what kind of social existence or behavior signifies an individual's virtue to others?" (1987, 20). The European realist novel works by establishing a deep and fruitful analogy between the questions of truth and virtue. The founding insight of the novel, in fact, lay in its ability to juxtapose the two, illuminating the problems of one question by referring to the other or conflating the two.

The cementing agent for the two questions is print. Print capitalism changed the ways in which truth was apprehended, as well as the methods for apprehending it. The spread of literacy in Europe during the late Middle Ages had profound epistemological significance and ramifications for the determination of truth. For literacy was not only the precondition for the transmission of the ancient Greek texts; it also encouraged the growth of the empirical perspective and fostered a more skeptical attitude toward, and the rational interpretation of, the erstwhile authoritative medieval assumptions regarding the authenticity of saints' relics and figuative status of the Eucharist (McKeon 1987, 35). Before the sixteenth century, the canonical truth of the Scriptures had been the main standard of spiritual and historical truth against which all other writings were measured and often found wanting. "Facts" were relevant, but they were subordinated to truth, and in an apparent conflict between the two, it was the Scriptural abstraction that took precedence over material or concrete issues.

An emphasis on the objectifying power of the written word subsequently replaced, over the next few centuries, the emphasis on lineage, since print effectively disseminated and reinforced the notion of competing accounts of the same event. It encouraged the norm of "objective" research and understanding through the systematic collection, comparison, categorization, collation, editing, and the indexing of documentary objects (McKeon 1987, 43). Print thus promoted a criterion of judgment that was appropriate to, and that accounted for, discrete, and empirically apprehensible "things"—singularity, formal coherence, and self-consistency became the test of veracity. In a way, this was made possible because of the process of typographical reproduction—the extent to which a single passage of text, a picture, an object or event could be replicated in their exact dimensions and quantities helped condition a "scientific" cast of mind. Viewing objects as "discrete and empirically apprehensible" was easily carried over to the investigation of human life. Thus, the idea of nature, and of human "nature," changed the course of historical studies.

In sum, print not only conditioned the turn in historical studies, but the scientific revolution in general. It was the result of two historically inseparable but distinguishable phenomena: the unprecedented valorization of empirical perspectives and practices, and the rapidly growing opportunities to cultivate and promote these through a fundamental change in the production and management of knowledge (McKeon 1987, 44).

The effect of print on the narrative form was substantial. For print contributed to and reinforced an "objective" standard of truth, which is also, in the narrative, a "historical" standard of truth, of historicity: Did it happen, how did it happen? And print's verifying capacity was so powerful that the act of publication itself would seem to affirm, even supplant, the historicity of the information it was meant to convey. Print not only
Necessary Fictions

Rizal and the Universalist Rhetoric of Progress and Change

Rizal wrote the *Noli* in the 1880s, well over a hundred years since the European novel began crystallizing as a distinct, self-conscious genre. The nineteenth century is usually considered the heyday of the novel form, and we need to understand that the novel by that time had already worked out in a stabilized form some of the kinks in its claim to historicity. In the mid-eighteenth century, according to Lennard Davis (1983), the increasing valorization of empirical modes of truth actually exacerbated the hitherto latent tension between the claim to truth and the nature of the material whose truth was being claimed. That is, the continuing avalanche of news reports gave the news a validity and authority that made it worthy of public attention and cemented the association of the news with the historical authenticity of printed documents in the public imagination. The public, however, consequently found itself in the position of having to compare many different, highly partisan, and often divergent “true accounts” of the same events at one and the same time. This experience fomented considerable skepticism among people regarding the news’ claims to truth and historicity, which had by then become something of a convention.

The concept of literary realism reformulated the problem of mediation by making literature not “history,” but “historylike.” The text was “true” to external reality but sufficiently removed from it to be true to itself as well. The *Noli* presents a self-referential statement on the “truthfulness” of fiction in the chapter, “La junta en el tribunal,” in which the male representatives of San Diego, divided along the lines of generation, meet to present their proposals for the fiesta. The “liberal” party, composed of “progressive” young men like Don Filipo, suggests that the money collected for the fiesta be put to good use for the benefit of all, by presenting new and morally edifying dramas instead of the usual week-long *moro-moros*, which feature interminable clashes and dramatic confrontations between Christian protagonists and Moslem antagonists. The two dramas suggested for consideration are “The Election of the Gobernadorcillo,” a comedy in prose, and “Mariang Makiling,” a fantastical drama of a satirical character. Both dramas are written by people from the area, and both are intended “to give a representation of our own customs in order to correct our vices and defects and to encourage our better qualities.”

This small detail from the *Noli* clues the reader in on the narrative basis of the “Filipino” national community. The fictive dramas—in fact, the *Noli* itself as fiction—treat the Philippine *patria* as a text that awaits the act of decoding and link the edifying truth culled from literature to the moral improvement of the viewer/reader. The patria thus imagined is at once real and “out there” and, above all, “true.” Rizal’s response to Barrantes’ criticism concerning his novel’s characters would thus argue in favor of the existence of the novel and its characters as independent from the author’s ideas and intentions, even though the author would perforce have to invent words that the rustics “could have” uttered and even insist that he can prove the reality of what he imagined. The Epilogue of the *Noli*, for example, begins with the following paragraph:

Viviendo aún muchos de nuestros personajes, y habiendo perdido de vista á los otros, es imposible un verdadero epílogo. Para bien de la gente, mataríamos con gusto á todos nuestros personajes empezando por el Padre Salvi y acabando por Doña Victorina, pero no es posible... ¡que vivan! El país y no nosotros los ha de alimentar al fin.

Since some of our characters are still living and others have been lost sight of, a real epilogue is impossible. For the satisfaction [also translated as: “for the good”] of the people, we should gladly kill off all of our characters, beginning with Padre Salvi and ending with Doña Victorina [a native who has pretensions to being Spanish, marries a lame Spaniard, and dresses in the European fashion], but this is not possible. Let them live! Anyhow, the country, not ourselves, has to support them in the end. (modified translation)

In this passage, Rizal invokes both the “real world” in its historically placed, realized, and detailed specificity (“some of our characters are still living”), and the fictional world in its artistically organized and rendered knowability (“we should gladly kill off all of them, beginning with Padre Salvi and ending with Doña Victorina”) without stretching the reader’s (in)credulity. What is remarkable about this double invocation of history and fiction is the power and flexibility such an invocation grants to nov-
elistic discourse. "Let them live!" cackles the narrative persona, since the
author has the power to grant clemency even to his novel's most odious
characters. Yet this author would have us believe that it is not in his power
to tie all the loose ends of the narrative and provide a proper epilogue,
even though he does kill off villains like Padre Damaso and Maria Clara's
fearless suitor, Ibarra's rival, Linares.

Similarly, in the section of the Noli where the rustics talk about the
meaning of the word filibuster, Rizal alludes to his own profession as a
trafficker in the written word by making one of the peasants comment
on the new breed of people who talk "with wires," and who know Spanish
and do not "handle anything but the pen." It is as though the author
accidentally "overhears" himself in his novel and in the conversation of
his characters.

Between the author's power to depict his world and the "constraints"
that this (imagined) world poses on his vision, we have a novel that
embodies and thematizes the impulse to explain not only the transfor-
mative capacity, but also the mutability, of human affairs in social and
historical rather than metaphysical terms. Perhaps, in Rizal's time, the
important difference between putting one's faith in a remote truth attested
to by external authorities, and immediately authenticating an empirically
apprehensible truth present for all to see (and change), was further rein-
forced by the fact of colonial rule, in which the "external" sources of truth
and authority were also immediately and empirically verifiable sources
of exploitation and oppression. The Noli's influence lay in its providing
an alternative to the colonial ideology in that it held the experience of insta-
Bility and oppression to be something that could be identified and
addressed "directly" as a sociohistorical condition susceptible to more
specific analysis and explanation, and to the possibility of transforma-
tion. In the Noli, the question of how to tell the truth was indissolubly
linked to the question of the relationship between social order and in-
dividual character. It assumed that being able to tell the truth meant being
able to determine the social order that reflected, and was itself reflected
in, the individual's moral condition. The question of a desirable or non-
desirable social order thus becomes a question of getting to the truth,
while the question of truth is posed in terms of the question of a deter-
mining and determined social order. The question of truth, in other words,
has an ideological component, while that of social order has an inher-
ently epistemological component.

Yet the conflation of the question of truth and morality (morality as
a condition of truth, and truth as a condition of morality) also leads
ironically to a tension between the claim to truth and the material whose
truth is being claimed; for how in fact can truth be claimed, given that
it is tied to an oppressive and misleading, if not blinding, social order?
On the one hand, it was possible for Rizal to fall back on the novel's
canonical status to mediate between fact and fiction. His claim to Barrantes
that his characters' ideas did not correspond to his own breaks the
simulation theory of the novel. By subsuming his work under the cate-
ogy of fictional prose narratives, Rizal draws on the differentiation of
the news/novel discourse which allows him to perform the reportorial
functions of journalism and history in a work of fiction, make direct com-
ments on the world, and be a historian in an avowedly fictional work.
Rizal thus draws on a broader notion of factuality, the factuality of
"history-like," to make a claim at once epistemological, moral, and politi-
cal. By virtue of the admission of fictionality, Rizal is able to incorporate
both news and commentary into his work. It is in the disjunction and
interaction between fact and fiction, reportage and invention, news and
novel, that the novel's power in society is confirmed and consolidated.
A journalistic piece or an ethnographic account would not have gotten
the same kind of reaction from colonizer and native alike, because it could
more easily be dismissed as tainted by its writers' bias. Moreover, the novel's
form's conventions ensured that the question of virtue, by being read as
fiction, would insinuate themselves into the reader's consciousness, would
engage the reader in a way that the journalist pieces, with conventions
demanding a relatively stringent adherence to the disciplinary and au-
thoritative prose, could not effectively achieve.

The novel's attitude toward fact and fiction is therefore constitutively
ambivalent, and it is the novel's ambivalence, the fact that it is both about
and not about reality, which engenders the possibility of commentary
linking truth to a species of ethical thinking, of morality, which is held to
be the defining capacity of human creation itself. Thus Rizal could cri-
tique the colonial order in the name of higher standards of morality, and
the human capacity to change society and realize its potentials.

But the idea of virtue also casts a critical light on the question of
truth, for the fundamental problem of ethical and social signification
inevitably leads to the realization that specific epistemological choices
have ideological significance and consequences. Any given explanation
of society and its motions implies certain epistemological procedures and
commitments. The question of truth is thus inherently ideological and
rooted in a specific social location. On that level, it can be argued that
Rizal addresses the issue by positing an outside stance through which the
situation of the Philippines as a Spanish colony can be denaturalized, illuminated, examined, and evaluated. The outside stance draws on (although Rizal himself does not explicitly use the terms of) a universalist notion of world history, of progress and change, and looks to other countries, specifically to modern Europe, for the concrete embodiment of the ideals.

In fact, Rizal’s stance on the “modern,” through its highlighting of the connection of the “modern” to the “outside,” closely resembles that of the popular discourse in his time. Rizal’s political writings attribute the backwardness, that is, the physical and moral degradation of the Philippines to misgovernment by Spanish colonial authorities, in part due to their lack of real understanding of the country they have colonized. Rizal, however, also emphasizes the fact that it is contact with the outside, particularly with “Western peoples,” that produces “the electric impact” that galvanizes the brutalized natives into “demand[ing] light, life, [and] the civilization that at one time they [the colonial powers] bequeath [the Philippines], thus confirming the eternal laws of constant evolution, of change, of periodicity, of progress” (1964, 18).

The main impulse behind Rizal’s literary project comes out of his attempt at describing the mechanisms of Spanish colonial rule that are responsible for “asphyxiating” the “modern ideas” “upon touching the shores of Manila” (1964, 289). In Rizal’s analysis of Philippine conditions the “modern” is primarily seen as external rather than as merely foreign. It is something that comes to the Philippines from the outside, and has an infectious, universalizable quality that the diligent mismanagement of the colony cannot contain. In a passage where Ibarra passes by the Botanical Gardens of Manila, the pitifully paupered and neglected gardens are compared to those in other European countries where much money and effort were expended to ensure the blossoming of a single flower. Rizal portrays progress and change as inevitable because they are world-historical in their scope: despite the efforts of Spain to keep the Philippines backward, the ideas of change and the natives’ aspirations cannot be blunted. Seen in this light, we should not be surprised that Rizal invokes a mythologized “free Europe” in his dedication instead of particular places like Berlin, Madrid, or Paris. Europe becomes the figure for moral development and the universal progress of the human condition.

Yet, it is equally important to note that Rizal’s invocation of “free Europe” was also deeply marked by a critical awareness of the fact that the modern ideas are articulated in the face of intensely competitive European colonial powers, and this meant he had to differentiate his position from the oppressive reality of European subjugation and exploitation of colonies like the Philippines. Unlike Indian or Chinese nationalists, Rizal could not draw on the past to create a material/spiritual divide that would admit the superiority of western forms of technology and government while asserting the Filipino spirit’s inherent superiority. For the surviving “Filipino” past existed only as already mediated by colonial rule and representation. Rizal’s position on colonial power, or the “rule of one people over another,” views the outcome of such an encounter between two different peoples in dualistic terms: either one assimilates to the other, or one is destroyed by the other (1964, 154–55). The former can be accomplished through the implementation of “modern” ideas, while the other can only result from the continuing abuse of colonial power. Thus, the mode of differentiation for Rizal cannot be based on an ancient Filipino spirit, the authenticity of which can be validated by a reference to an elaborate and elaborated precolonial “nationality.”

What is, in fact, striking about the Noli is that even its “Filipino” content is not much different from the content of social novels written in other countries. For example, the similarity in plot and characters between the Noli and Doña Perfecta, a novel by Benito Perez Galdos, touted as Spain’s greatest writer in the nineteenth century, revolves primarily around the dichotomy and conflict between the European, liberal, egalitarian spirit concentrated in and typified by the metropolis or Europe, and the traditionalist, reactionary spirit concentrated in and typified by the province, or, in Rizal’s case, by colonial Philippines. Perez Galdos’s plea for the reintegration of Spain into the European rationalist vision of the world could very well have been Rizal’s. Ibarra could also have been any of the young Spaniards (his forefather was a Basque) who went abroad—to Germany, for example—to be educated and came back imbued with the philosophical and scientific ideas prevailing in other European countries during the second half of the nineteenth century. In this light, Rizal draws on a series of related oppositions, such as reason and superstition, just and unjust, and knowledge and ignorance, to organize the action his novels.

At the same time, Rizal creates a specifically “national” space in his novel in which locality and local expression are suggested in terms of form through the insider’s perspective, and through the insertion of Tagalog words into Spanish. The idea of a Filipino “content” is thus posited through words, and through the “form” of double address typical of the Noli’s narrative perspective. More important, the narrative derives its nationalizing impulse not from a single speaking voice, but from the
differential cognitive standpoints generated and claimed by the inside-outside stance. On the one hand, the outside stance draws on the cognitive apparatus and standpoint of Europe, of a sense of “world history,” and of moral development, and serves up a powerful indictment of the abuses of colonial rule. On the other hand, the insider viewpoint argues in favor of the efficacy and epistemological significance of the different, and not always laudable and progressive, standpoints of the many different people who live in colonial Philippines. The insider’s perspective creates in the novel a space for rescuing many voices, voices often denied, silenced, fragmented, or simply unrecognized, by the general discourse of progress and change.

While the insider perspective works by critique through attestation or testimony, the outsider perspective works by means of a critical distance born of comparison. This double vision is evident in the Noli’s peculiar ethnographic stance. Although the Noli is not strictly a work of ethnography, the handling of its narrative stance does operate on the basis of what, by then, had become the familiar genre of representing colonial Filipinos in travel narratives. The project of “reproducing the conditions” of the time draws much of its impulse from the printed ethnographic narratives of colonial encounters, mainly written by European travelers, going as far back in the west as 1493, a year after the “discovery of America,” when Columbus wrote an account of his voyage and made it available for publication. To be sure, travel narratives underwent rapid, often uneven changes as they responded to the practical and ideological circumstances of encounter and expansion, and if we speak of a continuity in the sense of a tradition of travel writing, we can only do so in a heuristic manner. Nineteenth-century narratives took shape within—and were strongly influenced by—the “globalizing” tendencies of Western expansion. The publication of Karl Linne’s Systema Naturae and the inauguration of a series of joint transnational explorative voyages are articulations of a domain of thinking that Mary Louise Pratt (1992) calls “planetary consciousness.” Travel writing’s “embourgeoisification” of the world is posited on the exteriority of the authoritative gaze, white, often male, urban, and lettered, a gaze that constructs a moral cartography, a verbal mapping of landscapes and bodyscapes awaiting extraction and consumption. Not surprisingly, the ethnographic eye generally provides a bird’s eye-view of the place through which it travels, and the representation of a crowd or crowds of people is a favored motif of the genre, as can be seen in the descriptions of Binondo by foreign travelers like John Bowring and Paul Gironière. In a sense, Rizal could put Maria Clara in the center of a semicircle made up of “chinos, españoles, filipinos, militares, curas, viejas, jóvenes, etc.” only because this semicircle had already appeared somewhere else, in the travel narratives of Europeans who visited the Philippines and noted the “variety” of peoples moving in, and across, Philippine space.

Indeed, the traveling narrative I/Eye is evident in the first few chapters of the novel as it moves leisurely through space, providing sketches of backdrop detail or an inventory of customs, practices, and mores. In the Noli, Rizal treats dinner parties, picnics, fiestas, All Soul’s Day, and Christmas Day in elaborate detail. But the implied exteriority of Rizal’s narrative stance differs from what is typical of the European costumbreismo in that it is avowedly polemical. Rizal’s narrative stance is political because, unlike the European travel accounts, the one who describes the scenes has a stake in what he describes. European travelers may desire participation in the everyday life of the Filipinos (participation often taking the form of interracial liaisons amoureuses), but their participation is premised on the knowledge that they have no stake in the place they seek to represent. They are only passing through, as it were.

In the case of the Noli, the outsider is, by contrast, also an insider whose participation in everyday life in the Philippines makes it impossible for her to fully disengage herself from the reality she is describing as a whole. Thus, the act of describing or representing Philippine society is never just a matter of aesthetic preference, but an ethical imperative.

This enforced rootedness—and the moral accountability implied by that fact—is the wellspring of the Noli’s trenchant social analysis. To be sure, this rootedness coexists alongside the equally compelling “worldliness” Europe represented—the author and his characters’ sense of being part of a larger continuum of space and time called the “outside.” Ibarra, who finds himself a stranger in the Philippines after seven years in Europe, is privy to this other worldliness. In fact, the Spanish governor-general addresses him on the familiar basis of their shared, prior occupation of an external space: “Here [in the Philippines] we cannot laugh at such things [excommunication] in public as we can in the Peninsula, in enlightened Europe” (underscored added). The political mythology of liberal anticlericalism typical of the Filipinos in the Propaganda Movement (Del Pilar 1970, 1–41; Lopez Jaena 1951, 203–27) inveighs against an oppressive “frailocracy” that has kept the Filipinos in the Dark Ages, even as it posits the inevitable defeat of this monastic supremacy by Progress, by young men who dare defy the priests and dream of setting up schools to eliminate ignorance and “popular fanati-
The idealistic rhetoric of liberalism does count for part of the extremely negative, if not satirical portrayal of the friars in many of the propagandists' works.

Yet why does the novel end the way it does, with the failure of the liberal pro-Hispanization rhetoric? What is striking about the narrative "I" is not so much the fact that it is polemical as the fact that it inhabits the space of the observer as insider; the modern equivalent of, as mentioned earlier, the insider as tourist guide. The Noli differs from European travel narratives on precisely this point. The paradox of the European travel narrative is the paradox of the European wishing to elide himself in order to constitute the out-there as an object, a picture. At the same time, however, he desires participation in the immediacy of the real. In this sense, one always reads the narrative as both an authoritative account with the usual subdivision of the text into sections on commerce, government, religion, customs, language, and so on, and as a romance, complete with interracial love stories, idyllic country settings, picnics, ritual celebrations, glittering parties in the city, tense confrontations with irate inhabitants, cayman-catching, dramatic escapes, and others. The desire to achieve surface mastery of things Philippine through the endless accretion of "facts" is mediated by a countervailing desire, pushed by the opposite longing for immersion in the minutiae of everyday life. In the act of "immersing" himself in an exotic country, the European traveler foregrounds his separation from that country all the more emphatically.

In the case of the Noli, the crucial difference lies in the laughter this insider-outsider viewpoint generates. It allows readers, for example, to see sundry bifurcations at work—between official representation and the insider's account of the same event, for example. The Manila newspaper reportage of the fiesta highlights Padre Salvi's munificent self-sacrifice and unparalleled courage in single-handedly calming down a restive crowd, but the novel uses the insider's description of the snoring and quarreling churchgoers and Salvi's own lecherous, less than honorable, motives to ridicule the official version of the melee. To complicate things, this narrative stance is not simply content to mock the colonizer; it is self-mocking as well. This is evident in the following passage where the narrative persona satirizes the idea of miracles wrought by graven images:

Was it not also revealed that the Virgin of Luta, of the town of Lipa, had one cheek more swollen than the other, and the border of her dress dirtied with mud? Does this not logically prove that the sacred images also take walks without raising their skirts, and even suffer toothaches, perchance on our accounts? Had [Capitan Tiago] not seen with his small eyes all the Christs in the Sermon of the Seven Last Words move and bow their heads three times in unison, moving to tears and groans all the women and the sensitive souls destined for heaven? And more: we ourselves (nosotros mismos) have seen the preacher show the public at the moment of descent from the cross a handkerchief soaked in blood, and we ourselves were ready to weep with piety when, unfortunately for our souls, the sacristan assured us that it was only a joke: the blood of a chicken butchered and roasted and consumed incontinent notwithstanding the fact that it was Good Friday...the sacristan was flat! (1961b, 28)

The laughter is subversive precisely because it is an acknowledgment of the vulnerability of the satirist: it comes from the inside but may also be directed at the inside. The critical eye is trained on both the Spaniards and "Filipinos." Moreover, laughter can arise in the most (in)opportune moments and even among the subervientes: In the chapter on souls in torment, Sister Rufa, after being ignored by Padre Salvi when she presses forward to kiss his hand after mass, jokingly exclaims (esclamó... con risa húrtona): "Can it be that you've lost a real, kuriput (miser)?"

The outsider-as-insider's (self-)mocking stance brings out the most problematic aspect of Noli: the rhetoric of nation used by a specific class of self-proclaimed Filipinos. The series of idealized, liberal, utopian spaces that the patriotic, worldly Ibarra tries to create on the basis of his Europe-inspired vision of progress and change—notably the school and picnic, spaces where the colonial hierarchy can be flattened out, where personal happiness and political love are intertwined—are constantly disrupted, ultimately ruined by crowds of the disenfranchised, by the insane Sisa, the spiteful Consolación, the mysterious Elias, the yellowish man who tries to kill Ibarra, and Lucas the conspirator and Padre Salvi's cohorts. The disenfranchised flit in and out of the edges of Ibarra's consciousness, first as an idealized abstraction on whose behalf he seeks to institute reforms, then as individuals like the madwoman Sisa, her invertebrate gambler of a husband Pedro, and the mercenary Lucas, who impinge on his consciousness and interrupt his reveries and preoccupations to inflict their specific problems and idiosyncrasies upon him, and finally as one individual (la voz de los perseguidos, "the voice of the persecuted"), Elias, who quite literally speaks, with compelling urgency, on behalf of Capitan Pablo and his band of hunted men.
Just as Ibarra cannot entirely prevent the “unwanted” or “undesirable” fellow Filipinos, whose welfare he was supposed to be championing, from infiltrating his festive, idyllic gatherings, he is unable to guarantee the success of his own programs of reform. It is not just the sexually motivated malice of Padre Salvi or the hatred, arising from paternal concern for Maria Clara, of Padre Damaso that are the obstacles. Ibarra himself is the biggest problem because his plans for improving the lot of his fellow Filipinos do not actually take into proper account the real, practical claims “Filipinos” make on Ibarra. Ibarra is, in a most intimate and personal way, bound to Elias in a circuit of reciprocity and mutual indebtedness, of power, exploitation and suffering that go back a long way, beyond the personal histories of the individuals concerned. There is no escaping the “outsiders” who are also fellow Filipinos because they are the ones who made Ibarra, literally and symbolically. By exploiting the indios, Ibarra’s cruel forefather, Saturnino, founded the fortune that enabled Ibarra to go abroad; similarly, Elias, who saved Ibarra’s life after Ibarra saved him, later finds out just how deeply and ineluctably he is linked to Ibarra. That he would choose to cement this link, rather than sever it, after finding out the truth about Ibarra’s ancestry is indicative of the kind of fantasy about the Filipino nation that Rizal conceived, one that acknowledges the irreducible links that bind one person to another.

Moreover, Ibarra’s disenfranchised fellow Filipinos are not passive consumers of Ibarra’s beneficence and vision. The crowd scenes in the Noli (fiesta, cockpit, theater) are depicted as volatile public spaces, often rife with discontent that can very easily spill over into violence. Yet the so-called natives in Rizal’s novels do not only act: these crowds can speak, and they often do in many places in the novel. The Noli creates a situation in which “the people” are viewed and represented from the inside and outside. This double representation generates an excess of viewpoints that Ibarra’s pro-Hispanic reforms cannot simply recuperate. The crowd blurs the terms by which the Noli distinguishes between what is rational and not, since the narrative persona, indeed the author himself (so he declares), shares in the people’s “irrational” foibles even if these do not escape the author’s mocking scrutiny. At the same time, given Rizal’s choice of Ibarra as a main character, the crowd also constitutes a “national” space into which rationality must continually be extended, since their “ignorance,” which is the term the novel uses to account for the tenacity of the habits of thought and action that help maintain the oppressive social order, makes the pedagogical task necessary and infinite. Exasperated liberals like Ibarra and the Spanish governor-general mouth labels like “ignorant” and “fanatic” not only to explain why liberal reforms are bound to fail in the present time, but also why these reforms must be undertaken. It is when the crowds speak that the opposition between reason and superstition, between ignorance and knowledge, is often reinforced in the novel.

Rizal, however, was also aware that decrying popular “ignorance” and “fanaticism,” as middle-class ilustrados were wont to do, cannot fully account for what takes place in the space of colonial encounter. Some of the novel’s funniest moments involve the townspeople’s reaction to colonial power. The contact zone is precisely what generates the so-called “corruption,” or cancer, notably on the linguistic register. Early negative reviews of the Noli in the Spanish press excoriated the novel for bad writing (Rodriguez, quoted in Schumacher 1973, 83), for its “crassest ignorance of the rules of literature and especially of Spanish grammar” (87). Indeed the Noli itself is a textual manifestation of a “something else” that exceeds the rules of novel writing, if by rules we mean that classical allusions cannot be used alongside Balagtas, or grammatical Spanish alongside market Spanish, Chinese pidgin, Tagalog Latin, and other languages.

That the word “corruption” is used to describe the linguistic experience and the rest of colonial experience only highlights the dangerous instability of meaning produced within the contact zone. The source of the colonizers’ frustration and paranoia lies precisely in their inability to control the ways in which meaning circulates and proliferates within a crowd. Padre Damaso’s sermon provides one such occasion in which the natives, forced to listen to a long-winded harangue in the incomprehensible language of their masters, manage to work out their own reading of the sermon according to their specific concerns, with potentially unsettling effects as far as the official discourse of the church is concerned, since the priest’s vituperation against uppyt natives somehow gets interpreted as the priest’s attack against the inefficient Spanish government (Rafael 1988, 1–22). Doña Consolación’s interminable struggles with the word “Filipinas” ends up confusing her husband the alferez and revealing his ignorance, thereby undermining his supposed authority and superiority as a Spaniard. Or consider again the vicissitudes of the word filibusterio as it undergoes iteration with difference into plibastiero, plibestiero, plibustiero, plibibustiero, and palibibustiero in the hands of the rustics. In the chapter “Souls in Torment,” the townsfolk engage in a discussion of the merits of acquiring a hundred thousand years’ worth of indulgences and penitence. The insertions of Tagalog words and
"corruptions" of Spanish all register the existence of a heteroglossic other, of other languages and sensibilities and positions.25

The Noli is premised upon a demystifying readability in which things can be known or pieced together from the text—whether it is Ibarra’s past, or Elias’s story or Maria Clara’s fate or the hermanas’ gullibility. Its plot revolves around a series of disclosures, of secrets exchanged for another. Even dreams can be deciphered. But this readability is strongly inflected by the novel’s ambivalence toward the implications of its project of demystification, especially the implications of its ability to “speak to” and “speak for” the very people it represents/portrays.26

The character of Elias, a self-identified indio, exemplifies the ambivalence of the narrative project(ion). To an extent, Elias is the more enigmatic of the two outsiders-as-insiders of the novel (the other being Ibarra, the self-avowed stranger in his own land). Elias is both the catalyst of events (or even nonevents, as when he prevents a riot at the theater), and the interpreter who rationalizes the behavior and actions of the gente, naming its discontent and the sources of its suffering and unreliness to Ibarra. Elias speaks for the oppressed by rationalizing the “blind,” “popular fanaticism” of the victims of Spanish abuses and casts his lot with the outlaws after Ibarra, clinging to illusions of paternal Hispanization, refuses to help the bandits. Yet in the latter half of the novel, Elias tries to dissuade a vengeful, disillusioned Ibarra by invoking the same paternal metaphor Ibarra used: the people are “innocent and defenseless,” and will only bear the brunt of suffering unleashed by anarchic violence. Like Tasio, Elias invests “the people” with the future potential of change, disruptive, cauterizing, above all, unstable: “The force repressed for centuries will light and burst.” In so doing, he also gives up his ability to “speak for” the people since he cannot predict when the change will erupt. In his discourse, the gente is both an entreaty (i.e., open to solidarity) and a threat (i.e., open to disruption). He admits his own inability to account for the effects and implications of such a symbolic investment.

If the self-sacrificing Elias is haunted by “the people” for whom he must speak but whom he can never fully represent, what more for Ibarra? Unlike Elias, Ibarra is so occupied with his personal affairs that he is distracted from even taking the “people” seriously and heeding the unmistakable signs of discontent and plotting around him. He assumes that good intentions, substantial capital, and a rational plan of action are enough to guarantee the successful implementation of his altruistic plans for his country. Ibarra’s good intentions are sorely tested when he is forced to deal with real people with very specific problems.

For example, Pedro’s wife Sisa has been driven mad by the disappearance of her son Crispin, a sailor and在家 church. When Pedro approaches him, Ibarra promises to help find the missing son, but, when Maria Clara prompts him later, at the fiesta, he admits “rather confusedly” (medio confuso) that he has done nothing: “Besides, I have been very busy” (He estado además muy ocupado). Lucas, another of the disaffected, approaches Ibarra who, in a state of distraction upon hearing of Maria Clara’s illness, angrily brushes off the man. Padre Salvi will later use Lucas, along with the aforementioned Pedro, to organize a rebellion that would be wrongly attributed to Ibarra’s leadership. Ibarra should have taken Tasio the Philosopher’s words to heart. When consulted, the sage astutely advised Ibarra to give up his well-meaning plan to build a school because “[the enterprise needs another man, because to make it a success, zeal and money alone are not sufficient; in our country are also required self-denial, tenacity of purpose, and faith, for the soil is not ready; it is only sown with discord.”

In contrast, the nobler, self-sacrificing Elias’s sense of the patria is premised on (an already) prior abdication of claims to love and personal happiness in favor of the higher claims of “the people.” To do so, Elias would have to cancel out the destructive cycle of exploitation and suffering that had hitherto served as the binding force among fellow Filipinos. In burning Ibarra’s papers, Elias abolishes his original intention of seeking restitution from the descendants of the Spanish mestizo who had been responsible for the death of his great-grandfather. He abolishes the circuit of revenge and indebtedness in which he had operated while preserving the bond of intimacy linking him to Ibarra. Whereas the well-meaning Ibarra falls into, and is trapped in, the cycle of retribution following his implication in Padre Salvi’s manufactured rebellion and his own suffering at the hands of the authorities, Elias escapes such a cycle because he has cut all ties to his past, and the abolition of indebtedness is absolute. The beauty of this self-sacrifice lies in the fact that it is unconditional, and therefore inspires a debt of gratitude that is both infinite and postponed (because the debt is always owed by the future generation).

If Elias’s selflessness and self-immolation mark the nationalist moment, a moment born out of the ashes of the past, a moment that seemingly gives birth to itself and is without genealogy, a moment when hatred and revenge are transformed into love, sacrifice, and solidarity, when blood enemies can become friends, it is only fitting that he who has given up everything (family, the past, security, love) dies alone, because this
nationalism is posited as the dissolution of the self-denying self into an abstraction.20 Elías remains unnamed, but not unknown, in his death scene. The notion of brotherhood and sacrifice gives the knowable community the emotive charge that suffuses the nation’s “truth.” It is perhaps the novel’s ability to imagine the possibility of a self-sacrificing death that allows the community to be rendered meaningful. We might say that literature’s ability to bear witness to the possibility of self-sacrifice provides one important position from which the national community is “knowable” as a community in and through death.

At the same time, this meaningfulness of a knowable community is not to be equated with the certainty of immortality. What is most moving about the novel is its admixing of hope and risk. For despite the auspicious title of the last chapter “La Nochebuena,” which refers to Christmas Eve but also literally means “The Good Night,” Elías’ death is solitary, and his invocation of “you who will see the dawn” is an ambiguous statement opening itself to a future—“you who will see the dawn”—that neither Elías nor Rizal himself could fully predict, let alone guarantee.21

The Noli’s constant sliding between inside and outside perspectives, between the possibilities and constraints of this positioning, between the affirmative presence of “free Europe” and the “indio’s” critical power of self-attestation and the power to complicate idealized norms of freedom and development, enables the novel to conceive of itself in a national moment. It is, in fact, not just the subject matter, but also the gathering power of language in the Noli that allows the possibility of entry into a community of those who have been excluded when the bounds of that community were drawn, a community which, as Rizal suggests, cannot be fully represented (in both the artistic or political senses) by an ilustrado like Ibarra. Paradoxically, though, this inclusive community takes on the boundedness given it by the colonial state, even if that state was resolutely antinationalist.22

Rizal’s novel presents an epistemic claim that complicates the normative import of the novel’s rhetoric of development and change through its insistent avowal of the force of cultural material. Rizal’s novel can be read as an elaboration of his frequently articulated contention that being in the Philippines provides the inhabitant with the potential knowledge that complicates the picture inattentive outsiders (and insiders as well) construct about the Philippines. Writing to Blumentritt, Rizal states: “Si; you know our country only from the books written by friars and Spaniards who copied one another. If you had grown up, as I did, in one of our villages, and seen the sufferings of our peasants, you would have a

very different idea of Catholicism in the Philippines” (1938, v. 5, 14). This insistence on the complication of our ethical norms posed by social locatedness, by the specificity of the contexts of day-to-day existence, meanings, and social relations within the Philippines that define the social order, provides the main critical impulse for interrogating the assumptions of various critical mediations shaping Philippine “reality.” Within the gaps created by the complications of the universal ideas of freedom and transformation, Rizal locates the emergence of the knowable Filipino community. It was, perhaps, in this spirit that, writing to the Filipinos in Barcelona from London in 1889, Rizal boldly declared—“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, and besides we are informed of the secrets of the people among whom we had been raised. The Spaniards will never get to know us well, because they have many preoccupations, they do not mingle with the population, they do not understand well the language, and they stay a short time. The most that they can know is what is going on in the government offices, and these are not the country” (1963, 254).

Yet who are the “we” whom Rizal invokes? One of the problematic aspects of the Noli concerns precisely its depiction and handling of crowds. It has been argued that in opting for reform over revolution, Rizal was supposedly expressing the conservatism of the middle class. Renato Constantino, for example, reads Rizal as a paragon of the bourgeois fear of the masses and of violence (“Veneration” n.d.). Rizal’s second novel, El filibusterismo, explores the question of violence, and its examination of anarchism as a political alternative echoes the plot of several novels written around the same time in other parts of the world, notably Fyodor Dostoevsky’s The Devils and Henry James’s Princess Casamassima. One could conceivably account for the failure of Simoun’s anarchist plot in terms of social developments in the world scene, with anarchisms especially in Italy, Spain, and Russia. Written after the French Revolution and events of 1848 but before the Russian Revolution, the Noli’s and Fil’s assimilation of revolution into anarchism stood between a period when the inspiring success of the French revolution was irreparably contaminated by the bloody reign of terror unleashed in its wake, and a period when the masses of people that constituted a potential class capable of revolutionary activity still lacked the organization, ideology, and will to assert its hegemony.31

This was a time of marked uncertainty based, ironically, on a vague but insistent awareness of the possibilities of imagining different kinds of
political futures for one nation, and this uncertainty was typically expressed in novels as a form of ambiguity that defined social movements in terms, alternately, of decisive and liberatory revolution, and of fatal, individualistic acts of political terrorism drenched in the blood of innocent victims.

Though suggestive, this reading leaves questions about the mass reception of Rizal unanswered. Some readers may notice the relative paucity of attention Rizal devotes to elaborating the day-to-day life of so-called ordinary people (with the possible exception of Sisa), contenting himself with eavesdropping on their conversations. Rizal's most important achievement, in fact, lies in the fact that his works register the people's presence as an excess of conversations over and above the usual, intimate, blow-by-blow accounts of their lives. One must look at Rizal's novel not solely in terms of what it excludes, but in terms, too, however conflictively, of what it includes. For the novel gives a place, through the narrative device of eavesdropping, for what it declares to have no place.

The argument in this chapter thus far has been that "the people" who make up Rizal's fantasy of the Filipino nation both have a place and do not have a place in the novel. While Rizal's depiction of numerous character types is what lends his novels their narrative density and texture, the Rizal novels also suggest that these types cannot be contained within the rhetoric of liberal and Hispanism that Ibarra espouses (in the name of the people, of course) and within the novel itself.

This is because these people's actions and reactions—plucked momentarily from the flow of the world by narrative acts of eavesdropping—constitute the novel's most powerful statement about the complexity of the social terrain and the historical contingency that attends the imperative toward political action. Moreover, Elías's dilemma shows that it is not revolutionary violence Rizal fears, but the unpredictability of the effects of any program of action, the intolerable burden of history, of risk and chance, that are at the heart of all social programs and transformative visions. Which is not to say that just because one cannot fully account for how history might turn out in the wake of one's actions and decisions, one should therefore refuse to embark on action aimed at changing society. Elías, for example, does not abandon the difficult task of speaking and working for "the others," even when he counsels Ibarra against embarking on his plans to exact vengeance.

The acknowledgment of the contingency of artistic and political decisions—contingent because they are specific to a range of subject positions—makes future decisions possible and forces people to take responsibility for the decisions (and errors) they make. Rizal's much discussed and sometimes maligned "indecisiveness" can be read not just as an ideological feature of his novels, but as a literary expression of the contingency of any attempt to represent a political, moral, and symbolic community, an ineradicable component of nationalist thought and practice. Rizal's difficulty in grappling with his material, a difficulty that may have been evinced as "unruliness" within the novel or as the unruliness of the novel itself, is an acknowledgment of a difficult love for a knowable community, and the risks that attend, or haunt, the incarnable task of rendering a critical—as opposed to blind acceptance of "outside" norms or values—exposition of this community.

When Rizal gives his readers a sense of crowds, of people, and when the people talk, and keep on talking beyond the novel, the fictional realism of Noli me tangere reduces the distances separating the author, the reader, and their shared world. Rizal's "people" are at once the frame of reference of nationalism, its basis. But they are also something else, an excess of speech, a multitude of characters who are "still living" or "have been lost sight of" and whose personalities stand out as reflective of the distortions, but also the possibilities, engendered within the Spanish colony—Doña Victorina with her colonial mentality, Capitan Tiago with his venal spinelessness, Doña Consolación in all her cruelty, but also Elías with his capacity for self-sacrifice, Capitana Maria in all her dignity. The Noli suggests a basis for nationalism rooted in a sense of place, of location, and in a mode of connectedness not fully recuperable even by nationalist solidarity and sacrifice. Because the Filipino nation is grounded in the possibility that, despite the readability of social relationships and connections that the novel establishes between individuals and societies, between human beings and nature, knowing and acting on that knowledge may not be enough to guarantee the success of changing the social order.

This possibility of a failure in representation (in both its artistic and political senses of speaking of and for) stems from Rizal's uneasiness regarding the issue of the "corruption" colonial rule spawned. By summoning the specter of the filibusteros in its various linguistic and semantic mutations, Rizal insists both on the specificity of native reinvention of colonial terms, as well as the in calculability of the effects of this reinvention. As the mutations of filibusteros show, the term can be applied as much to the "first civilian I [i.e., one of the peasants] see stealing hens" as to the political dissident. The danger is that the term would lose its
political charge, even if its political charge originates from the possibilities created by such corruption in the first place.

One might think of "the people" in similar terms, as a necessary "fiction" the novel generates, but also as a kind of excess that the novel registers, an excess that the novel can index but cannot fully contain. It is perhaps no coincidence that the people appear in Rizal's novels in the act of talking, creating and spreading rumors, which in turn foreground the relations among truth, untruth, and nontruth. This excess creates the possibility of a failure of reference, representation, of writing from a perspective even, that blurs the conceptual boundaries that determine the oppositions operating in the novel, oppositions such as reason/superstition and knowledge/ignorance. The possible breaching of the line defining the modern and its negation is what leads Ibarra to tell Elías, with whom he has been arguing passionately over the issue of "the people": "I have not been brought up among the people whose needs, perhaps, I am not aware of. I spent my childhood in a Jesuit school, I grew up in Europe, I have been developed by books and I have read only what men have been able to bring to light. What remains behind in the shadows, what writers failed to write about, I know nothing of." Even Elías, who calls himself "one of the people" and tries to articulate the people's needs, is also haunted by the contingency of his own position. When an Ibarra, embittered by the events that led to his arrest on false charges of having staged a rebellion, speaks darkly of vengeance, the knowledgeable Elías counsels peace and invokes the specter of the "defenseless and the innocent" for whom even his (Elías's) rationalizations cannot fully account to dissuade Ibarra from living up to his own observation about the "right of might."

This acknowledgment of both the necessity and limitation of writing from a place and perspective stems from the multiple standpoints the inside/outside stance generate, which render both transparent yet problematic the narrative of progress, universalized cultural norms of Europe, and construal of progress as inevitable change. The inside-outside perspective pits against the often idealized, transcendental account of political will and self-determination the "nature" of the recalcitrant, empirical vagaries and particularities of the Philippine colonial situation. Rizal's evocation of the suffering, but also tenacious survival, of the brutalized people can be read as a plea for the epistemological significance of the experiences the colonial situation engendered, experiences that the universalist norms of progress and development may not fully recuperate, nor the nationalist ritual of self-abnegation and sacrifice fully absorb.

The irreducibility of the risk attending the knowable community and its inscription in history, body, technics, and politics, haunts Rizal and makes him posit the nation in the future. It is perhaps his inability to guarantee the necessity of his decision that, as Graciano López Jaena observed, made Rizal leave the problem of political transformation unsolved (1963, 610). Because the Filipino nation, for Rizal, is both nurturing and intractable, a source of succor but also of anxiety, comforting but also menacing, it compels but also obstructs the drive for origins, for a genealogy. It is haunted by the very freedom it posits.

The moment of nationalism is both a fiction that the novel helped to create or realize, and a fiction produced in the very strictures of material forces operating in colonial Philippines. It may not be proper to speak of the novel as generating a nation that is then defined as exclusionary. The nation emerges precisely from the excess of speech and violence of exclusion. Nationalism and literature thus come together in the invention of a political community, and the efficacy of such a community does not lie in the success of the invention but in the risks that attend the necessity of forging a national community, the risks of failure opening that community to the necessity of reinvention again and again. It is to admit that human freedom is haunted irrevocably by time, by human finitude, by the objects that we create and objects that create us. That Rizal's novels were able to index this aporia at the heart of nationalist thought and practice may help to explain the continuing fascination that his novels command even among Filipinos today.