Dietrich Harth

HERO OF THE NATION AND CITIZEN OF THE WORLD

Tracing José Rizal

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Essays and Miscellanea
by Dietrich Harth

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Table of Contents

Preface

José Rizal (1861–1896), the celebrated Filipino intellectual, is well-known in Southeast Asia but less so in Europe. It is regrettable that his work, which includes novels, political essays and poems, is not better known. His contributions to Spanish literature and beyond are significant and worth reading in the original language. What is more, he was one of the few who spoke out against colonialism during the heyday of European imperialism. Unfortunately, the Spanish Crown responded to his actions with a trial considered scandalous by many, and – even more scandalous – with a death sentence.

The texts in my collection draw from and expand upon the themes explored in my biography, *José Rizals Kampf um Leben und Tod,* which was first published in 2021 (and was updated in a second edition in 2025). Writing my readings in English seems appropriate to me, particularly after meeting the representatives of a Filipino cultural delegation in Heidelberg in October 2024. It would be fair to say that knowledge of German, which Rizal spoke and wrote admirably well, is not as widely spoken or written in the Philippines as it could be and this at times stands in the way of a true engagement in his ideas.

English, on the other hand, serves as an official language in the Philippines and hence offers itself as a viable bridge of communication. I believe it is important to engage in dialogue with the country that celebrates Rizal as a national hero. As a foreigner I perceive the hero cult with a certain distance and sometimes with bewilderment. However, it is precisely the gulf between these points of view that could po-

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tentially contribute to a broader understanding of the subject, which, if carried out in a common language, could perhaps produce some inspiring cross-border interpretations.

Heidelberg, June 2025 D. H.

Introduction

The texts collected in this book were written on different occasions and represent some of the results of the search for clues announced in the book's subtitle.[1] The collection begins with the extended English translation of the first chapter of my biography, *José Rizal's Struggle for Life and Death,* which was first published in 2021.[2] This is followed by a short discursive piece that I designed as a loose script for a public discussion with the Italian philosopher Sergio Givone about outsiders and the paradox of freedom that took place in Florence in June 2024.

The essay "Hero of the Nation and Citizen of the World" is based on a lecture I gave in Wilhelmsfeld and at the World Museum in Vienna in 2023. It is an attempt to get as close as possible to Rizal's life and thought, and at the same time to question the identity-politics that feeds into the idolisation of this historical thinker. The following three chapters are largely based on the sections found in my Rizal biography, first published in 2021 and in a second edition in 2025. They thoroughly explore Rizal's complex attitude towards Europe, his vision of political and moral progress in the Philippines and the carnivalesque

1 All translations in this book are the property of the author unless otherwise noted. – My thanks go to Johann Stockinger for kindly pointing out literature and hidden letters from Rizal and Blumentritt.

2 D. Harth: José Rizals Kampf um Leben und Tod. Facetten einer kolonialismuskritischen Biografie. Heidelberg, 2nd edition 2025; ONLINE: https://books.ub.uni-heidelberg.de//heibooks/catalog/book/1356.

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rhetoric of his novels. After this I offer a brief discussion of the critique of racism advocated by Blumentritt and Rizal, based on a previously unknown letter.

In October 2024, a delegation from the Philippines had the opportunity to visit Heidelberg and Wilhelmsfeld. I was honoured to be invited to share my thoughts on Rizal briefly, which proved to be a challenging task. As a starting point, I chose his statement that he still had the Malay "Wanderlust" in his blood. My short lecture eventually evolved into an essay in which I took Rizal's wanderlust as a starting point to talk about wandering as a metaphor and as a topos in world literature. In doing so, I did not forget what Rizal's friend Maximino Paterno had to say about Rizal as an indefatigable traveller: "He went to Europe in 1882 to expand his knowledge and compare the greatness and progress of developed countries with the slow, monotone and sometimes retrograde pace of this unfortunate colony."[3] Luckily, Rizal had a useful shadow with him on all his journeys, the "Demon of Comparisons". Starting from the question of Rizal's scientific paths, or those he wanted to pursue, I examined his relationship to physical anthropology, particularly anthropometry. I have dedicated a separate short study to this topic, as well as to his life in exile. The final statements in this book concern the long overdue recognition of Rizal as an author of the Spanish language by the *Instituto Cervantes* in Madrid, which took place in spring 2023.

Why search for traces at all? Isn't José Rizal unmistakeably present in the Philippines and in countless other countries and continents in images and inscriptions? Yes, that's the case.[4] But that doesn't mean that the 'hero' depicted in all kinds of more or less idealized monuments is perceived as an individual. Maybe that would be too much to ask, as monuments and inscriptions idolise the person whose image they serve, but also run the risk of falsifying or obscuring the stories

3 "Marchó a Europa en 1882 para ampliar sus conocimientos y comparar las grandezas y progresos de los países cultos con la marcha lenta, monótana y a veces retrógrada de esta desgraciada colonia." Homenaje al Dr. Rizal (1899). In: Rizal ante los Ojos de sus Contemporáneos. Manila: Comisión Nacional del Centenario de José Rizal, 1961, 37

4 Paz Policarpio Mendez: Adventures in Rizaliana. Manila 1978

written on his life and limb. Moreover, the data visibly reproduced on memorial plaques and monuments very rarely offer direct access to the figures' contexts, placed as they are in the public space as tangible memorabilia.

There is no doubt that it is one of the customs of the cult of a national hero everywhere to freeze the idol stereotypically in stone or bronze in order to guarantee the recognisability on which the beneficiaries of hero worship can rely: Political functionaries of virtually all ages and hues have done the same. "I was to discover that like the overcoat that wraps Rizal in all his statues and photographs, Rizal is obscured by countless myths and preconceived ideas", notes the Filipino scholar Ambeth R. Ocampo in his book *Rizal without the Overcoat.*[5]

One of the common 'labels' that distorts Rizal's life and work is his political classification as a "nationalist" and "revolutionary". The biographer Austin Coates celebrated him as a "nationalist"; for most presidents of the Philippine Republic he was or is the "revolutionary" who liberated the archipelago from the yoke of Spanish colonial rule.[6] Both contradict not only Rizal's self-image, but also the historical facts. Philippine nationalism was alien to him. Instead, he advocated a semi-autonomous association with Spain (as an overseas province) on the basis of reforms that would be secured by treaty and would dis-

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5 A. R. Ocampo: Rizal without the Overcoat. Pasig/Manila 1990, Preface

6 A. Coates: Rizal, Philippine Nationalist and Martyr. Oxford & Hongkong 1968. Präsident Fidel V. Ramos in: M. Rajaretnam (Hg.): Jose Rizal and the Asian Renaissance. Kuala Lumpur & Manila 1996, 33 ff. The numerous academic attempts to transform the reformer Rizal into a revolutionary hero are not convincing either; see e.g. Floro Quibuyen: Rizal and the Revolution. In: Philippine Studies, Vol. 45, No. 2 (Second Quarter 1997), 225–257. The homage by the *Instituto Cervantes* from 2023 also adopts this attribution and adds an ambiguous suspicion that casts doubt on Rizal's political honesty: "Tras volver a Filipinas, se le condenó al destierro en Mindanao. Pese a sus intentos por *congraciarse con el gobierno español* fue acusado de asociación ilícita con otros revolucionarios y acabó siendo encontrado culpable de traición siendo fusilado el 30 de diciembre de 1896. Rizal sentó las bases del independentismo filipino y es reconocido como un héroe." https://cultura.cervantes.es/espanya/es/Caja-de-las-Letras:-José-Rizal-in-memoriam/157697 (22.1.2024)

empower the old colonial institutions. He never completely gave up hope of a love match between the Philippines and Spain, even in his greatest despair at the inertia of the Madrid government:

> We have all come here to […] unite our vows, to give shape to that mutual embrace of two races that love each other and want to be united, morally, socially and politically, in the space of four centuries, so that in the future they may form a single nation (*una sola nación*) in spirit, in their duties, in their scopes, in their privileges.[7]

Rizal's statements about what drove him throughout his life, i.e. to develop the ability of independent thinking in his countrymen through secular education, is not really taken seriously by his admirers – or so it sometimes seems. He rejected violence, especially revolutionary violence aimed at political independence and directed against the colonial power. On this point, as elsewhere, he was unequivocal. He feared the anarchy that would result from an irregular uprising from below, frustrating the patient negotiation of legitimate interests at the higher level. After all, as Rizal clairvoyantly recognised, it is rarely the ideal of liberation but rather the thirst for power of the agitators that violent insurrection is intended to satisfy.

Whether Rizal revised his critical stance towards the Catholic Church and the religious abuse of the friars was a bone of contention between the clergy and Freemasons for a long time. In 1896, the Jesuits boasted of their victory over the "heresies" of the alleged apostate and presented "evidence" years after his death.[8] Other, more straightforward misrepresentations have claimed that Rizal was given a professorship in medicine in Germany as a reward for his conversion to

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7 "Hemos venido aquí todos a este banquete para unir nuestros votos, para dar forma a ese abrazo mutuo de dos razas que se aman y se quieren unidas, moral, social y políticamente, en el espacio de cuatro siglos, para que formen en lo futuro una sola nación en el espíritu, en sus deberes, en sus miras, en sus privilegios." *Discurso en el banquete dado en honor de los pintores filipinos.* In: J. Rizal: Escritos políticos. Manila 1961, 21

8 It is in keeping with the unresolved contradictions in Rizal's life and work that his retraction has been neither clearly refuted nor definitely affirmed to

Protestantism. The notion that he had received a doctorate not only in Madrid but also in Heidelberg was a false conclusion even for qualified historians.[9] Political denunciations also played a role during his lifetime and caused him considerable difficulties in his projects: he and Blumentritt were said to have worked together as agents for Bismarck's claims to Oceania. In truth the opposite was the case.

But what does truth mean in the face of the growing darkness under the "overcoat"? Even Rizal's novels have fallen victim to the creation of legends. An essay comparing him – for whatever reason – to Mark Twain relays Blumentritt's supposed statement that translations have made Rizal's novels accessible to "all" German readers.[10] Well, for heaven's sake, how long did Ferdinand Blumentritt live and what spectres are supposed to have revealed to him his friend's alleged bestseller success? Nota bene: the only German translation of *Noli me tángere* was published in 1987, and that of *El Filibusterismo,* under the title *Die Rebellion* anno domini 2016.[11]

False trails damage Rizal's life story and his written legacy. These trails drag his conviction of the moral right of non-violent resistance into the unknown and smudge the traces of his intellectual struggle against the lawless and arbitrary power of illegitimate rule in his Tagalog-Philippine homeland and beyond. It is not easy to free the

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this day. Cf. Rene Escalante: Did Jose Rizal Die a Catholic? Revisiting Rizal's Last 24 Hours Using Spy Reports. In: Southeast Asian Studies, Vol. 8, No. 3, December 2019, 369–386. https://englishkyoto-seas.org/2019/12/vol-8-no-3-rene-escalante (16. 12. 2024)

9 Catherine Vance Yeh: The Chinese Political Novel. Migration of a World Genre. Cambridge (Mass.) & London 2015, 41. Among the erroneous statements contained in this study is the following: "Rizal's name became a regular reference for nonviolence in the writings of Gandhi." (44)

10 Dolores S. Feria: The Mysterious Strangers. Rizal and Mark Twain. In: Rizal. Contra Essays, ed. Petrolino Bn. Daroy & Dolores S. Feria. Quezon City 1968, 40

11 J. Rizal: Noli me tangere. Roman. Aus dem philippinischen Spanisch übersetzt von Annemarie del Cueto-Mörth. Frankfurt a.M.: Insel Verlag 1987. J. Rizal: Die Rebellion. Roman. Aus dem philippinischen Spanisch ins Deutsche übersetzt von Gerhard Walter Frey. Heidelberg: Morio Verlag 2016

autonomous Rizal from this suffocating 'cloak'. But if, to paraphrase Eufronio Alip, it is a matter of following confidently the hero's travels in search of "light and wisdom", then this attempt is worth every effort.[12]

12 E. M. Alip: I Traced Rizal's Footsteps in Foreign Lands. Manila 1961, 5

Tracing José Rizal

On the global information network, there is an interactive online offer showcasing the university city of Heidelberg on the Neckar River through its literary reflections.[1] The 'Literature Map' (*Literaturkarte*) is a constantly updated service that marks the places on a city map where literature was created or literary scenes took place. An index leads to the Heidelberg addresses of the persons or places to be searched for, with reliable bio-bibliographical information and the locations of publicly visible memorials.

The literary map also commemorates two renowned critics of colonialism, Muhammad Iqbal and José Rizal, who were closely linked to Heidelberg. Those keen to explore the city's literary heritage will find a number of memorials scattered throughout the city on the literature map: inscriptions on houses and university buildings, quotations fixed on stone, and street signs with their names. If a university city incorporates well-known names of exotic origin into its public memorial spaces, there may be reasons to be found in the attractiveness of the university as a magnet for academic tourism.

In the case of Iqbal and Rizal, however, it is also a matter of politically relevant myth-making, as both are revered as founding figures

1 https://www.literaturland-bw.de/literaturkarte/ (21. 2. 2024)

Tracing José Rizal.
In: Dietrich Harth: Hero of the Nation and Citizen of the World.
Tracing José Rizal. Essays and Miscellanea. Heidelberg 2025, pp. 7–12.
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and national monuments in their countries of origin.[2] An attribution that the Hindustani Muslim and the Filipino free-thinker would probably have resented, because they did not believe in hero worship and, as transcultural wanderers between Asia and Europe, could find little charm in national narrow-mindedness. Anyhow, it makes sense that Heidelberg's city council has named its riverside streets after Iqbal and Rizal. I say "it makes sense" because Iqbal and Rizal arrived in Heidelberg like travellers on a boat from a foreign land and left after a relatively short stay; but also because both brought an astonishing "flow" to their worlds of origin, with more or less revolutionary effects. And something else is also true: the mythical river of oblivion known as "Lethe" eats away at their memory, in spite of the local traces, something that a city like Heidelberg – a proud UNESCO City of Literature – should not accept. Perhaps a local saint like Goethe can help; after all, Rizal and Iqbal, once accompanied by benevolent local spirits, had their first experience of Goethe's *Faust* in Heidelberg.

Rizal and Iqbal are unforgotten idols in their countries of origin. The Pakistani is revered as the "Spiritual Father of the Nation" and was also praised – whether rightly or wrongly – by Ayatollah Khamenei as the chief ideologist of the Iranian revolution.[3] As the "Father of the Philippine Republic" and a larger-than-life monument, the Filipino stands at the centre of a national, if not global, remembrance policy pursued with spectacular effort by all governments in the Philippines, regardless of their ideological pretensions.

Although the dates of Iqbal (1877–1938) and Rizal (1861–1896) are relatively far apart, they have much in common. For their idolic images – not their works – serve as vehicles for political self-congratula-

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2 In the Philippines there is an official government address for this: *Selection and Proclamation of National Heroes and Laws Honouring Filipino Historical Figures* (https://ncca.gov.ph/about-culture-and-arts/culture-profile/selection-and-proclamation-of-national-heroes-and-laws-honoring-filipino-historical-figures)

3 Iqbal Singh Sevea: The Political Philosophy of Muhammad Iqbal. Islam and Nationalism in Late Colonial India. Cambridge 2012, 201

tions.[4] Their roles as writers, critical intellectuals and cultural mediators – in short, their pre-eminent importance as transcultural *hommes des lettres* – appear insignificant under the rigid gaze of cult-worship, or fall by the wayside altogether. In reality, they wanted to change the world through the printed word, which broke down the genre boundaries between prose and poetry. Both have set in motion processes of change that have been beneficial and detrimental, even if sometimes contrary to their well-minded intentions. To study their transcultural role in mediating between Asia and Europe from a comparative perspective, and to study them as representatives of a specifically Asian-European modernity, would therefore be a worthwhile task, one that a transcontinental research cluster, yet to be invented, might one day profitably undertake.

One of the most active institutions behind the glorifying Rizal cult is an "Orden de Caballeros de Rizal", founded in 1911, which also has a branch in Heidelberg's immediate neighbourhood, in the Odenwald town of Wilhelmsfeld. Founding an Order de Caballeros in the name of Rizal? Isn't it a little strange that it was founded in the 20th century and doesn't fit at all with the person whose name serves as the order's figurehead? The truth is: Rizal preferred the pen to the sword as a weapon. The model of the "Orden" goes all the way back to the medieval institutions of courtly knighthood, while the members of such orders were once there to justify the existence of aristocratic society and secure it with the sword. Their special duties included strict

4 On December 29, 2017, historian Ambeth R. Ocampo wrote in the *Philippine Daily Inquirer*: "Rizal Day is upon us once again, and the commemorative speeches will be rolled out tomorrow, mostly from politicians beating the dead horse with the same tired quotations they learned in school. Jose Rizal then and now should inspire, and there is no better way to know him than to read him. After all, he left us with 25 volumes of writing that are hardly read outside of what is required in school. His six-volume correspondence, for example, is not just an outline of a short but meaningful life; his letters to family, friends, acquaintances, and colleagues in the Propaganda Movement remind those who have forgotten that he was made up of flesh and blood before he was petrified into monuments of marble and bronze." http://opinion.inquirer.net/109849/destiny-woman-rizalisms [10. 1. 2018]

member discipline; the rules of behaviour were laid down in an obligatory code of knighthood, while the membership identified itself to the outside world in an appropriate order costume. All kinds of symbolic elements contribute to the pathos and organisational unity of such institutions. There are consecrations and other beautiful rituals, memorial ceremonies in honour of the order's patron, the awarding of orders of merit and medals, a more or less military hierarchy in which one can rise through the ranks, and much more besides. And the annual recharging ceremony of the signs and places involved adheres to the key dates of Rizal's biography, following the patterns of ritual remembrance.

However, what distinguishes the 'Orden de Caballeros de Rizal' from its medieval counterparts are the extraordinary activities that spread Rizal's name and fame worldwide. These include international networking, the punctual observance of the commemorative calendar, the dissemination of Rizal literature and, last but not least, the global distribution of commemorative symbols such as plaques, statues, monuments, etc.

The oldest large monument dedicated to the memory of Rizal is located in Manila in a spacious area called Luneta Park, approximately where the national hero was executed on 30 December 1896. It would seem that as early as 1901, as the Philippine guerrilla war against the Americans was still in full swing, the tender for the property was approved by the then President of the USA, Theodore Roosevelt, who was known to hold racist views. It was decided that an American-Filipino commission should be formed to serve as the jury. A fundraising campaign attracted a large number of European artists to submit designs that were, for the most part, feasible. Eventually, the monument was created by the Swiss sculptor Richard Kissling (1848–1919) and unveiled in 1913. The material of the Rizal monument, bronze and Gotthard granite, speaks for itself and for eternity.

Richard Kissling created a model that was often varied, depicting the writer in the habitus of a man of letters, towering with broad breast over the peaceful reading people at his feet. Kissling is also known for his work on the William Tell monument in Altdorf in the Swiss canton of Uri, completed a year before Rizal's arbitrary killing. Rizal's Tagalog translation of Schiller's freedom drama *Wilhelm Tell* is, so to say,

the common denominator of both monuments. While both statues are meant to embody national heroes, their individual stories remain significant in their own right. Wilhelm Tell was a fabulous figure from the beginning, while Rizal, who had a real life, was mythologised post mortem.[5]

To extend the search for traces of Rizal to other countries would require a trip around the world. Replicas of the large Manilean monument are in Madrid and Jinjiang (Fujian Province), parks dedicated to the hero in Litoměřice (Leitmeritz), Wilhelmsfeld, Seattle and Tokyo, memorials in Heidelberg, Berlin, London, Paris, Port Moresby (Papua New Guinea), and myriad other locations, including his bust, statues, commemorative plaques, museums or street names in Czechia (former Bohemia), Germany, Austria, Italy and numerous other European cities, in Buenos Aires, and La Molina (Peru), etc. etc.[6] As an impressive example, on the south-east coast of our Antipodes, in New South Wales and Victoria, the Tracker can discover six landmarks that commemorate the Philippine national hero. One of these landmarks is a bronze statue erected near Sydney in 2012, depicting the heroic gaze of a five metre tall Rizal giant towering over its verdant surroundings. Rizal was never there, but the Filipino communities in Australia are impressively large.[7]

All this pales into insignificance when compared to the idol's spread throughout the more or less blessed islands of his homeland. "Whether the foreigner wishes to learn Philippine history or not [according to a *Vademecum* for travellers], he cannot escape the Rizal presence. There is a monument to him in practically every town and plaza in the coun-

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5 A fate he shares with numerous other national heroes; see for example D. Harth: Bolívar – Fabrication of a modern myth, in: D. H.: Rituale im Zwielicht/Ambiguous Rituals. Heidelberg 2014, 153–164. Online: www.ub.uni-heidelberg.de/archiv/16751

6 See also the List of historical markers of the Philippines overseas: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_historical_markers_of_the_Philippines_overseas

7 According to the 2021 census: 408,836 persons by ancestry (1.6 % of the Australian population). https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Filipino_Australians (1. 1. 2025)

try."[8] Indeed, Rizal's portraits hang in all public buildings; it appears on the two peso note, the one peso coin and on postage stamps. Every main street in the country is named Rizal, as are an entire province (created in 1901), Manila's main park, theatres, schools, universities, but also such banal products as cement, beer, matches and cigars. In short, the critic of colonialism posthumously colonises – in effigy or as a product brand – an imaginary world that is barely conceivable, in order to promote a myth that few see through or even understand. This is despite the abundance of information that Filipino Rizalists have disseminated to make Rizal impervious to future hardships.[9]

It seems there is no longer any reason to search for traces of Rizal. Rather, the reverse is true, the search for what the widespread idolisation conceals or displaces.

8 A. & G. Roces: CultureShock! Philippines: A Survival Guide to Customs and Etiquette. Singapore 2009, 68

9 As to Rizal's public image see also Renato Constantino: Dissent and Counter-Consciousness. Quezon City 1980

Rizal, seen through the philosophical lens

The oracle

The term "philosophical" in this context is used to describe a method of examining a person's biography from a perspective that is contemplative and reflective, with the aim of finding access to their self-perception. While Rizal did not write an autobiography, he did offer insights into his life and experiences through his letters and diaries. In these writings, he more or less openly talks about his thoughts and reflections on various aspects of his literary and political commitment and the circumstances he encountered. Furthermore, the *experimentum crucis* of his novels is a demonstration of how colonialism can be detrimental to the development of an individual and a community. He did not use the assertive language of a man of action, but usually commented on his aspirations and concerns in an elegiac tone.

In his poetry and novels, he used the freedom of satirical imagination, not to promise salvation from colonial oppression, but to shed light on the shortcomings of the colonial rulers and to encourage self-criticism among his fellow countrymen. His novels can be seen as belonging to the category of 'punishing and laughing literature', established by Cervantes with his *Don Quixote de la Mancha.* From a political point of view, Rizal was a reformer. He was opposed to physical violence, but he fought for recognition, for what he considered the "rights of humanity" (*los derechos de la humanidad*) and the "independence of thought" (*independencia del pensar*). In a letter to a

Rizal, seen through the philosophical lens.
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friend, he wrote that the pen is perhaps the most important tool for expressing heart and mind.

From the perspective of the oppressive colonial rulers, Rizal was a doubly stigmatised outsider. He was regarded as both biologically belonging to an "inferior race" and as a critic of colonialist power who favoured violence. As a result, he was exiled for four years, charged with rioting and breach of the peace without any evidence, and in the end sentenced to death by a firing squad. He died at the age of 35 on 30 December 1896 at the gates of Manila.

Although my review of Rizal's life follows a philosophical guideline, there is also a very old background tradition to be remembered, which is linked to fortune telling and mythical tales. In Rizal's novel *Noli me tangere,* published in Berlin in 1887, the narrator describes a convivial scene in a beautiful rural setting. The villagers are sitting by the river and enjoying themselves playing cards and board games. The younger ones are engaged in a fortune-telling game in which the numbers on a Wheel of Fortune (*Rueda de la Fortuna*) set in motion by the questioners lead to the numbered answers written down in a list. Ibarra, one of the novel's main characters, wants to build a school for boys and girls in the village. He asks the wheel of fortune whether his enterprise will succeed. The answer "Dreams are dreams!" (*¡Los sueños, sueños son!*) foreshadows Ibarra's failure.[1]

Many years later, during his exile in Dapitan, Rizal created a parlour game which he called "Haec est Sibylla Cumana". The name represents the Cumaean Sibyl, whose appearance in Virgil's *Aeneid* was well known to the Philippine exile. In Book VI (42 ff.) of the Latin epic, Aeneas enters the underworld with the help of the Sibyl and learns from her and his father Anchises what the future holds for him. A pen drawing by Rizal aptly illustrates the appearance of the Sibyl in Virgil's poem, where her face is discoloured by frenzy and her hair is wildly dishevelled.[2]

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1 J. Rizal: Noli me tángere. Berlin 1887, 131

2 Source of the drawing: https://www.positivelyfilipino.com/magazine/jose-rizal-the-oracle (29. 11. 2024)

Rizal's pen drawing of the Cumaean Sibyl

Rizal's oracle game consists of several octagonal tops, on the sides of which are inscribed the numbers of 52 questions in a written list which, in vague analogy to the fundamental questions of the German philosopher Immanuel Kant, ask about the past and, above all, about the future: "¿Cuál será mi destino? ¿Cuál será mi carrera?" And so forth (*What will be my destiny? What will be my career?*).[3] The answers to the questions posed to the player are compiled (with numerous variations) in a separate list – 416 numbers in total – and selected at random.

Rizal was not only familiar with Virgil, he also knew the great Italian poet very well, whom the Roman poet led like another Sibyl through the underworld regions of those unfortunate 'sinners' whom the Christian God had condemned to purgatory or to hell. It was therefore more than just a whim when he wrote to Blumentritt (31 July 1894) from exile using Dante Alighieri's first lines from the *Divina Commedia*: "Halfway through my life / I found myself in a dark forest" (*Nel mezzo del cammin di nostra vita / mi ritrovai per una selva oscura*). He

3 J. Rizal: Escritos Varios II. Manila 1961, 318 ff.

could not know, but he had a hunch that he was never going to find his way out of this dark forest.

In what follows, however, I will not take the Sibyl or Virgil as my guide. Instead, I am going to use the following questions, posed by the philosopher Kant (may he forgive me), as a guideline:[4]

What can I know?
What should I do?
What can I hope for?
What is man?

What can I know?

Rizal was born on 19 June 1861, the seventh of eleven children in a relatively well-off family of Filipino tenant farmers. His birthplace, Calamba, and the surrounding lands were owned by Spanish religious orders (who had appropriated them without rights). These same orders, especially the Dominicans and Jesuits, had a monopoly on education in the colony. Rizal's family, on the other hand, had a rich private library of at least 1000 books, including banned works. It was an Eldorado for young José, who, like Giacomo Leopardi, grew up a book lover in the family library.

Rizal received formal education in Latin and Spanish at monastic schools, where rhetoric was a major subject in preparation for the clerical profession. He made a virtue of necessity, devouring the Latin classics (from Virgil to Augustine), successfully practising various literary genres and secular resistance to Catholic drill. At the Jesuit University in Manila, he pursued studies in medicine and *Filosofia y Lettras*. At the age of 20, he departed from his homeland, which was experiencing the consequences of late feudalist exploitation under the

4 In *Critique of Pure Reason* (1781), Kant writes: "All the interests of my reason (both speculative and practical) are united in the following three questions: 1. What can I know? 2. What should I do? 3. What may I hope?" In the Lectures on Logic, he added the question *What is man?* Cf. https://ekkehart-schaffer.de/kants-fragen-der-philosophie

Spanish colonial rule. As soon as he arrived in Spain, he looked back on his school days at home and summarised his experiences in the following verdict: "Blame the defect and insensible system of education that, like a thick fog, obscures the intellectual horizon, killing and drowning the most felicitous aptitudes."[5] To change this became the focus of his life's work.

Rizal continued his studies at the Central University in Madrid, where he attended language courses in German, French, Italian, English and Hebrew. He subsequently passed examinations in medicine and in the faculty of arts known as *Filosofia y Lettras.* As a medical practitioner, Rizal specialised in ophthalmology, a field that aligns with the values espoused by a late Enlightenment philosopher who sought to enlighten the oppressed. He embarked on a journey to consult with renowned ophthalmologists in Paris, Heidelberg and Berlin. As a writer, he worked on a novel entitled *Noli me tangere,* which alludes to the "social cancer" of colonialism that was eating away at his homeland and corrupting it morally (cancer was considered infectious at the time). In pursuit of both philological curiosity and poetic ambition, he devoted himself to the improvement of his language skills. He engaged with a diverse array of literary works, including those by Dante, Machiavelli, Thomas More, Shakespeare, Voltaire, Herder, Schiller, and Karl Julius Weber, a figure known as the "laughing philosopher." He read them in the original language and quoted from their writings.

In the European cities where he resided for a period exceeding one day, he visited museums, clinics, educational institutions, religious edifices, and libraries. He consulted a wide range of sources on the Philippines in order to reconstruct the pre-colonial era of his homeland, including the *Biblioteca Real* Madrid, the *Royal Library* in Berlin, the *Bibliothèque Nationale de Paris* and the Reading Room of the *British Museum.* The result was the publication of a new edition of an old Spanish chronicle from the early 17th century, which was sup-

5 The Town Schools in the Philippines (1882) J. Rizal: Miscellaneous Writings VIII. Manila 1964, 11

plemented by dozens of critical and subversive annotations from Rizal's pen.

In the summer of 1886, he began a correspondence from Heidelberg with Ferdinand Blumentritt, a Bohemian grammar school professor and scholar, who at the time was the world's leading expert on the colonial and ethnic history of the Philippines. With a few Spanish exceptions, this correspondence, written in German, is a treasure trove for anyone who wants to find out what Rizal was like. Over the course of their uninterrupted correspondence, which spanned a decade, both letter writers engaged in discourse on a range of topics, including politics, history, philology, and human rights. They repeatedly returned to the crucial question of what the future of the Philippines might look like, how – in other words – justice could replace injustice, equality replace racist humiliation, freedom of self-determination replace spiritual subjugation, in order to build a peaceful world of Filipino-Spanish coexistence on the more than seven thousand islands of the Pacific archipelago. Both fought side by side against racist exploitative colonialism and the abuse of power by the Catholic clergy in the Philippines with sharp polemics published in Spanish and Philippine newspapers.

A short interim: Two years after Rizal's assassination by the corrupt Spanish colonial dictatorship, the United States, following military intervention, purchased the Philippine archipelago, including its inhabitants, from the Spanish crown for the ridiculous sum of 20 million dollars. With the exception of a two-year Japanese occupation during the Second World War, the archipelago remained under American rule until 1946. In the early 20th century, Rizal's work was americanised and his name became the slogan of a national hero cult binding on all Filipinos. This cult is to be ritually renewed every year on 30 December, the anniversary of Rizal's death. Since the 1950s, Rizal's novels have been compulsory reading in all Philippine schools and universities.

But now to the second Kantian question, which Rizal has posed from time to time, even without a philosophical undertone.

What should I do?

He contemplated this question when he sought to publish his books, but lacked both the financial resources and a publisher. Neither in Spain nor in the Philippines was there a publisher with the courage to even consider this potentially dangerous venture. He posed the same question when he placed his family in jeopardy by publishing *Noli me tangere*. He posed the question again each time he sought to identify potential allies who were willing to collaborate with him on his critiques of colonialism and reform politics, as well as on the development of pragmatic strategies for action. He considered what could be done to inspire self-respect and self-confidence in his fellow countrymen, and became an advocate of radical reform through his criticism of colonial oppression published in the *Quincenario democrático La Solidaridad* and elsewhere. The question "What should I do?" resurfaced again when friends who feared for his safety attempted to free him from Spanish captivity.

His responses to these questions, at times, induced a sense of despondency, ultimately resulting in his death and bestowing upon him immortality. He rejected attempts to be freed from custody, citing that he, a lone voice in the wilderness, stood as a person behind every word in his writings critical of religion and power. He exhorted his compatriots to pursue "Bildung", and he devised a plan for a secular, modern school curriculum. To empower his fellow countrymen, he became an advocate of radical reform through his criticism of colonial oppression published in the *Quincenario democrático La Solidaridad* and elsewhere.[6] But he was only able to implement his strategies temporarily, as he quickly fell out with his fellow campaigners, and the Spanish administration refused to accept his proposals. Furthermore, he was unable to protect his family from persecution. At best, he could mitigate their hardships through negotiation. Nevertheless, his books were published in "free Europe", albeit only with the financial backing of his

6 *La Solidaridad* was published by the young Filipino *ilustrados* in Barcelona and existed from 1889 to 1895.

friends: the annotated Spanish chronicle in Paris,[7] the novel *Noli me tangere* in Berlin and the follow-up novel *El Filibusterismo* in Ghent, Belgium.

At the end of the prefaces to his books, Rizal called the place of their creation "Europe" rather than the exact place of publication. Only in Europe, says this signature, could he move freely, i.e. without surveillance; and only there could he write about his homeland and the oppression staged there by Europeans without having to fear persecution and humiliation. He had fled from the violence in his homeland in order to denounce the violence in his country in freedom. But at the same time, with the very work that was born of free thought, he gave his opponents the pretext to deprive him of his freedom and ultimately his life. Ecco, il paradosso della libertà!

What can I hope for?

In 1889, one hundred years after the French Revolution, Rizal began writing a long essay in Paris entitled *The Philippines in One Hundred Years,* a cautious Utopia in terms of content. In order to be able to talk about the future, he wrote, one must know the past. He therefore began by summarising the past 300 years under the yoke of the Spanish colonial regime. The result is a grey history of decay, to which applies what I would like to call, with Paul Ricœur, a 'history of unfulfilled promises'.[8]

Five years before this publication, Rizal gave an enthusiastic speech in Madrid in praise of two Filipino artists who were friends of his and who had won a Spanish competition for the best painting. I'm going

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7 Sucesos de las islas Filipinas por el Doctor Antonio de Morga, obra publicada en Méjico el año de 1609, nuevamente sacada á luz y anotada por José Rizal y precedida de un prólogo del Prof. Fernando Blumentritt. Paris: Librería de Garnier Hermanos, 1890

8 Paul Ricœur: Das Rätsel der Vergangenheit. Erinnern – Vergessen – Verzeihen. Übersetzt von Andris Breitling u. Henrik Richard Lesaar. Göttingen 1998

to quote a passage from this eulogy in which the great pathos of hope can be heard, which will only be perceptible as a distant echo in the Utopia-essay written later:

> The patriarchal era in the Philippines is waning. The deeds of her illustrious sons are no longer wasted away at home. The oriental chrysalis is leaving the cocoon. The morrow of a long day for those regions is announced in brilliant tints and rose-coloured dawns, and that race, fallen into lethargy during the historic night while the sun illumines other continents, again awakens, moved by the electric impact that contact with Western peoples produces, and she demands light, life, the civilisation that on one time they bequeath her, thus confirming the eternal laws of constant evolution, of change, of periodicity, of progress.[9]

What is man?

This is a question that is not straightforward to answer, to which Immanuel Kant (and not he alone) devoted considerable time and effort. On reflection, it seems that this question is one that is constantly evolving and cannot be ignored. However, upon perusing Kant's *Anthropology,* I came across the philosopher's observation that it is part of the "unfathomable wisdom" of "nature's plan" to "bring about the perfection of man through progressive culture, albeit with some sacrifice of his pleasures in life".[10] The figure of Rizal immediately comes to mind, not only because of the "pleasures of life" he missed and lamented, including the unfulfilled longing for family life. As to Kant, the term "culture" is correctly translated by the Asian as "Bildung"; and Kant's concept of "perfection" corresponds closely to the concept of "perfectibility", which Rizal could find in Herder, whose complete

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9 Rizal's speech delivered at the banquet in Madrid in honor of the Filipino painters Juan Luna and Felix Resurrección Hidalgo (25 June 1884). J. Rizal: Political and Historical Writings VII. Manila 1964, 18

10 Immanuel Kant: Anthropologie in pragmatischer Absicht. Ed. Karl Vorländer. Leipzig ^{5}1912, 275 f.

works were part of his personal library. Furthermore, progress in the sense of perfection was the hope that Rizal celebrated so enthusiastically in the Madrid eulogy to his artist friends.

In short, the simplest answer to Kant's fourth question could be: *Man is what he, under given circumstances, makes of himself.*

However, this is not the end of the matter, as in Rizal's novel *Noli me tangere* a philosopher responds to Kant's question with a challenge that provokes considerable reflection. The philosopher is named Tasio and is a prototypical outsider figure. The villagers, who are characterised as sanctimonious, regard him as a fool, despite or because of his ownership of a large library and his ability to read and write books. The villagers ridicule him, failing to comprehend his critique of the disdainful violence of the colonial regime and the indoctrination by the Spanish priests. To write his texts, the philosopher uses a secret script, which is designed to safeguard him and his ideas from the persecution by fanatical villagers. He is convinced that an educated posterity will be able to decipher the code, and that they will then realise that not everyone slept in the "night of the ancestors".[11] Tasio's hope is that by deciphering his coded works, future generations will be able to liberate themselves from the obscurantism imposed on them by their ancestors.

Even if the philosopher's answer to Kant's fourth question is not prophetic, it is extremely radical. Because together with the Catholic Church's dogma "Extra ecclesiam nulla salus!" (*No salvation outside the Church!*), he also condemns the myth of man as an image of God:

> The Creation, i.e. Man, is a contingent and not a necessary being, and God should not have created him, no, if, in order to make *one* happy, he had to condemn hundreds to eternal misery, and all of them for inherited or

11 "Porque no escribo para esta generación, escribo para otras edades. Si esta me pudiera leer, quemaría mis libros, el trabajo de toda mi vida; en cambio, la generación que descifre estos caracteres será una generación instruida, me comprenderá y dirá: "¡No todos dormían en la noche de nuestros abuelos!" Noli me tángere. Berlin 1887, 135

> momentary faults. No! If that were true, you would drown your son who is sleeping there.[12]

Although the narrator in Rizal's novel does not impede the philosopher's progress, the narrative arc of the story ultimately undermines his efforts to enlighten future generations. No sooner has Tasio died of old age than the bigoted villagers set fire to his house and burn his library and manuscripts. It is a foreshadowing of what will happen to the novel that tells this story.

It was not long before Rizal himself realised that the figures he had invented bore an uncanny resemblance to an oracle, reflecting his own self and foretelling his future fate.

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12 "La creación, el hombre es un ser contingente y no necesario, y ese Dios no debía haberle criado, no, si para hacer feliz a uno debía condenar a centenares a una eterna desgracia, y todo por culpas heredadas o de un momento. ¡No! Si eso fuera cierto, ahogue Ud. a su hijo que allí duerme." Noli me tángere, 1887, 68 f.

Hero of the Nation and Citizen of the World

Preliminary note

"Hero of the Nation" is a great, almost adulatory title that makes the person so described seem larger than life and thus distant from it. Whether the same can be said of "Citizen of the world" probably depends in which world you see yourself. After all, the philosopher Immanuel Kant appreciated the cosmopolitan as the representative of a community of nations encompassing the whole planet; well, that doesn't exactly sound like a national hero. Rizal was an indefatigable "Weltenwanderer" (traveller of the world), unrestrained by political or imaginary borders. When he and his friends called themselves "Philippiner", it was not an expression of national pride, but simply the name given to a group of young Creoles, Malays and mestizos living in Spain and committed to criticising colonialism.[1]

In the following pages I will not go into any further detail about these titles and designations. My modest intention is to give the reader a close-up portrait of José Rizal and leave it to him/her to decide which title to award him.

1 "Wir müssen alle der Politik etwas opfern, wenn auch wir keine Lust daran haben. Dies verstehen meine Freunde welche in Madrid unsere Zeitung herausgeben; diese Freunde sind alle Jünglingen, creolen, mestizen und malaien, wir nennen uns nur Philippiner." Letter to Blumentritt, 13 April 1887. The Rizal–Blumentritt Correspondence, Vol. 1. Manila 1992

Hero of the Nation and Citizen of the World.
In: Dietrich Harth: Hero of the Nation and Citizen of the World.
Tracing José Rizal. Essays and Miscellanea. Heidelberg 2025, pp. 25–51.
https://doi.org/10.11588/heibooks.1635

A brief outline of Rizal's life story

On 19 June 1861, José Rizal was born the seventh of eleven children to a relatively wealthy mestizo family that ran a hacienda in Calamba, a village on the main Philippine island of Luzon. Spanish Dominican friars had craftily taken possession of land and village, and Rizal's family were among the tenants.

The young Rizal attended the school controlled by the monastic orders, enrolled in medicine at the Jesuit University in Manila and left for Europe at the age of 21 to continue his studies in Madrid. Two years later, he graduated in medicine from the central university there and shortly afterwards obtained a degree in history, languages and literature. While still in Madrid, he began work on an extensive novel about his homeland entitled *Noli me tángere,* which he published in 1887 in a Berlin publishing house.

Apart from that, he still had time to train as an eye surgeon with specialists in Paris, Heidelberg and Berlin. From Heidelberg, he began a ten-year correspondence with the grammar school professor Ferdinand Blumentritt, who lived in Leitmeritz in Bohemia and was the best expert on the Philippines at the time. Thanks to Blumentritt's letters of recommendation, Rizal gained access to the most renowned anthropologists and ethnologists in Germany. I may mention for example Adolf Bernhard Meyer, director of the Ethnographic Museum in Dresden, the so-called 'father' of German ethnology Adolf Bastian, and Rudolf Virchow, universal scholar at the Charité and reform politician in the Reichstag. The latter made Rizal a member of the highly renowned "Berlin Gesellschaft für Anthropologie, Ethnologie und Urgeschichte" (*Society for Anthropology, Ethnology and Prehistory*), an extraordinary honour for the young Asian.

In the summer of 1887, Rizal set off from Berlin on a long journey that took him to Leitmeritz, Linz, Vienna, Geneva, Rome and finally Marseilles, from where he took a steamship back to his homeland, which he had to leave again very quickly. The publication of his novel *Noli me tangere* infuriated the Spanish colonial power, not least the clergy. He was denounced and threatened, fled from Hong Kong via Japan and the USA to Europe, stayed briefly in London, worked in the reading room of the British Museum on a critique of an old Spanish

chronicle of the Philippines, travelled between London, Madrid, Paris and Brussels, began a sequel to his novel, which he provisionally completed in Biarritz and published in 1891 – he was barely 30 years old – in a publishing house in Ghent, Belgium: *El Filibusterismo.*

Between all these travels, from which he wrote letters almost every day and kept a diary, he still found time to establish, together with his Filipino friends and comrades-in-arms, a periodical critical of colonialism called *La Solidaridad,* which he diligently supplied with sharp essays and invectives attacking the arbitrariness and brutality of the Spanish colonial regime. He also became a member of a Spanish-Philippine Masonic lodge, drew up plans for secular educational institutions in his homeland based on the German model, drafted the programme for an international academy of Philippine sciences, and tried to organise journalistic resistance to the colonial regime in small groups.

In the summer of 1892 – he was back in his native Philippines – Rizal secretly met with like-minded people to launch a reform initiative under the name "Liga Filipina". He was denounced, arrested and deported into exile in Dapitan on the island of Mindanao. (A long way from Manila: 865 kilometres as the crow flies.)

In August 1896, the fourth year of his exile, Filipino rebels attacked a Spanish military camp near the capital, Manila. It was the bloody beginning of the struggle for independence. Rizal, who rejected violence on principle and warned his countrymen against the revolutionary uprising, was arrested by order of the governor-general as the alleged mastermind of the revolution and tried by a Spanish court-martial. Charged with treason and incitement to rebellion, he was sentenced to death by firing squad and executed at the age of 35 on 30 December 1896 at the gates of the capital to the applause of the so-called 'fine' Spanish society.

In a long farewell poem written on death row, he wrote: "Voy donde no hay esclavos, verdugos ni opresores, / donde la fe no mata, donde el que reina es Dios." (*I'll go where there are no slaves, tyrants or hangmen, / where faith does not kill and where God alone does reign*).[2]

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2 J. Rizal: Poesias. Manila 1961, 139. Translation by Encarnación Alzona: Rizal's Poems (Writings of José Rizal Vol. III/1). Manila 1962, 154

How Rizal was seen by his adversaries

A few days before Rizal's execution, in December 1896, a Spaniard named Nicolás de la Peña, in a postscript to the court martial's verdict, characterised the condemned Filipino as follows:

> Rizal, a student of the natural and physical-chemical sciences (*de las ciencias naturales y de las fisico-químicas*) by profession, was industrious and active like no other of his countrymen, a tireless traveller in Europe and speaker of several living languages; admired by his uneducated compatriots, celebrated by his teachers and his friends of different origins, he embarked on the path of the humanities and sociological studies (*ciencias morales y estudios sociológicos*) […]. He vigorously spread among the inhabitants of these Spanish regions sentiments of disloyalty and betrayal, doctrines contrary to national unity, ideas hostile to Spanish sovereignty, in order to trust in the salvation of his own existence in the dark moments of battle and death.
>
> Rizal is not a tribune of the people. His speeches […] are full of vulgar stuff that might have been effective with the masses half a century ago, but today deserves only the greatest ridicule. Rizal is neither a competent writer nor a profound thinker. His writings […] betray a highly imperfect command of language and little intellectual energy. And yet Rizal became the spokesman of the rebellion (*el Verbo del Filibusterismo*), the cleverest head of the separatists, the idol of the ignorant crowd and of uneducated people who saw in this permanent troublemaker a supernatural (*sobrenatural*) being that they called *Supremo.*[3]

The author of these lines, Nicolás de la Peña, was not just anybody, but the attorney general who argued the case against Rizal before the court martial. I have quoted this passage to show that even during his lifetime, Rizal had a contradictory image that has fuelled all kinds of speculation about his life and work to this day. On the one hand, if we follow de la Peña's description, he was a connoisseur of many

3 My translation from the Spanish transcription by W. E. Retana, edited by H. de la Costa: The Trial of Rizal. Manila 1996, 73

languages and sciences; on the other, a witless literary dilettante; on the one hand, an evil traitor and seducer of the people; on the other, a clever strategist and a charismatic authority revered by the people. This ambiguous characterisation should have made the attorney general reflect on his own words. But the man was incapable of doing so because, as a functionary of the state authority, deciding over life and death, he embodied the divine sovereignty of the Spanish Crown. This sovereignty demanded a special kind of blood sacrifice in order – it believed – to keep itself alive, even if this sacrifice was to be made against better judgement. Making an example of such a well-known and respected Spanish subject as Rizal also marked the birth of a cult of martyrdom that continues to influence Filipino public opinion today.

An unbiased reading of the court records shows that Rizal, a physician and writer, was innocent and even in the safe custody of the Spanish Crown when the revolution broke out. Even the role he was accused of playing as a spokesman for the revolution did not apply to him, since he rejected violence with good reason and passionately advocated the recognition of the Philippine archipelago as a semi-autonomous overseas province of Spain. As for his support for the non-violent struggle for freedom, he did not seek moral justification in a catalogue of behaviour prescribed and supervised by the clergy. Rather, he relied on an inner sense that, as he confidently wrote, spoke to him with 'the voice of his conscience' (*la voz de mi conciencia*) and weighed up what was right and what was wrong. Rizal's immediate political goal was not *independencia* in the sense of state sovereignty, but self-determination on an equal footing with the Spanish metropolis, with what he called the "Motherland".

Of course, he had attached political conditions to his dream of non-violent transformation. These included:

1. the demand for voting representation in the *Cortes* (the Spanish parliament),
2. agrarian reform based on equitable land distribution (a colonial legacy in the Philippines that continues to cause conflict today),
3. freedom of speech and of the press, respect for human rights, and last but not least

4. the secularisation of educational institutions, i.e. taking schools out of the hands of the bigoted monastic orders (Dominicans, Franciscans, Augustinians, and Jesuits).

When Rizal visited the 1889 Paris World Exhibition, celebrating the centenary of the French Revolution (marking the birth of the Eiffel Tower), he was able to read the original version of the famous 1789 *Déclaration des Droits de l'Homme et du Citoyen*.[4] Article 11 of the Declaration reads: "La libre communication des pensées et des opinions est un des droits les plus précieux de l'homme." (*The free exchange of ideas and opinions is one of the most precious rights of man*). This normative phrase must have struck a particular chord with him. In any case, he soon set about translating the French *Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen* into his mother tongue, Tagalog.

About language and translation

Like Indonesian and Malay, Tagalog belongs to a geographically widespread 'Austronesian' (Wilhelm Schmidt) language family. At the time of Rizal, it was one of the numerous languages in the archipelago and was spoken on the island of Luzon alone. Since the 1930s, Tagalog has formed the basis for one of the official languages spoken throughout the archipelago; the second current official language is American English; Spanish is spoken only in specialised circles.

Rizal was a language genius, with a written and spoken command of several European languages in addition to Spanish and Tagalog: Latin, German, French, Italian and English. He had studied the three so-called sacred languages, Greek, Hebrew and above all Latin; he spoke and wrote the latter effortlessly. In his novels, Creole languages native to the Philippines are occasionally quoted alongside Vulgar Latin. All this explains his interest in the history of languages and in

4 https://www.conseil-constitutionnel.fr/le-bloc-de-constitutionnalite/declaration-des-droits-de-l-homme-et-du-citoyen-de-1789 (31.10.2024)

criticism, not only of etymology and grammar, but also of orthography. He was also fully aware of the political importance of a common language uniting the peoples of the archipelago. Such questions were a constant theme in his correspondence with Ferdinand Blumentritt.

Rizal's polyglotism also gave him the opportunity to study and quote in the original authors and books that a mere mortal would not even have picked up. It is no wonder that he was attracted to metropolitan libraries and bookshops wherever he travelled and that he amassed a private collection of more than 2000 books over the course of his eventful but short life, including complete editions of works by Voltaire, Johann Gottfried Herder and the French physiologist Claude Bernard.

Criticising the arbitrary and violent acts of the Spanish colonial rulers – both secular and clerical – did not prevent Rizal from appropriating the oppressors' language of domination as a literary medium. Why? The answer is simple: Spanish was and is a world language with an overwhelmingly large literary library that ranks high in the establishment of tradition. Tagalog, on the other hand, was a regional language limited to the island of Luzon with a very limited literary production. In addition, Rizal was socialised in Spanish at the schools of the monastic orders and familiarised himself with the formal education of European origin. He used the Spanish language in its Filipino variant due to the well-founded opinion that he could reach both his friends and his enemies among the Spaniards through it.

Although the Filipino version of Spanish was related to the Castellano written by Cervantes, it was not identical. The colonial Spanish had originally arrived in the Philippines with the Spanish conquistadores from Central America, bringing with it all sorts of varieties of Mexican indigenous languages, which were then enriched by further creolisation in the Pacific islands, including the hybrid variants of Tagalog. Rizal wanted to regulate the grammatical, lexical and orthographic aspects of Tagalog, the everyday language spoken by the majority of his compatriots, to such an extent that it could be used to spread the popular education he dreamed of, a project that immediately makes sense. It may be that this encouraged him to inform himself about the methods of German school teaching during a stay

in Saxony, the birthplace of the "Duden".[5] He had great plans for education and drew up the prospectus for a modern, i.e. secular Colegio, whose curriculum – to name the involved subjects – would include Spanish, English, French, German, Chinese and Tagalog in addition to maths, rhetoric, political economy, world history, civil law, music and dance.

On 31 March 1890, he wrote enthusiastically to Blumentritt from Brussels:

> I'm going to start a school and if you can stand the climate, you'll be the headmaster. I'm sure all the boys, the best in the country, will come to us. Blumentritt Rizal will remain like Goethe and Schiller, like Horace and Vergil, like the two Humboldts [in] the memory of the philp. people.[6]

Rizal consciously pursued a linguistic and literary policy that was critical of colonialism in two directions. His aim was to make his literary and essayistic criticism of colonialist despotism heard both by his fellow countrymen, whom he wanted to 'awaken', and by the Spanish public in the 'motherland'. He obviously succeeded in this, albeit with mixed results. In the metropolis, his texts were applauded by local republicans fighting for a modern Spain, while in the colony, the feudalistic, ossified regime rewarded his fearless words with persecution, exile and death.

Another aim of his language and literary policy concerned the (what I would call) ennoblement of the Tagalic language through translation. Among other things, he himself translated some of Hans Christian An-

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5 The "Duden" was first published 1880 in Leipzig by Konrad Duden as *Vollständiges Orthographisches Wörterbuch der deutschen Sprache* (Complete Orthographic Dictionary of the German Language) and became the basis of standardised German orthography in the following decades.

6 "Ich werde eine Schule gründen, und wenn du das Klima ertragen kannst, wirst du der Direktor sein. Ich bin sicher alle Jungen, die besten des Landes kommen zu uns. Blumentritt Rizal werden wie Goethe und Schiller, wie Horatius und Vergilius, wie die zwei Humboldt [im] Gedächtniss des philp. Volkes bleiben." Escritos de José Rizal: Cartas entre Rizal y el profesor Fernando Blumentritt. Manila 1961, 638

dersen's fairy tales from German, as well as Friedrich Schiller's freedom drama *Wilhelm Tell* into Tagalog. He had already translated some lines from Schiller's verse parody *Shakespeares Schatten* into Spanish and used them as a motto on the title page of his novel *Noli me tangere*.

In a long letter written in London on 8 June 1888 to his former host, the "dear Pastor Ullmer" in Wilhelmsfeld near Heidelberg, he declared:

> Now I am here again […], breathing the free air of Europe. My compatriots consider me very lucky to have come back alive from the Philippines. Schiller's "Taucher" comes to mind: What monsters I have seen, what dragons and salamanders have stretched their claws at me, but with God's help I have surfaced again. But I want to try that twice.[7]

What is Schiller's ballad "Der Taucher" (*The diver*) about? I quote from stanzas 18 and 19,[8] in which the young diver who has resurfaced from the depths describes what happened to him in the abyss:

> Da zeigte mir Gott, zu dem ich rief
> In der höchsten schrecklichen Not,
> Aus der Tiefe ragend ein Felsenriff,
> Das erfasst ich behänd und entrann dem Tod …
>
> Das Auge mit Schaudern hinuntersah,
> Wie's von Salamandern und Molchen und Drachen
> Sich regt' in dem furchtbaren Höllenrachen …

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7 "Nun bin ich hier wieder […], die freie Luft Europas atmend. Meine Landsleute halten mich für sehr glücklich, lebendig aus den Philippinen zurückkommen zu können. Schillers Taucher kommt mir ins Gedächtnis: Was für Ungeheuer habe ich erblickt, was für Drachen und Salamander erstreckten auf mich ihre Krallen, aber mit Gottes Hilfe bin ich wieder aufgetaucht. Doch will ich das zwei Mal probieren." J. Rizal: Correspondencia epistolar IV. Cartas entre Rizal y otras personas, ed. Comision Nacional del Centenario de José Rizal. Manila 1961, 106/107 (Facsimile)

8 English translation in: https://www.poetrynook.com/poem/diver-ballad (31. 10. 2024)

Then God pointed out – for to Him I cried
In that terrible moment of need –
A craggy reef in the gulf's dark side;
I seized it in haste, and from death was then freed.

With shuddering awe 'twas seen by the eye
How the salamanders' and dragons' dread forms
Filled those terrible jaws of hell with their swarms.

The king in Schiller's ballad insists on a second dive and throws the golden cup back into the flood. The last line announces the death of anyone who dares to do it a second time:

Es kommen, es kommen die Wasser all,
Sie rauschen herauf, sie rauschen nieder,
Den Jüngling bringt keines wieder.

And the waters are pouring in fast around;
Though upwards and downwards they rush and they rave,
The youth is brought back by no kindly wave.

Rizal's attempt to translate the German liberation drama of *Wilhelm Tell* into the language of his countrymen, who could neither read nor write Spanish, was probably inspired by the words of the "Rütlischwur" (the oath of the Swiss confederates) in the poet's insistent language:[9]

Nein, eine Grenze hat Tyrannenmacht,
Wenn der Gedrückte nirgends Recht kann finden,
Wenn unerträglich wird die Last – greift er
Hinauf getrosten Mutes in den Himmel,
Und holt herunter seine ew'gen Rechte,
Die droben hangen unveräusserlich
Und unzerbrechlich wie die Sterne selbst –

9 English translation by Theodore Martin. https://www.gutenberg.org/files/6788/6788-h/6788-h.htm (31.10.2024)

Der alte Urstand der Natur kehrt wieder,
Wo Mensch dem Menschen gegenübersteht –
Zum letzten Mittel, wenn kein andres mehr
Verfangen will, ist ihm das Schwert gegeben –
Der Güter höchstes dürfen wir verteid'gen
Gegen Gewalt – Wir stehn vor unser Land,
Wir stehn vor unsre Weiber, unsre Kinder!

Yes! there's a limit to the despot's power!
When the oppressed looks round in vain for justice,
When his sore burden may no more be borne,
With fearless heart he makes appeal to Heaven,
And thence brings down his everlasting rights,
Which there abide, inalienably his,
And indestructible as are the stars.
Nature's primeval state returns again,
Where man stands hostile to his fellow-man;
And if all other means shall fail his need,
One last resource remains – his own good sword.
Our dearest treasures call to us for aid
Against the oppressor's violence; we stand
For country, home, for wives, for children here!

The lines I have emphasised are quoted by an outsider in Rizal's novel sequel *El Filibusterismo* with great pathos, but also with equally great resignation. In this book, which Rizal finished shortly after his 30th birthday, the revolutionary who rebels with brute force fails. Unlike the Swiss confederates in Schiller's drama, he wants to take revenge for selfish reasons, but not to defend the human right to have rights. The terrorist credo of the vengeful rebel invented by Rizal is therefore: 'Force takes precedence over law', and this makes the rebel common with those colonial powers who bent written law to their advantage, denied it to their subjects or callously disregarded it.

Colonialism's social cancer

My digression on Rizal's linguistic and translational work has led me to the centre of a controversy on the political motives behind his reform and translation efforts, which I would like to explore in more detail below. This controversy has to do with the well-known pros and cons that can stir the minds of politically committed spirits when it comes to the question of whether the struggle for freedom should immediately resort to direct violence against the oppressors or rather build up resistance against them through patient mole work. Rizal himself indicated what he had chosen: "Ahora el instrumento principal del corazón y de la cabeza es la pluma" (*Today the pen is the main instrument of the heart and the head*) he wrote in a letter to one of his comrades-in-arms.[10] In Rizal's case, the pen deserves its own consideration. Not only did he use a pen, or more precisely a steel nib (*pluma de acero*) and ink, as a writer, but also as a skilful draughtsman who had enough talent to translate the sketched object of perception into three-dimensional forms.

However, I am not talking about mole work in the sense of intimidating propaganda or agitation. Rizal's 'Maul-Würfe' – his texts thrown onto paper with the pen – are accusatory, sometimes polemical, mostly critical, often unmasking. The steel pen, he wrote in a poem, had long since renounced its romantic vigour and demanded irony and witty humour, even in poetry. Rizal's most important stylistic devices, often used with great acuity, are unmistakably satire, parody, irony and caricaturing exaggeration.

Here is a sample, an excerpt from a prayer of thanksgiving and supplication addressed to God, entitled "Llanto y risas" (*Tears and Laughter*):

> Blessed art Thou, God of freemen. […] I thank Thee for so many good things that Thou hast created, for the kindness Thou dost shower on me alone, favouring the existence of so many calamities to make me laugh; in

10 Epistolario Rizalino II. Manila: Documentos de la Biblioteca Nacional de Filipinas 1930, 21

the same way Thou hast created great and numberless celestial bodies so that the earth can see little lights when the sky is [no longer] cloudy, so that our military officers would have something to put on their sleeves after having killed our brothers! Permit me, Thou who canst forestall everything, Thou whose earthquakes, typhoons and locusts help the others to impoverish us, permit me to address to Thee my entreaty. Thou who hast said that to enter heaven one must be poor, Thou who hast promised to look after those who thirst for justice, keep for our welfare Sagasta [prime minister in 1885] and all the Conservatives, those who deny us the Penal Code, the friars of the four corporations [i.e. the monastic orders] and those who may join them in time, the Guardia Civil, the carabineers and the government employees! Do not forget, above all, to send us every fortnight the worst left-overs Spain has to offer, like the rascals, the dissolute, the hypocrites, the lazy, the ignorant and the hungry; turn everything into an office, put a tax on anything, place at every street corner a censorship office and twenty spies; forbid us to read, write and speak, make us blind, deaf and mute, and leave us only enough strength to clap our hands and to work.[11]

11 "¡Yo te doy gracias por tantas cosas buenas que has creado, por la bondad que me dispensas a mí solo, favoreciendo la existencia de tantas calamidades para hacerme reir, así como creaste grandes e innumerables astros, a fin de que la tierra vea lucecitas cuando el cielo ya no está nublado, a fin de que nuestros militares tengan algo que ponerse en sus mangas, después de matar a nuestros hermanos! Permite, Tú que todo lo previenes, Tú cuyos terremotos, baguios y langostas ayuda a los otros para empobrecernos, permite que Te dirija mi súplica. ¡Tú que dijiste que para entrar en el cielo hay que ser probre, Tú que prometiste Tu mirada a los que tienen sed de justicia, conserva, para nuestro bien, a Sagasta y a todos los conservadores, a los que nos niegan el Código Penal, a los frailes todos de las cuatro corporaciones y a los que con el tiempo puedan ir allá, a los guardias civiles, carabineros y empleados! No Te olvides sobre todo de enviarnos cada quincena todo lo peor que en España sobre, como calaveras, perdidos, hipócritas, holgazanes, ignorantes, hambrientos; haz de todo una oficina, levanta a cualquier cosa un impuesto, pon en cada esquina una censura y veinte espías; prohíbenos leer, escribir, hablar, vuélvenos ciegos, sordos y mudos, y sólo tengamos fuerzas para aplaudir y trabajar." Escritos políticos e historicos por

Oh yes, this is a sharp reckoning with hypocrisy, an unmasking in the form of a parody of sanctimonious prayers of thanksgiving and supplication. The bitterness that speaks from this text has to do not only with the failure of the reforms demanded by the Filipino elites and by the liberals in the Spanish government, but also with the terror that Rizal, as the accuser of arbitrary and lawless colonial rule, and his family, taken into clan custody by the executive power, had to suffer.

Anyway, the quoted excerpt, which is heavily abridged here, may also demonstrate Rizal's virtuosity in handling those literary forms whose exemplary patterns can look back on a very long tradition of criticism of power and religion. Among the classics of satirical criticism of power that were banned but were nevertheless quoted or mentioned by Rizal are

- Menippos of Gadara (3rd century BC),
- Lukian of Samosata (120–180): *Dialogues of the Gods, of the Dead and of Courtesans,*[12]
- Voltaire (1694–1778): *Candide*; *Dictionnaire philosophique* and more,
- Karl Julius Weber (1767–1832),
- Heinrich Heine (1797–1856): *Die Götter im Exil* and more,
- Ernest Renan (1823–1892): *Histoire des origines du christianisme.* Vol. 1: *Vie de Jésus.* [9]1863.

He wrote to Blumentritt, to whom Rizal owed the most important reading recommendations, from London:

> For a long time I had not read a book like [Karl Julius] Weber's, which I owe to you; for a long time in England I had longed for a new philosopher who could write about religion without prejudice, for the thinkers I had

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José Rizal. Manila: Comisión Nacional del Centenario de José Rizal 1961, 174 ff. Translation based on "Tears and Laughter". J. Rizal: Political and Historical Writings VII. Manila 1964, 173 f.

12 We only know about Menippus second-hand, e.g. from Lucian, whose texts were banned by the Catholic Church.

> read were militants, like Voltaire, Cantú, Renan, etc. I think I have found the right man in Karl Julius Weber.[13]

I think it is clear what Rizal means when he speaks of Voltaire, Cesare Cantù (the Italian universal historian) and Ernest Renan as "militants". For they were united by the struggle against the clergy, if not against religion in the sense of an institutionalised power that determined what a Christian could read and how he should live. The fact that Karl Julius Weber wrote about religion "without prejudice" may be true in so far as this freemason from the Hohenlohe region of Württemberg, in his study of the history of monastic life, wanted to concede certain cultural and historical merits to the monks. On the other hand, I have the suspicion that Rizal's sympathy for Weber was due to his undisguised willingness to criticise. For example, statements like the following:

> All superstition, hypocrisy, image worship and fanaticism originated in the monasteries. The unholy belief that all sins could be bought with pious donations, which the self-interest of the monks developed more and more every day, was the tomb of all morality.[14]

If I look at the monk characters in Rizal's novels set on the Philippine island of Luzon – and there are certainly quite a few of them – I find much in common with Weber's crude characterisation. These characters are backward but business-minded, they lease the land they have stolen before, demand alms and tribute at every calendar date of the

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13 Letter to Blumentritt from 18 August 1888. In: Cartas entre Rizal y el Profesor Fernando Blumentritt, 2 Bde. Manila: Comisión Nacional del Centenario de José Rizal, 1961 [Facsimile without page reference]

14 "Aus Klöstern kam aller Aberglaube, Werkheiligkeit, Bilderdienst und Fanatismus. Der heillose Glaube allein, dass man mit frommen Stiftungen alle möglichen Sünden loskaufen könne, den der Eigennutz der Mönche täglich mehr ausbildete, war das Grab aller Moralität." Karl Julius Weber: Die Möncherey oder geschichtliche Darstellung der Klosterwelt,1. Bd. Stuttgart 1819, 308

church year, barter away the absolution rituals devised by their superiors, beat their gullible 'flocks' into the Mass, are feared rapists because of their sexual greed, are fanatical followers of – as Rizal notes – "anti-human" penal teaching, and do not shrink from torture. Anyone who protests is hunted down by the Guardia Civil, will be abused and deported, or entangled in a web of intrigue, with the help of which they are finally brought to justice.

Rizal's novels are anything but subtle in their depiction of colonialist repression and blatant perversions. The story of the farmer Tales, whose wife and daughter are torn from his side by malaria while he is clearing a damp stretch of land, is gruesome; but no sooner do his fields bear fruit than monks lay claim to his land; he loses his case before a corrupt judge, whereupon he takes the law into his own hands against the new tenants, turns into a criminal outlaw and gang leader, is shot unrecognised by his own son, who has been conscripted into the Guardia Civil, after losing his daughter, who throws herself out of a window while fleeing from a rutting Spanish priest. The dramatic stages of this tale of woe run like a fateful leitmotif through the novel's sequel, *El Filibusterismo.* Every now and then, reading the book, one is reminded of the horror stories that the French author Eugène Sue – one of Rizal's favourite writers – tells in his novels about the Jesuits' reign of terror.

Unlike Sue's books, however, Rizal's stories do not contain pure fiction or second-hand quotations. In correspondence with his friends, he himself always emphasised the factual content of his novel-dyptichon. What Eugène Sue had read, fantasised and paraphrased was part of Rizal's personal experience: the cronyism between crown and clergy, or more precisely, between exploitation and paternalism; the harassment of a surveillance system that was still theocratically infiltrated, and the tenacious late feudalistic way of thinking among the elites of the mother country; not forgetting their merciless racism that degraded the nature of the colonised. What Weber called the "tomb of all morality", Rizal regarded in relation to his home island as an infectious form of moral corruption that damages the lives of all – the oppressors as well as the oppressed. In the dedication of his novel *Noli me tangere,* he addresses his fatherland with the following words:

> The history of human suffering records a cancer so malignant that the slightest touch causes irritation and provokes the most searing pain. As often as I conjured up your beloved image in the midst of modern civilisations, whether to rejoice in memories or to compare you with other countries, I saw your face marked by a similar cancer, by a "social cancer".[15]

"Noli me tangere/Don't touch me" means – as we know from our own experience since the Covid pandemic – "stay away from the infected person if you don't want to be infected". In Rizal's time, skin cancer was considered a contagious disease. However, the saying "Noli me tangere!" is known to have come down from the Vulgate, the Latin translation of the New Testament (John 20:17). These words are spoken by Jesus immediately after his resurrection to the woman (Magdalene), who is the first to see him and wants to touch him to assure herself of his physical appearance. The saying can therefore also be understood as a response to a test of truth. "Don't touch me," the novel urges the reader, "or you will see yourself as in a mirror and your eyes will be opened!"

The unmasking effect implied by this can be illustrated by a scene from *El Filibusterismo* (Chapter 18): A magician is performing at the annual fair, and the monks are invited as spectators, including one of the rapists, a Franciscan (Salví). An ancient Egyptian mummy mask emerges from the eerie darkness of the stage into the gloomy light and, with a hollow voice, tells a tale of seduction, rape and murder that takes place at Pharaoh's court, but actually concerns the Franciscan present. The monk feels caught out and falls unconscious as soon as he makes eye contact with the Egyptian mask. The narrator comments on the events with the words of David's Psalm 41(8): "Abyssus abyssum invocat/The abyss calls the abyss". If this formula is taken literally, it becomes clear what Rizal wanted to achieve with his novels: to inspire

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15 "Regístrase en la historia de los padecimientos humanos un cáncer 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 acompañarme de tus recuerdos, ya para compararte con otros países, tantas veces se me presentó tu querida imagen con un cáncer social parecido." J. Rizal: Noli me tángere. Berlin 1887, 440

readers to look in the mirror, that is, to make them reflect upon the injustice of colonialist oppression and their own reticence.

The secret of illegible writing

Rizal's novels belong in a special way to political literature. The biblical quotations alone, which are remarkably often placed in unusual contexts, signal proximity and distance to a cultural heritage that is in a state of decay, an absolutely undogmatic approach. The novels castigate the administrative colonial regime built on injustice and the abuse of religion that flourishes under its protection, thus criticising power and religion at the same time. But they do not show a way out, they do not outline a political agenda. Rizal leaves that to his pragmatic, reformist writings. The fictional space of the novel, on the other hand, serves him as a field of experimentation in which contradictions, trickery and deceit play a leading role, the whole misery of authoritarian, distorted, mendacious and grotesquely meaningless communication. The reader, I can assure you, will have to arm himself with patience if he wishes to follow Rizal's schedule.

But when it comes to the search for truth, the outsiders in the novels have the floor: the village philosopher (Tasio), who has the reputation of a fool, the innocently persecuted dissident (Elias), who lays down his life for the fugitive Ibarra, and the priestly hermit (Florentino), who explains to the dying terrorist (Simoun) that not brute force, but the fight for justice is the only viable way to set limits to the injustice of the oppressive regime and to protect oneself from the contagion of social cancer.

The village philosopher, one of the narrator's most interesting inventions, is mocked by the villagers as a fool, not least because of his book learning. This leads to a book-burning organised by the pious after his death. A fate that also befalls the very book in which this story is set. For the Spanish monks of the orders ruling the Philippines could not fail to recognise themselves in the satirically inflated characters of the Noli novel, and they immediately reacted in the old manner with a ban and auto-da-fé.

What drove the "frailocracia" – as Rizal called the monk's rule –

into a rage? Let's look over the shoulder of the village philosopher: we see him sitting among his books in his room, dipping his pen into the inkwell and gliding it over the paper. But his handwriting is very peculiar, we can't decipher it because it resembles ancient Egyptian hieroglyphics. Asked what it meant, the philosopher replies:

> I don't write for this generation, I write for other times. If my contemporaries could read me, they would burn my books, my life's work. But the generation that deciphers these signs will be educated and understand me. They will say: 'Not everyone slept in that night of our ancestors.'[16]

When he's not writing for posterity, the village philosopher is an Enlightener of the first order. On the night before All Souls' Day, he tells a young couple about the origins of this festival commemorating the dead, which is celebrated in the cemetery as the *Dia de los Muertos* in Mexico, and about the true background to the myth of purgatory. It is a long narrative from the annals of council and church history, peppered with historical names and dates. And it is a fraudulent story, designed to talk the faithful into paying for many masses, with the help of which – the clergy claim – they could shorten the sweaty stay in purgatory for the souls of their deceased. But ultimately this amounts to a gamble, explains the philosopher. Because according to the Gospel of Mark (16:16) 'He who believes and is baptised will be saved; but he who does not believe will be damned', so that only a few Catholics would be saved, while for every single blessed person there would be hundreds, if not thousands, who would fall victim to damnation. The village philosopher considers this to be 'blasphemy' and replies to his listeners when they argue with providence:

> The Creation, i.e. Man, is a contingent and not a necessary being, and God should not have created him, no, if, in order to make *one* happy, he should

16 "Porque no escribo para esta generación, escribo para otras edades. Si esta me pudiera leer, quemaría mis libros, el trabajo de toda mi vida; en cambio, la generación que descifre estos caracteres será una generación instruida, me comprenderá y dirá: *¡No todos dormían en la noche de nuestros abuelos!*" Noli me tángere 1887, 135.

> condemn hundreds to eternal misery, and all of them for inherited faults. No! If that were true, drown your son who is sleeping there.[17]

No wonder the monks wanted to get rid of such statements, even if they appeared in the guise of fiction. It made no difference to them whether the words came from the mouth of a character in a novel or from the inventor of that character. One monk, an Augustinian, attacked Rizal in a series of short polemical writings, ignoring the categorical difference between the voice of a fictional character, the voice of the narrator and the voice of the author. To him, it was clear that whoever criticised the clergy and monasteries in the world of the novel was a mouthpiece of the author.

However, Rizal responded to this attack with a satirical story in which the village philosopher complains to the patron of the Augustinian order, the church father Augustine himself, about not being taken seriously:

> There is (*explains the philosopher in Rizal's fiction*) an unfortunate person from your Order on earth who has already spouted all kinds of nonsense, including the following: An Indio named Rizal is supposed to be responsible for what I said during my earthly existence. And only because this Rizal wrote down my words in a book he had written. If you were to agree with this argument – as you will realise for yourself – then Rizal would also have to share the ideas expressed by the monks, the gendarmes, the governors etc. in his book and be responsible for their contents. That would be like taking everything that you, Sanctissime Doctor, have put into the mouths of heretics, pagans and, not least, Manichaeans, for your own convictions.[18]

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17 "La creación, el hombre es un ser contingente y no necesario, y ese Dios no debía haberle criado, no, si para hacer feliz a uno debía condenar a centenares a una eterna desgracia, y todo por culpas heredadas o de un momento. ¡No!. Si eso fuera cierto, ahogue Ud. a su hijo que allí duerme." Noli me tangere 1887, 68 f.

18 "Hay allá en la tierra un infeliz de vuestra orden que ha cometido entre muchas tonterías, las siguientes: […] Que quiere hacer solidario a un indio llamado Rizal, de lo que yo en vida terrenal he dicho, solo porque este

All I can say is: Well spoken! Although not everyone might see it that way. For the complaint of the village philosopher – doesn't it sound as if he wants to compare the theological writings of the Church Father with fiction? And wouldn't that be to deny theology the nobility of metaphysics? I am not asking these questions out of the blue: as a reading citizen of Civitas Terrena, I have discussed them in dialogue with Rizal. Rizal himself, in fact, commented on them extensively in his correspondence with a Jesuit who tried to persuade him to publicly repent and retract his and his novel characters' criticism of what the Jesuit saw as the unjustly generalised abuse of catholic religion.

At the time of this correspondence, Rizal was in exile on Mindanao, near the sleepy town of Dapitan, of which he wrote, sarcastically, that it could certainly rival the greatest cities in the world in importance.

A plea for doubt

On the one hand, Rizal did well during his four years in exile: he was allowed to explore the surrounding area, taught the village children in a school pavilion built under his supervision, set up a dispensary, improved the farmers' irrigation system, played the lottery and won, bought land and became a prosperous farmer himself. On the other hand, there was strict surveillance by official police informers, and he, the inquisitive traveller, suffered from the stationary existence forced upon him in a narrow-minded world and from the lack of stimulating sociability. "My wings broken", he writes in a poem, "my dwelling place

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Rizal lo hizo constar en un libro que escribió. Como veis, si se sigue este razonamiento, Rizal seria también solidario y participaría de las ideas vertidas por los frailes, guardias civiles, gobernadorcillos, etc.; y vos, santo Doctor, lo seríais también de las palabras que ponéis en boca de los herejes, paganos y sobre todo de los maniqueos." J. Rizal: Obras literarias II: Prosa. Manila: Comisión Nacional del Centenario de José Rizal, 1961, 76 f. – The philosopher speaks to Augustine in this literary 'vision'. In order to make clear what the wider context, not quoted here, tells the reader, I have expanded my translation by a few phrases, D. H.

destroyed, / my faith sold to others and ruins everywhere" (*Vénse rotas mis alas, deshecha la morada, / la fe vendida a otros y ruinas por doquier*).[19]

In short, Rizal had time to reply to the Jesuit priest's arguments in detailed letters. Among the Jesuit's accusations was that Rizal was an ungrateful apostate who had betrayed the Catholic faith in Germany and converted to Protestantism. In a letter dated November 1892, Rizal replied to the challenger with an anecdote that is quite thrilling:

> Rizal a Protestant! A laugh resounds within my breast that I only hold back out of respect for Your Reverence. Your Reverence should have heard my discussions with a Protestant priest, in the long summer twilights, there in the solitudes of the Odenwald forest. There, in calm and cool conversation, talking freely and openly, we spoke of our respective beliefs in the morality of the peoples and the influence on them of their respective creeds. A great respect for the good faith of the opponent and for the most opposite ideas that necessarily follow from the diversity of race, education and age almost always led us to the conclusion that religions, whatever they may be, should not make men enemies of one another but brothers and good brothers. From these conversations, that were repeated almost every day for more than three months, I do not believe I have taken anything, if my judgment does not deceive me, other than a profound respect for every idea sincerely conceived and practised with conviction. Almost every month a Catholic priest from a small village on the banks of the Rhine came to visit the pastor, and this priest, a close friend of the Protestant, gave me an example of this Christian brotherhood. They considered themselves to be two servants of the same God, and instead of spending their time quarrelling with each other, each did his duty, leaving it to his Lord to judge later who had best interpreted his will.[20]

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19 Alfredo S. Veloso: The Complete Poems of José Rizal in Spanish and English. Manila 1961, 136

20 "¡Rizal protestante! Retoza dentro del pecho una carcajada que sólo el respeto por cuanto dice V.R. puede con tener. Hubiese V.R. oído mis discusiones con un cura protes tante, en los largos crepúsculos de verano, allá en las soledades de Odenwald. Allá, en conversación pausada y fría, teniendo la palabra libre, hablábamos de nuestras respectivas creencias de la morali-

I think it is worth recalling the 11th article of the *Déclaration des Droits de l'Homme et du Citoyen,* which declares the free exchange of ideas and opinions to be one of the most noble human rights. Rizal uses the Wilhelmsfeld story to claim this right against those powers that preached intolerance in Spain (until the Franco era), but above all in the colonies, and persecuted those of other faiths as heretics. In his words, Rizal teaches the Jesuit challenger a lesson, the core of which is the demand to recognise an ethos of brotherhood (fraternity) anchored beyond all theological quibbles and fundamentalist doctrines. This by no means excludes the recognition of a 'Supreme Creative Being', as the further course of the epistolary dispute shows. However, Rizal becomes clear: it was not doctrines of faith but reasons of rationality (*raciocinio*) that led him to recognise a supreme, yet at the same time incomprehensible being.

> What [he asks in the correspondence] does mankind want with more Bibles and Gospels? Do you not think that men have done very badly in seeking the divine will in scrolls and temples, instead of in the works of nature and in the sublime vault of heaven (*las obras de la Naturaleza y bajo la augusta boveda de los cielos*)? [Why] interpret dark passages or obscure phrases, which only provokes hatred, war and discord? Wouldn't it be

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dad de los pueblos y la influencia en ellos de sus respectivos credos. Un gran respeto á la buena fé del adversario y á las ideas más opuestas que la diversidad de raza, educación y edad tenían necesariamente que hacer surgir, nos conducía casi siempre á la conclusión de que las religiones, cualesquiera que fuesen, no deben hacer de los hombres enemigos unos de otros sino hermanos y bien hermanos. De estas conferencias que se repetían casi todos los días por espacio de más de tres meses, no creo haber sacado otra cosa, si mí criterio no me engaña, que un profundo respeto á toda idea sinceramente concebida y con convicción practicada. Casi todos los meses venía allí á visitarle un cura católico de un pueblecíto de las orillas del Rhin, y este cura, íntimo amigo del protestante, me daba ejemplo de esta fraternidad cristiana. Se consideraban como dos servidores de un mismo Dios, y en vez de pasar el tiempo riñendo entre si cumplía cada uno con su deber, dejando á su señor el juzgar después sobre quién mejor ha interpretado su voluntad." Epistolario Rizalino IV. Biblioteca Nacional de Filipinas. Manila 1936, 64 f. (11 November 1892)

> better to study the gifts of nature in order to better organise our lives according to its eternal laws, to use its powers for our perfection (*perfeccionamiento*)? When did people actually start to fraternise?[21]

Rizal's questions are clear. His opponent, however, did not want to deal with them, but insisted on his dogmas. This became too much for Rizal and he broke off the correspondence with the words: "Dejemos á Dios lo que es de Dios y á los hombres lo que es de los hombres."[22] (*Let us leave to God what belongs to God and to men what belongs to men.*). In other contexts, he spoke of "*religiosidad*" (religiosity) in the sense of a pragmatic ethic, the normative content of which does not need to be enforced by a system of rewards and punishments. In his eyes, the offensive rejection of a religion that had perfected this system to the advantage of its representatives was necessary in order to get to the root of the fundamental evil of moral corruption, which he called 'social cancer'. He summed up the extent of his contempt for the priestly deception that his novels denounce with a statement that has the potential to live on as a maxim: "Your mission is to baptise the pagans, but mine is to dignify the people."[23]

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21 "¿Que mas Biblia y que mas evangelios quiere la humanidad? ¡Ah! ¿No cree V.R. que los hombres han hecho muy mal en buscar la voluntad divina en pergaminos y templos en vez de buscarla en las obras de la Naturaleza y bajo la augusta bóveda de los cielos? En vez de interpretar pasajes oscuros, o frases oscuras que provocaban odios, guerras y disensiones. ¿No era mejor interpretar los hechos de la naturaleza para amoldar mejor nuestra vida a sus inviolables leyes, utilizar sus fuerzas para nuestro perfeccionamiento? ¿Cuando han empezado a hermanarse de hecho los hombres sino cuando han dado con la primera pagina de la obra de Dios?" Epistolario Rizalino IV, 119

22 Raul J. Bonoan: The Rizal-Patells Correspondence. The Hitherto Unpublished Letters of José Rizal and Portions of Fr. Pablo Pastells's Fourth Letter and Translation of the Correspondence together with a Historical Background and Theological Critique. Manila 1994, 115

23 "Ihre [der Missionare] Mission ist, die Heiden zu taufen, meine aber ist, die Menschen zu würdigen." Letter to Blumentritt dated 2 February 1890. The English translation in *The Rizal–Blumentritt Correspondence* II (Mani-

The enlightener's message

My intention was not only to portray Rizal as a partisan of independent thought, but also to emphasise his position as a late Enlightenment thinker in the struggle against the exploitative and at the same time backward-looking powers of European colonialism. Of course, it is not a question of categorising him as belonging to the epoch around 1800 known as the 'Late Enlightenment'. Rather, I wanted at least to hint at the intellectual charm of independent thinking that characterises Rizal's writings and letters. As a critic of colonialism, he unmasked the abuse of religion in the service of colonialist exploitation and oppression with satirical acuity. As an enlightened sceptic, he defended a way of free religiosity that knew neither cultic constraints nor theological dogmas nor the pharmaceuticals of paradisiacal rewards or terrifying punishments in hell. And as a theologically trained rationalist, he understood 'God' as a cipher of transcendence, the meaning of which man cannot comprehend, but at best can only guess at.

Rizal's view can be compared to what the German Enlightenment philosopher Lessing called "natural religion". This refers to a religious ethos that requires neither 'scrolls and temples' (Rizal) nor eschatological 'punishments and rewards' (Lessing), which the clergy use as a means of discipline to keep the lives of the faithful under control. The centre of strength of this ethos lies – according to Lessing's *Erziehung des Menschengeschlechts* (The Education of the Human Race) published in 1780 – in the hope of a

> time of fulfilment, since the more convinced a person's mind feels of an ever better future, the more he will not need to borrow motives for his actions from this future, since he will do good because it is good.[24]

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la 1992, p. 328) "Your mission […], but mine is to make men worthy" is misleading, for the German verb "würdigen" refers to the *recognition* of others, not to their improvement.

24 Gotthold Ephraim Lessing: Werke, Bd. 10, 1778–1781. Ed. A. Schilson and A. Schmitt. Frankfurt a.M. 2001, 96

Doing good for good's sake is a maxim that applies to everyone, regardless of origin, faith or social status. The maxim does not exclude the idea of a Divine or Supreme Being. What it does exclude is submission to the authority of a dogma or a church. Seen in this light, the demand to do good for its own sake stands for a universal imperative or, in other words, for a valid cosmopolitan ethos. Rizal's criticism of the absolute claim to truth backed by Scripture and the clergy as her exclusive interpreters, as expressed in his correspondence with his Jesuit adversary, is based on this ethos. I think that this attitude is not least evident in his struggle for the recognition of Human Dignity and Human Rights.

Yet, the comparison with Lessing's "natürliche Religion" cannot console us for what happened to Rizal posthumously. When, in 1902 – six years after his death – a church was founded in the Philippines, the *Iglesia Independiente,* that turned its back on run-down Catholicism, Rizal was one of the first martyrs to be canonised in this new 'temple'. By then, with the active support of the new US colonial regime, the state-sponsored personality cult had begun to emerge, which continues to feed a growing idol industry based on the brand name of the national 'saint'. Every Philippine government, no matter how corrupt, has taken full advantage of this offer. In 1956, over the objections of the established Catholic Church and religious leaders, the government finally passed a Lex Rizal, making the author's novels – in whatever translation and edition – compulsory reading in all schools and universities. Absurdly, the law also dictated the patriotic and moral aspects through which the work was to be read and interpreted.

Rizal, when he was still walking the earth, wrote repeatedly and prominently about how close laughter and tears lie. And what about my allusion at the end of the last paragraph? Is it not a case of tragic irony, compared to the independence of thought for which Rizal fought with his steely pen? Should I cry or laugh, or do both at the same time? Rizal himself gives an answer to this question, based on his own experience, which sounds rather subjective. But it is an answer that says much more than a supposedly objective testimony from the outside, even if it speaks to us from the past. In the autobiographical text entitled *Llanto y risas,* from which I have already quoted, we read:

My homeland's breezes preserve my sighs, in her fountains are my teardrops, on the leaves of her canes, palms and trees I have written my complaints and remembrances. She offers me a sweet death and, nevertheless, far from all that I love, in a foreign land, among indifferent and unknown people, I do not weep for her; I am frightened by her outstretched arms. My eyes are dry and I laugh. I laugh when I think of her miseries, when I hear the complaints of my brothers, when I see the dark mist that covers their horizon. I laugh when I see my people, brutalised and deceived with grand theories and dazzling words, when I hear how some demand freedom and reason while others set obstacles and routine, some want human rights, brotherhood and rule of law, and others exceptions from them![25]

25 "La brisa de mi patria guarda mis suspiros, en sus fuentes hay gotas de mis lágrimas, en las hojas de sus cañas, palmeras y árboles he escrito mis quejas y recuerdos, ella me ofrece una dulce muerte, y sin embargo, lejos de todo lo que amo, en extranjero suelo, entre gente indiferente y desconocida, no lloro por ella, me espantan sus tendidos brazos. Mis ojos esan secos y yo me río. Me río cuando pienso en sus miserias, cuando escucho las quejas de mis hermanos, cuando veo la oscura niebla que cubre su horizonte. Me río cuando le veo a mi pueblo embrutecido y engañado con grandes teorías y deslubrantes palabras, cuando oigo pedir libertad y razón para unos, trabas y rutina para él, leyes humanas, fraternidad, derechos para aquellos, ¡para él excepciones!" Escritos políticos 1961, 174. Translation based on "Tears and Laughter". J. Rizal: Political and Historical Writings VII. Manila 1964, 172 f.

Rizal's Europe

Prelude

In December 1888, a group of young Filipinos in Barcelona founded an association they called "La Solidaridad". One of the founders, the Philippine journalist Graciano López Jaena (1856–1896), launched within a few weeks a journal that would allow the members of the association to voice criticism and reform proposals in the public debate on Spanish colonial policy. They called the journal *La Solidaridad. Quincenario democrático.*

The first issue of *La Solidaridad* was published in Barcelona on 15 February 1889. The editorial, entitled 'Nuestro Propósitos' (*Our Purpose*), after a friendly greeting to the Spanish public, read in part:

> Our programme, as simple as it is, very simple, is to combat all reaction, to prevent all retrogression, to applaud and accept all liberal ideas, to defend all progress; in a word, to be another propagandist (*propagandista*) of all the ideas of democracy, striving to make them prevail among all peoples, from across and beyond the seas. […] We will also discuss all questions that concern the general interests of the nation, seeking solutions in a highly national and democratic sense.[1]

1 "Nuestro programa, por de más sencillo, sencillisimo, es: combatir toda reacción, impedir todo retroceso, aplaudir, aceptar toda idea liberal, de fen-

Rizal's Europe.
In: Dietrich Harth: Hero of the Nation and Citizen of the World.
Tracing José Rizal. Essays and Miscellanea. Heidelberg 2025, pp. 53–80.
https://doi.org/10.11588/heibooks.1635

With these words, the editors of *La Solidaridad,* who had signed the editorial anonymously with 'La Redacción', declared their commitment to the interests of the Spanish nation, not without making it clear that these should be identical to the interests of the Filipinos:

> The lack of recognition of our archipelago does not contribute to the integrity of Spain in the Philippines. This country is open to the voice of the century. There are legitimate aspirations for a better life there and we do not consider it political to suppress such aspirations with our notorious "we will see".[2]

Loyalty to the Spanish nation, the so-called 'motherland', is not hostile to the solidarity of the Filipino community of *propagandistas* fighting for reforms, but includes it. The way in which this should be done is made clear in the column immediately following the editorial, entitled "Movimiento politico", which is devoted to a comparison between European and American politics (*Politica Europea y Americana*).

Europe – the column begins – is on a 'thorny path'; the Pax Octaviana,[3] which the continent's nations are currently enjoying, would

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der todo progreso; en una palabra: un propagandista más de todos los idea les de la democracia, aspirando que im pere en todos los pueblos de aquende y allende los mares. […] Tambien discutiremos todas las cuestiones que se refieran á interesses generales de la nación, buscando soluciones en sentido altamente nacional y democrático." La Solidaridad. Quincenario democrático, Núm. 1, Barcelona 15 Febrero 1889, 1. In: La Solidaridad. Translated by Guadelupe Forés-Ganzon. Vol. I, 1889. Quezon City: University of the Philippines 1967, 2

2 "A la integridad española en Filipinas no favorece el desconociemiento de nuestro archipiélago; aquel país tiene puestos los oidos á la voz del siglo; allí palpitan aspiraciones legitimas á una vida mejor, y no conceptuamos nada político el sistema de ahogar tales aspiraciones con nuestro clásico 'ya lo veremos'." ibid.

3 "Paz octaviana", obviously refers to a period of peace, similar to that which existed in Rome during the time of Emperor Octavian Augustus (63 BC–14 AD). The English translation by G. Forés-Ganzon mistakenly reads "the peace of the 80's". Unfortunately, there are many errors and misinterpretations in Forés-Ganzon's translations. I, therefore, translate myself.

soon fall apart, because there, the particularism and individualism of politicians struggling for power threatens the stability of important states. In France, the bickering between republicans and monarchists was weakening the institutions. Germany was nothing without Bismarck (*Sin Bismarck Alemania no es nada.*), but his position in the power field was seriously jeopardised by the rash and impulsive actions of Wilhelm II. The members of the Spanish government, on the other hand, were following their egotistical drives for power and pursuing a 'politics of fear' (*La política, pues del miedo es la política del actual gobierno.*). While Austria is in danger of getting into domestic and foreign policy turmoil due to the tragic death [suicide] of the crown prince Rudolf (*con su muerte Austria está amenazada de grandes desasosiegos en lo interior y esterior*). The only exception is Italy where 'the national interests are not tied to one man, but follow the opinion that beats in the heart of their peoples' (*los intereses nacionales no van vinculados en un solo hombre sigue la opinión que palpita en el seno de sus pueblos*).

The column concludes as follows:

> Peace or war, order or disturbances in European nations hang by a most contemptible thread, i.e. on the life, or on the preponderance of an individual: whether the death of an Archduke like that of the heir of Austria [Rudolf], or the colonial adventures of a German emperor, or the decrepitude of an iron chancellor, or the ambitions of a [Georges] Boulanger in republican France. In the American nations, however, nothing of the kind happens; nor is the high treason of any personage feared, nor the American equilibrium disturbed by intestine agitations, nor the order of things overturned by a trifle. And why? Because their institutions are impersonal, democratic, always removable, never bound in the bandwagon of personalities. Everything in them, in those nations varies, except their regime and their fundamental code.[4]

4 "Resumiendo: la paz ó la guerra, el órden ó las perturbaciones en naciones europeas penden de un hilo muy deleznable; de la vida, ó de la preponderancia de un individuo, llámense estas cosas: ora muerte de un Archiduque como la del heredero de Austria, ora aventuras coloniales de un emperador aleman, ora decrepitud de un canciller de hierro, ora ambicio-

Land of freedom?

Rizal not only put his name to the dedicatory inscriptions of his novels published in Berlin and Ghent and to the Morga commentary printed in Paris, but also added "Europe" instead of a local designation. He could also have named the European cities in which he completed his books: *Noli me tángere* in Wilhelmsfeld and Berlin, *El Filibusterismo* in Biarritz, in Brussels or Ghent as well as the 'Morga' in London. The scripts of the novels have constantly accompanied the author on his extensive journeys across the European continent as a portable work in progress.

While Bismarck regarded 'Europe' merely as a geographical designation, the Asian, whom his enemies denounced as the iron chancellor's agent, saw the continent with completely different eyes. Although he occasionally claimed that he was "not yet *europeanised*", the question of whether he thought and felt 'Asian' never occurred to him. When the language teacher who helped him improve his French in Brussels insinuated that he thought differently to Europeans, namely like a Buddhist, he simply laughed at him and wrote to Blumentritt that he would soon "be able to write good French like a miniature Tseng-Ki-tong".[5] With this ironic remark he alluded to the Chinese diplomat and writer Chen Jitong, whose books, published in the 1880s and 90s, enjoyed great success in France. Rizal particularly appreciated Chen Jitong's witty self-portrait of the Chinese, published in Paris in 1884 under the title *Les Chinois peints par eux-mêmes,* and

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nes de un Boulanger en la republicana Francia; mientras en las naciones americanas nada de esto sucede; ni se teme la alta traición de un cualquier personaje, ni turba el equilibrio americano sus agitaciones intestinas, ni se trastorna el órden de cosas por una nonada: ¿Y Porque? Porque sus instituciones son impersonales, democráticas, siempre amovibles, nunca vinculadas en el carro de las personalidades. Todo en ellas, en aquellas naciones varía, menos su regimen y su codigo fundamental." La Solidaridad. Núm. 1, 15 Febrero 1889, 3

5 Cartas entre Rizal y el Profesor Fernando Blumentritt [3 vol. in one part]. Edición del Centenario. Manila 1961, 670. Letter from 28 June 1890.

flirted – as he told Blumentritt – with the idea of joining the ranks of francophone writers.

In Rizal's writings, 'Europe' shines like a code with contradictory connotations, in which the word "freedom" often outshines all others, even the darker meanings. Seen in this light, the aforementioned close placement next to the author's name at the end of the dedications can be read as a meaningful configuration that encompasses a proud awareness of personal freedom. Last but not least, it lends weight to the assumption that Rizal's novels could only have been written in their present form in Europe. Whenever he rhapsodises about "free Europe", this is primarily to be understood as a self-statement. On 7 August 1887, on his way home shortly before the passenger ship enters the Suez Canal, Rizal looks back at the dwindling coast of Europe and writes to Blumentritt: "the beautiful land of my freedom was moving away from me as if shrouded in mist."[6] He realises once again the freedom he enjoyed in European countries, as he is on his way to a country, indeed to his native country, where Europeans suppress freedom.

Incidentally, things were not so 'free' in Europe at the time either: authoritarian powers had the upper hand in many countries after the failed liberal and democratic independence movements of the post-revolutionary era. Increasingly aggressive nationalisms and widespread militarisation contributed to modelling the type of social subject that corresponded perfectly to the demands of the authoritarian state that triumphed towards the end of the century.

Rizal's extensive European travels took him from Spain to Germany and repeatedly to the metropolises of France and England, but also to Austria, Italy and Switzerland. Surprisingly, his extensive correspondence – apart from a rather trivial episode in his dealings with the Berlin police – contains no complaints about any difficulties with the guards of the national borders across which his travels took him. Of course, he had the diplomatic advantage of speaking the local language well enough to make an impression on the border guards. Such comfortable independence, which he enjoyed as a travelling

6 "[…] das schöne Land meiner Freiheit entfernte sich von mir wie in einen Nebel gehüllt." Cartas entre Rizal y el Profesor Fernando Blumentritt, 204 f.

enthusiast and attentive observer on his travels through the various countries, cities and institutions of Europe, he could not expect – as he complains in another letter to Blumentritt dated 10 June 1887 – in his Philippine homeland: "The nearer the moment of my departure, the more beautiful Europe seems to me; I tremble to think what kind of authorities, officials, laws, thoughts, behaviour etc. I will find in the Philippines."[7]

But what should cause him to tremble? Nothing other than the España Eterna, which ruled his homeland and defended tooth and nail a feudalistic past. For him – as he had to experience for himself – there was not only the one secular, perhaps even 'beautiful' Europe, but also the Europe of exploitation and racist violence in the very place where he was born and grew up. A few years before Rizal's sigh of relief, the 22-year-old wrote a letter to his parents from Madrid with personal and political messages. As if it were an ominous postscript to his earlier enthusiasm for the European capital of the 19th century, Paris, this text speaks, among other things, of a 'conflagration' endangering Europe, which was somehow linked to the shift of power from France to the 'nations of the North' while the Russian Tsarist regime faced a serious threat from nihilism, which could be seen as a "Damocles sword".[8] Before Rizal adds another news snippet relating to the cost of attending a banquet in honour of Christopher Columbus, he concludes laconically: "¡Esto es Europa la civilizada!" (*So this is the civilised Europe!*)

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7 "Je näher der Augenblick meiner Abreise ist, desto schöner kommt mir Europa vor; ich zittere schon, wenn ich nur denke was für Obrigkeiten, Beamten, Gesetze, Gedanken, Umgang usw. werde ich auf den Philippinen finden." Cartas entre Rizal y el Profesor Fernando Blumentritt, 178

8 Cartas entre Rizal y los miembros de la familia. Manila 1961, 143. Rizal writes "la espada del Nihilismo como el antiguo Damocles", thus transforming the original sword of Damocles into a sword of nihilism.

European turmoil

What are we talking about? Historiography has the answers. In the 1880s, Bismarck was keen to isolate republican France in Europe. To this end, he forged a tripartite alliance with Austria-Hungary and Italy, which Romania joined shortly afterwards. The alliance partners were not only interested in presenting a robust front to France, Russia and England, but also – something Rizal does not mention – in gaining an advantage in the global competition for colonial dominions. Spain, which had entered into a loving alliance with the Restoration under Antonio Cánovas' government, sent King Alfonso XII to Berlin in the summer of 1883 to pay his respects to Bismarck's anti-republican alliance policy. Rizal ignores this in the quoted letter, but this has little to say. After all, he had already expressed his attitude towards the arrogant colonial ruler in the spring of the same year. He advised his brother-in-law Manuel Timoteo Hidalgo, who asked him for information on the status of a reform concerning the Philippines, to give up hope, since Spain was about to bid farewell to the government of Castilian King Alfonso X.[9] Nota bene: Alfonso X, called the Wise, was in office from 1252 to 1282.

Rizal's ideal of the freedom embodied in Europe, which was denied to him as a colonial subject in the Philippines, corresponded to his desire to gain access to the noble 'republic of European spirits'. Yet he did not close his eyes to the political and social conflicts that were as much a part of Europe as the dream of a continental balance of power that would guarantee peace. But what is all this talk about the 'Damocles sword of nihilism'? The strange image fits, I think, with the rich history of terrorist and anarchist assassinations in the late 19th century, whose Russian events Rizal directly alludes to. In March 1881, Tsar Alexander II, who had been the target of repeated assassination attempts years earlier, was bombed to death. In September 1883, an assassination attempt on Kaiser Wilhelm I during the inauguration of the Niederwald monument failed due to the amateurism of the assassins. In 1897 – to add to the list – the Spanish politician

9 Cartas entre Rizal y los miembros de la familia, 97

Antonio Cánovas was the victim of an anarchist attack in the Basque town of Mondragón, allegedly an act of revenge in the name of the martyr Rizal. A year later, the Empress Elisabeth of Austria-Hungary was attacked with a knife on the lakeside promenade in Geneva.[10]

Nihilism stands for a negative attitude that demonises authority and does not shy away from annihilation by murder in its extremist form. In Rizal's *El Filibusterismo,* the vengeful Simoun alias Ibarra plays the nihilist role and, as is often the case with terrorism, exonerates himself after the failed assassination attempt. Rizal's enemies associated him with Proudhon; he was accused of anarchism and suspected of treason as a *filibustero.*[11] This was no mere stigmatisation, especially since the meaning of *filibustero* was roughly equivalent to the common denunciation of terrorists in today's political language.

Nihilism also experienced a real boom in the second half of the 19th century. Ivan Turgenev's generational novel *Fathers and Sons* (1862), translated into several European languages, became a bestseller and was one of Rizal's favourite reads. For one of Turgenev's admirers, the Russian anarchist Pyotr Alexeyevich Kropotkin, who was suspected of nihilism, the difference between word and deed, between literature and rebellion, was of little importance. This was not only characteristic of Kropotkin's individual, politically motivated vocation as a writer, it is also vaguely reminiscent of a confessional statement made by Rizal in a letter he sent to Mariano Ponce in June 1888, while he was working on 'Morga' in London:

> The most important tool of heart and mind today is the pen. Some prefer the paintbrush, others the chisel, I prefer the pen. The importance of this tool does not seem so central to us. But sometimes great work is done with a bad pen, which is then called a 'Filipino machete'. And sometimes

10 Curiously, the murdered empress, known as Sisi, had been a guest at Pastor Ullmer's house in Wilhelmsfeld in 1885, a year before Rizal moved in.

11 Letter dated 9 July 1888 to Blumentritt. Cartas entre Rizal y el Profesor Fernando Blumentritt, 312. It is highly probable that Rizal was familiar with one or the other of Proudhon's writings, as he was in contact with his translator, the Catalan politician and state theorist F. Pí y Margall.

> bad literature can tell great truths. I am not immortal or invulnerable, and my greatest joy would be if, on the day I die, a large group of writers take my place. If one is killed or executed, at least twenty or thirty should take his place to hunt down the perpetrators.[12]

What is the 'Filipino machete' (*bolo Filipino*), is it a literal or a figurative expression? To 'write' with a machete can mean: to attack the opponent with a naked weapon; or to 'beat' effective paths into the undergrowth of language in an aggressive manner. In either case, violence is involved, be it physical or symbolic, in the form of sharply aggressive, even destructive rhetoric. Whatever Rizal's text may suggest in detail, his confidence in the intervening and transformative power of literary speech was unshakeable. How else can we understand his entrusting the continuation of the struggle to a group of writers after his anticipated death?

A friend and comrade-in-arms of Rizal's who lived in Paris contributed a chapter to the historiography of the Russian nihilism that had called for the 'propaganda of the deed' – which may come as a surprise here: in 1922, Trinidad Pardo de Tavera published *Las Nihilistas,* a memoir of some young Russian anarchists whom he had met personally in France during Rizal's lifetime.[13]

"¡Esto es Europa la civilizada!" Rizal's exclamation comes across as a judgement that – it seems – exposes the much-vaunted European civilisation as something fragile, if not hypocritical. After all, since the

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12 Letter from 27 June 1888: "Ahora el instrumento principal del corazón y de la cabeza es la pluma; otros prefieren el pincel, otros el cincel; yo prefiero la pluma. Ahora, no nos parezca el instrumento como el objeto primordial; á veces con uno malo se hacen obras muy grandes, díga lo el bolo filipino. A veces con una mala literatura pueden decirse verdades grandes. – Yo no soy inmortal ni invulnerabile, y mi mayor alegría sería verme eclipsado por una *pléyade* de paisanos a la hora de mi muerte. Que si a uno le matan ó le ahorcan, que le sustituyan veinte o treinta al menos para que se escarmienten de ir ahorcando ó matando." Epistolario Rizalino II (1887–1890). Manila 1931, 21. – Following a French tradition, the word *pléyade* refers to an association or loose group of prominent writers with similar aims.

13 Benedict Anderson: Under Three Flags, Anarchism and the Anti-Colonial Imagination. London/New York 2007, 80 f.

revolution of 1868, Spain had enjoyed the dubious reputation of being a European hotbed of unrest threatened by anarchist forces.[14] Rizal was probably not unaware of this. The term anarchism is often mentioned in the same breath as violence and subversion. But in the post-revolutionary 19th century, social-revolutionary ideas found a home among those intellectuals critical of supremacy who, without preaching violence, sought to enrich anarchism with pragmatic plans of action in the search for alternative ways of life.[15] The fusion of anarchist assassination with terror is not compatible with this, and all the less so if it is attributed to that dark side of modernity on whose soil the remnants of the Ancien Regime were to be brought down by force.

In Rizal's writings, the code 'Europe' evokes predominantly positive connotations such as civilisation, political self-determination and scientific progress. This is not surprising, as both his intellectual education and the recognition he received as a budding scholar and author came primarily from Europe. However, this did not make him forget the violence with which the European states subjugated and plundered distant foreign countries and cultures during the game of power. "I am delighted to be leaving Europe!" he confessed in a letter from Geneva on 6 June 1887. This unambiguous farewell was, of course, based on a current event that offended his pride of origin. His rejection was directed at the *Exposición de Filipinas,* a state-funded ethnographic exhibition that was shown in Madrid's *Parque de El Retiro* from spring to autumn 1887. Compared to other European folk shows, the Spanish authorities tried to gain favour with the indigenous ethnic groups presented at the show with small gifts and rewards. But this paternalism must have been seen as humiliating and contemptuous by those who took note of the precarious conditions in the exhibition, which led to the death of three of the 42 Filipinos on display.[16]

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14 Murray Bookchin: The Spanish Anarchists. The Heroic Years 1868–1936. New York 1976

15 See the articles in Hans Diefenbacher (Ed.): Anarchismus. Zur Geschichte und Idee der herrschaftsfreien Gesellschaft. Darmstadt 1996.

16 See the chapter "Völkerschau oder Menschenzoo" in my biography *José Rizals Kampf um Leben und Tod.* Heidelberg 2025, 270–280.

There could never be any question of Rizal's unreserved admiration for Europe. When he was thinking about a future place of residence shortly before the publication of his second novel, he explicitly ruled out Europe. The continent now seemed to him – before the long overdue return journey to the East – to be a place of 'exile' (*destierro*) and he considered settling in Asia, in his native Philippines, in Hong Kong or Japan.[17] Yet, he was not interested in committing himself to a single 'homeland' like a staunch patriot tied to the soil. When he spoke of home, he was referring – as can be seen below – not only to the country of his birth, but also to the European sciences. His serious plan to leave the Philippines with his entire clan in order to make a new start in Borneo – i.e. in 'exile' – also confirms his lack of ties. 'Europe' therefore harboured two opposing experiences for him: the prospect of freedom and the violent colonialist power of the Europeans over the countries, minds and bodies they had captured. On 24 April 1887 – Rizal was preparing to return to the Philippines soon – he wrote to Blumentritt from Berlin:

> I nevertheless feel a gentle melancholy at having to leave the beautiful, free, learned and civilised Europe; but I will be of more use in my fatherland than here; here no one needs me; if I am then in constant contact with the good German scholars in my homeland, if I have some good newspapers of civilised Europe, I will not feel as if I were in exile from my scholarly homeland.[18]

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17 Cartas entre Rizal y sus colegas, vol. II. Manila 1961, 657: "Para evitar un aumento en las atenciones de la misma creo necesario mi retiro a fin de establecerme y ganarme mi subsistencia. Mi punto escogido es o Filipinas, Hongkong o el Japón, porque Europa me parece un destierro y por esto anuncio mi intención a la Propaganda para que pueda tomar su determinación." – See furthermore Zeus A. Salazar: The exile in Philippine history. In: Asian and Pacific Migration Journal 8/1-2 (1999), 19–64

18 Cartas entre Rizal y el Profesor Fernando Blumentritt, 133: "Eine sanfte Melancholie empfinde ich trotzdem, indem ich das schöne, freie, gelehrte und civilisierte Europa verlassen muss; aber ich werde in meinem Vaterlande mehr nutzen als hier; hier bedarf niemand meiner; wenn ich nun in meiner Heimath in beständiger Verbindung mit den guten deutschen Ge-

Rizal's scholarly homelands

Rizal's "wissenschaftliche Heimat" (*scholarly homeland*) was by no means in Germany alone, but included a large part of the European continent: In Madrid – under Miguel Morayta's guidance[19] – he became acquainted with republican historiography and with Giordano Bruno, the arch-critic of religiously distorted world views; in Paris, he became aware of Europe's urban modernity and studied the most advanced achievements of medical science; in London's libraries, he had an abundance of the oldest histories of his native island world, mostly written in Spanish, at his fingertips so that he could comment on them critically; in Dresden and Berlin, he was honoured by the most famous anthropologists; from Leitmeritz in Bohemia, he received not only important letters of encouragement, applause, objections and friendly recommendations; in Rome, he could not take his eyes off the ancient ruins, which – as he noted on various occasions – reminded him of the beginnings of Roman law and Latin civil society.

Wherever he went, he tried to immerse himself in the language and history of the country, eager for anything that promised to satisfy his hunger for enlightenment (luz). In comparison with other countries and continents, however, he appreciated Europe in first place as a civilising power. What is impressive in this context is that Rizal knew how to read, to quote and to write the three ancient languages whose literatures were in part intertwined: Greek, Latin and Hebrew. As Andreas T. Zanker shows in a very remarkable study,[20] he used classical literature in a way that was partly playful and partly polemical. Quoting from this literature not only bestowed an intertextual aura of literary

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lehrten stehe, wenn ich einige gute Zeitungen des civilisierten Europas habe, so werde ich mich nicht fühlen wie in einer Verbannung von meiner wissenschaftlichen Heimath."

19 Miguel Morayta y Sagrario (1834–1917), professor of history, freemason and republican, friend and teacher of Rizal. https://simple.wikipedia.org/wiki/Miguel_Morayta_y_Sagrario (18. 2. 2025)

20 Andreas T. Zanker, (forthcoming): José Rizal, the Philippines, and Greco-Roman Antiquity. London (Routledge)

quality on Rizal's writings, but also authenticated his authorship, both as a poet and as a scholar. At the same time, his free use of the classical tradition gave him the prestige of an author who, by virtue of his education, could easily take on his European-socialised opponents from the clerical caste.

In this context, it is worth recalling the emotive weight of the European cipher in those discourses that frame the conservative worldview of 'Abendland'. The arrogance with which Europeans acted as masters of the world at the end of the 19th century is not unknown. Nevertheless, it is worth recalling the arguments used in this game to adapt the old idea of a *christianitas* that united peoples to the modern desire for progress, which encompassed colonialism, trade, science and industry. No one expressed this better than the historian Leopold von Ranke, who wrote in 1879 about "das christliche Wesen" (*being a christian*):

> Of course, we do not understand it exclusively as religion; even the words culture and civilisation would only imperfectly describe it. It is the genius of the Occident. It is the spirit which forms nations into well-ordered armies, which builds roads, which digs canals, which covers all the seas with fleets and makes them its own, which fills distant continents with colonies, which fathoms the depths of nature with exact research and conquers all fields of knowledge and renews them with ever fresh work, without losing sight of the eternal truth, which, in spite of the diversity of passions, maintains order and law among men. We see this spirit at work in tremendous progress.[21]

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21 "[Wir] verstehen darunter freilich nicht ausschließlich die Religion; auch mit den Worten Kultur, Zivilisation würde man es nur unvollkommen bezeichnen. Es ist der Genius des Okzidents. Es ist der Geist, der die Völker zu geordneten Armeen umschafft, der die Straßen zieht, die Kanäle gräbt, alle Meere mit Flotten bedeckt und in sein Eigentum verwandelt, die entfernten Kontinente mit Kolonien erfüllt, der die Tiefen der Natur mit exakter Forschung ergründet und alle Gebiete des Wissens eingenommen und sie mit immer frischer Arbeit erneuert, ohne darum die ewige Wahrheit aus den Augen zu verlieren, der unter den Menschen trotz der Mannigfaltigkeit der Leidenschaften Ordnung und Gesetz handhabt. In ungeheurem Fortschritt sehen wir diesen Geist begriffen." L. v. Ranke: Serbien und die Türkei im neunzehnten Jahrhundert. Sämmliche Werke 43/44. Leipzig 1879, 518 f.

Despite its pompous tone, this declaration celebrating imperialism expressed something true. The Europeans had succeeded in establishing a tense, if wavering, relationship between the ideas of a thoroughly secular modernity and a religiously grounded knowledge of tradition. Catholic Spain, whose reputation as a colonial ruler had suffered under the accusations of the 'Black Legend', also sought to close ranks with the great nations of Europe. As late as 1882, with its colonial power long tarnished, Prime Minister Antonio Cánovas, under whose government Rizal had just begun his studies in Madrid, urged Spaniards not to forget their civilising mission:

> It is our duty, evidently, to join the number of expansive, absorbing nations, which have taken upon themselves the task of carrying to completion the arduous enterprise of civilising the whole world: and to understand why it commands us to do so, it would be good to remember without respite the honour, not yet extinct, which we inherited from our fathers.[22]

Rizal's own enthusiasm for Europe, which repeatedly erupted between well-founded doubts, was closely linked to his socialisation: He was exposed to European literature at an early age in the home library and to the benefits of formal education during his intensive schooling at the Jesuit College. It was the interweaving of horizons that saved him from a doctrinaire, let's say fanatical, one-sidedness. It was in his father's world that he first came into contact with Europe, in Europe with the images that this continent made of his homeland. Seen in this light, the reference to 'Europe' in the dedicatory texts of his novels set in the Philippines suggests a reading that can perhaps best be described as an overlapping perspective of proximity and distance.

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22 "Mándanos el deber nuestro, visiblemente, que entremos en el número de las naciones expansivas, absorbentes, que sobre sí han tomado el empeño de llevar a término la ardua empresa de civilizar el mundo entero: y para comprender por qué nos lo manda, sí que fuera bueno recordar sin tregua la honra, no extinta aún, que heredamos de nuestros padres." A. Cánovas del Castillo: Discurso sobre la nación. Inauguración del curso des Ateneo de Madrid 1882, 131

Proximity is expressed in the Spanish dedication title "To my fatherland", distance in the place name "Europe". As already mentioned, most of his writings were not written in the Philippines. The novels, which look at the archipelago from afar, from a European bird's-eye view, unfold their action in a small, manageable space, in or between the capital Manila and the village of his childhood, Calamba (in the novel: San Diego). Distance from and proximity to the "fatherland" together mark the work of memory evoked in the dedication text "in the midst of modern civilisations" (*enmedio de las civilizaciones modernas*), as well as the intention to compare the native islands with European countries.

The forest of his homeland, to take just this one example, appears in Rizal's fiction as a place of retreat and dark danger; the European forest, however, in conjunction with the ability to read culturally imbued signs, as a palliative for the tormented soul:

> When our nerves are frayed, we cannot tolerate the best music in the world, nor the comfort of friends, nor the distractions of social life. But if, as in the European countries inhabited by the Germanic peoples, we are accustomed to read in the expression of nature (*a leer en la expresión de la naturaleza*), we find the best consolation in the solitude of the forest, gazing at the clouds crossing the sky, admiring the beauty of the flowers and listening to the lively song of the little birds. We forget our worries and sorrows, the hand of the Creator caresses us, and when we return home we feel refreshed, for nature has rejoiced over what had previously saddened the soul.[23]

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23 "Cuando estamos afligidos, nuestros nervíos se agitan, no podemos tolerar el eco de la mejor música del mundo, ni el consuelo de los amigos, ni las distracciones de la vida social. Pero si como sucede en los países Europeos poblados por los pueblos germanos – estamos acostumbrados a leer en la expresión de la naturaleza, encontramos el mejor consuelo en la soledad del bosque; mirando las nubes que cruzan el espacio, admirando la hermosura de las flores y escuchando el cantomocente do los pajaritos, nos olvidamos de nuestros duelos y cuitas, la mano del Criador nos acaricia, y al regresar al hogar nos sentimos como refrescados, pues la naturaleza ha alegradolo que antes había entristecido el alma." J. Rizal: Obras literarias II: Prosa. Manila 1961, 64

Imperial violence and the European discourse on ethics

The comparative view, for which Rizal liked to invoke the "demon of comparison", is not accompanied by an abrupt change of perspective, although it can sometimes appear in the novels like a dramatic camera move alternating between shot and counter-shot. In *El Filibusterismo,* the narrator juxtaposes, in two chapters not far apart, two speeches that could hardly be more contradictory. In Chapter XXXI, entitled "El alto empleado" (*The High Official*), an unnamed Spanish functionary argues with the Governor General. The scene takes place in the governor's residence and the subject of the dispute is the imprisonment of an innocent man, the student Basilio. In the novel, this thoughtful young man, who shies away from violence, is cast in the role of a scapegoat who, despite lack of evidence, is to be made an example of. The high-ranking official tries to save Basilio by convincing the Governor General, the man in charge, reminding him of the importance of European values in the name of honourable Spain:

> We protest when we read that might is placed before right, and we applaud when in practice we see might, a hypocrite, not only perverting right but putting itself at the latter's service in order to impose itself … […] I do not want that in the coming ages Spain will be accused as the stepmother of nations, vampire of peoples, tyrant of small islands, because it would be a horrible mockery of the noble principles of our ancient Kings! How are we carrying out their sacred legacy? They promised protection and justice to these islands and we play with the lives and freedoms of their inhabitants; they promised civilisations and we begrudge it to them, fearing that they might aspire to a more noble existence; we promised them light and we close their eyes so that they do not see our orgies; we promised to teach the virtues and we encourage their vices and, instead of peace, wealth and justice, anxiety reigns, commerce is dying, scepticism is spreading among the masses. Let us put ourselves in the place of the Filipinos and ask ourselves what we would do in their case! […] When light, home, liberty, justice are denied to a people, things without which life is not possible and therefore constitutes the patrimony of man, this people has the right to treat, who thus deprives him, as a robber who intercepts us on the road. […] Yes, I am not a soldier, and the years are putting out the little fire in my blood, but

> just as I would let myself be cut into pieces to defend the integrity of Spain against a foreign invader or against the unjustified whims of her provinces, so also do I assure you that I would put myself on the side of the oppressed Filipinos, because above all, I prefer to fall for trampled rights of humanity than win with the selfish interests of a nation even when this nation is called Spain![24]

It is a clever move on the part of the narrator to put the condemnation of violence against the Filipinos and the defence of universal values into the mouth of a Spanish representative of the colonial administration. Whether the kings of old Spain really administered the colony with such philanthropic intentions is another question altogether. The paternalistic tones of father state can still be heard in the official's plea that the 'primitive people' should be rescued from a pre-cultural state in the name of European civilisation. And yet the plea is remarkable, if only because the fictional speaker's remark 'Let us put ourselves in the place of the Filipinos and ask ourselves what we would do in their case' (*Pongámonos en lugar de los filipinos y preguntémonos qué hariamos en su caso.*) expresses the principle of mutual recognition, of putting oneself in the other's shoes for the sake of trying. Furthermore, as the reference to the arbitrariness of the country's name at the end suggests, the text alludes to a specifically European tradition of political thought, the basis of which can be found in the source of the 1789 *Déclaration des droits de l'homme et du citoyen,* which Rizal translated into Tagalog.

The other speech to be considered here can be found in chapter XXXIII of *El Filibusterismo,* entitled "La última razón". The aforementioned student Basilio meets with the jeweller Simoun alias Ibarra in his house. They discuss the planned demise of Manila's 'good society' and the preparations for revolution in the country. Simoun uses all his powers of persuasion to win over Basilio, who shies away from the violent consequences, as a co-conspirator. Simoun outlines his original plans with almost diabolical gusto, plans that lead to the disintegration of social cohesion. The speech is reminiscent of Kropotkin's

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24 José Rizal: The Revolution [El Filibusterismo]. Translation by Jovita Ventura Castro. Manila 1992, 298 f.

anarchy of action, especially as Simoun lets his actionist imagination run wild and glorifies the planned subversive violence as an "artistic work" (*obra artistica*). But he has to admit that he has not yet got beyond fantasising, as he has not yet been able to mobilise followers. So, he now explains to Basilio, the only option left to him is a terrorist attack, which he plans to carry out at the next opportunity and to recruit the student as his assistant. When the latter reacts in horror, Simoun responds with a speech in which he justifies the terror with the argument that Europe has not only tolerated the colonialist, even genocidal violence in the colonies, but has always and everywhere applauded it:

> Europe has applauded when the nations of the West sacrificed in America millions of Indians, certainly not to make nations much more moral or more peaceful. There is the North with its egoistic liberty, its law of lynch, its political fraud; there is the South with its troubled republics, its barbaric revolutions, civil wars, its military coups, like in Mother Spain. Europe applauded when powerful Portugal looted the Molucca Islands, applauds when England destroys the primitive races in the Pacific to settle its immigrants there. Europe will applaud as one applauds at the end of a play, at the end of a tragedy: the common man pays little attention to its depth, he only sees the effect! Let the crime be well done and you will be admired and will have more partisans than for virtuous acts, performed with modesty and timidity.[25]

Simoun is Rizal's Vautrin. Like this famous hero of Balzac's novels, Simoun is feared because of his opacity and domineering demeanour. Like Vautrin, he espouses a philosophy that despises humanity, celebrates the perfectly executed capital crime as an act of art, and uses his powers of persuasion to win over the young man (Rastignac) who sees himself as a victim of circumstance. The transformation of the idealist Ibarra into a terrorist had already taken place in *Noli me tangere*. After years in Europe, the novel tells us, he returns home full of energy to do good there. He immediately encounters resistance, becomes involved

25 The Revolution [El Filibusterismo] 1992, 309

in intrigues and, although innocent, is eventually hunted down by the Guardia Civil.

In the sequel, he now appears, unrecognised, under the name of Simoun, in the middle of Manila society and, like Vautrin with corrupt Parisian society, plays on the greed of the Filipinos and Spaniards. The principle of "justice before violence", which the high official defended in his speech, is countered by his credo, which he declares to be the highest principle of action for the wretched and oppressed. It reads: "violence against violence' (*fuerza contra fuerza*).[26] In 1893, in *La Solidaridad,* Ferdinand Blumentritt conducted a dialogue with Simoun, the hero of the novel, entitled "A Visit" (*Una visita*), and asked him what was to be expected after the absolutely destructive violence. The answer Simoun gave was "Nihil!"

Both of the contrasting speeches quoted here, which are integrated into the fictional plot of the novel, refer to European ideas. Their proximity in the textual space of the narrative speaks in favour of a juxtaposition of which the author was well aware. But is this also evidence of the ambivalence of the cipher Europe discussed above? I think we can answer in the affirmative. For both speeches revolve around the callous violence of European colonialism and at the same time – however incidentally – touch on the questions of right and wrong discussed in the European discourse on ethics. This discourse is not only about the law, i.e. *positive* law, but primarily about the foundations of morality.

The civil servant criticised the violence ordered by the representative of the Spanish colonial power because it perverted the moral principles that, in his opinion, had once formed the basis of a treaty of friendship negotiated between the old Spanish rulers and the peoples of the Philippines. His superior, with a gesture of incomparable arrogance, sent him packing. Rizal's civil servant, who is concerned about justice, speaks – it can be assumed – on behalf of the *ilustrados* (Filipino intellectuals). For with the Spaniards, European knowledge came to the archipelago, no matter how clumsily the clergy made use of it

26 J. Rizal: El Filibusterismo. Novela Filipina. Gent 1891, 247: "Es la suprema razón del debil, fuerza contra fuerza, violencia contra violencia …"

in their schools. It would be ridiculous to want to fall behind. What remains is the only way to achieve self-determination, i.e. to position this knowledge against the excesses of late colonialism without cutting the ties with the so-called motherland.

About the foundations of legitimate rule

Outside the fictional world, Rizal himself defended the foundations of legitimate rule negotiated in European political discourse in a dispute with Blumentritt. In a letter to the Bohemian friend written in London on 14 November 1888, he vehemently disagreed with Blumentritt's view that the reason of the state should always take precedence over all other interests, in this case, the interest in the welfare of the country. Rizal, however, was willing to accept this view only when the state and the people are one, i.e. when it is a sovereign nation. If, on the other hand, the welfare of a dependent colony was at stake, he argued, the priority of the state's interest in maintaining domination (*dominación*) over that colony would be contrary to the state's interest. Domination over this colony violates everything that is right. Rizal summed up his judgement of such a Machiavellian empowerment of the reason of the state in the simple sentence: "It would be the realm of violence":

> If a colonising nation does not succeed in making the colony happy, the mother country must give it up or release it. No one has the right to make others unhappy. […] If one day the Philippines can enjoy the same state privileges as Spain, then their interests may be subordinated to the interests of the state, but not to the mere name of Spanish rule.[27]

27 "Wenn [es] eine[r] kolonisierenden Nation nicht gelingt, die Kolonie glücklich zu machen, muss das Mutterland sie aufgeben, oder freigeben. Niemand hat das Recht andere unglücklich zu machen. […] Wenn einst die Philippinen [sich derselben] Staatsvorrechte wie Spanien erfreuen können, dann mögen ihre Interessen den Staatsinteressen sich unterordnen, aber nicht dem blossen Namen der spanischen Herrschaft." Cartas entre Rizal y el Profesor Fernando Blumentritt, 391 f.

It is the novel's character Simoun who celebrates the "realm of violence" by shattering the foundations of morality and with them the precarious balance between law and lawlessness. For Simoun preaches the downfall of the old society in a storm of terrorist violence. However, neither liberation through revolutionary action nor the desire to avenge the injustice once inflicted on him can explain the furore with which he indiscriminately wants to put the guilty and the innocent to violent death. The reason, in my opinion, is rather a break in the construction of the character, from which Simoun emerges as the mouthpiece of a racial doctrine that emerged in the last third of the 19th century and, as Rizal could not have known, belongs to the prehistory of the Nazi genocide. In my translation, the relevant passages of Simoun's speech read as follows:

> It is necessary to destroy the evil, kill the dragon for the new people to bathe in its blood and make robust and invulnerable! What else is the inexorable law of nature, the law to struggle where the weak has to die so that the corrupted species does not survive and creation does not grow worse? Away, then, with these unmanly prejudices! Let the eternal laws be fulfilled, let us help them, and since the earth is all the more fertile when manured with blood, and thrones more secure when cemented on crimes and cadavers, let there be no hesitations, no doubts![28]

Simoun's speech blurs the distinction between good and evil, confusing the young student who, as the text says, is blinded by a thirst for revenge. Beyond the tale of rebirth from the blood of the slain dragon, the sentences, which the narrator aptly describes as 'bloody sophisms' (*sangrientos sofismas*), resemble what lies at the heart of an antagonistic image of society invented in Europe. I am referring to Social Darwinism, a vulgar version of the thoughtless application of 'natural selection', which is assumed to be a principle of survival in the animal world, to the complex processes of human interaction.[29] According to

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28 The Revolution 1992, 308

29 Raymond Tallis: Aping Mankind. Neuromania, Darwinitis, and the Misrepresentation of Humanity. Abingdon, New York 2011

this doctrine, the social 'selection process' is like a 'struggle for existence' in which there are only winners and losers. The forces of violence and counter-violence clash, as Simoun puts it, according to an inexorable law of nature. No one can escape this battle, but the unscrupulous can 'help' it. All this gives the impression that Simoun has appropriated the teachings of the German Wilhelminian philosopher Eduard von Hartmann, who in his *Phenomenology of Moral Consciousness,* published in 1879, replaced the old moral teachings with Social Darwinism.

The student Basilio is unable to counter the jeweller's dark credo. The narrator is not satisfied, so he gets carried away and puts into Basilio's mouth what he *could have said* in reply. For example, that even the worst man is not biologically determined, since he is endowed with a soul and intelligence and is capable of deliberately renouncing evil; that no one has the right to dispose of another person's life; that everyone has a right to freedom and enlightenment (*luz*) in addition to the right to life, and that a government that punishes misdeeds whose seeds it has planted is abusing its power, and so on. It is clear that the author is speaking to his readers in the voice of the narrator. It is a far-flung audience he is trying to reach: Family and friends back home, his *ilustrado* comrades in Spain and, last but not least, the hostile clergy, the enemies in his homeland. With Basilio's omitted speech, he reminds them that the Creator alone has the right to reward and punish.

Rizal, a "new Moses"?

As soon as *El Filibustrismo* was published, Rizal's friends in Barcelona celebrated the author as a prophetic figure who foresaw and guided the freedom of the Philippines. To quote from their letter dated 2 October 1891, signed by 12 of the Propagandistas:

> The novel shows here and there a vigour and energy reminiscent of the impetuosity of some proclamations … Great, redeeming thoughts flow through its pages. With your immortal work you have, like a new Moses, given the Philippines a Decalogue for their political redemption and their

> human dignity. If they knew how to follow the commandments, the principles and the advice that your novel so beautifully prescribes, they would quickly free themselves from the state of a downtrodden, enslaved people and become a free, noble, prosperous nation with sovereignty over their destiny.[30]

This praise seems strangely exaggerated, even inappropriate, if not ironically warped. And yet, behind the religious allusions may be also flashes of a political vision. For the novelist's comparison with the biblical prophet implies, as the last sentence suggests, the hope of an exodus from forced servitude and subsequent arrival in the Promised Land of free self-empowerment. Rizal's friends may not have realised it, but their comparison refers not only to a table of commandments, but also indirectly to a concept that has a firm place in Western political discourse.

The question immediately arises as to whether or how the friends read *El Filibusterismo,* since the novel fails completely as a guide to a better life. At the same time, however, its formulations evoke a premonition of what will happen to Rizal posthumously: the apotheosis of the 'holy martyr' who leads the country to freedom, if only temporarily. But that's not all. Their enthusiasm for the first novelist from their own ranks, who was so successful in exposing the colonial rulers and the corrupt society at home, seems so boundless that they search for comparable masterpieces in European fiction. So in their letter of congratulation and thanks they place Rizal's work alongside the glorious literary monuments of Alexandre Dumas and Eugène Sue and, not

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30 "Tiene la novela periodos de vigor y energía que traen a la memoria la impetuosidad de las proclamas … Sus paginas son un raudal de pensamientos elevados como redentores. Usted, cual nuevo Moisés, con su obra inmortal, acaba de dotar a Filipinas, del Decálogo de su redención política y humana dignificación. Si ella supiera cumplir los mandatos, preceptos y consejos bellamente transcritos en su novela, haría prontamente, de un pueblo abyecto, esclavizado, libre, grande, prospero y soberano de sus destinos." Escritos de José Rizal II: Cartas entre Rizal y sus colegas de la propaganda. Manila 1961, 717 f.

forgetting, compare him to the founding father of the European novel, Miguel de Cervantes.

I'm tempted to end my ramble through Rizal's European fantasies here. Related topics can be found in the detailed chapters of my biography of Rizal.[31] And yet something important is missing from the tableau outlined so far: the figure of utopia. Both Rizal and his European contemporaries used this figure, which goes back to Thomas More, to create promising visions of the future. Utopian thinking experienced an upswing in the European 19th century, the reasons for which can be found in the emergence of a new historical consciousness. 'Making history' now meant taking responsibility for what was, what is and what is to come and throwing the old, disastrous visions of salvation overboard. In the post-revolutionary period, not only the well-known radical ideas of a social constitution overturning the balance of power were to emerge from the new. Relations between the European states were also to be reorganised in line with a common vision of peace. One concrete goal was the unification of all nation states in a European federation based on law and peace.

Utopias of power and of emancipation through knowledge

As early as 1814, the philosopher Karl Christian Friedrich Krause (1781–1832) published a draft for a European confederation of states as a basis for general peace and as a legal means of defence against any attack on Europe's internal and external freedom. Passionate pleas came from France: the republican Victor Hugo, the socialist Pierre-Joseph Proudhon and the Saint-Simonist Charles Lemonnier were some of the best known of the advocates of a united Europe. In 1872, shortly after the Franco-Prussian War, Lemonnier published a programmatic paper entitled *Les Etats-Unis d'Europe,* which sought to launch a Europe-wide transnational debate. In keeping with the French model of a com-

31 D. Harth: José Rizals Kampf um Leben und Tod. Facetten einer kolonialismuskritischen Biografie. Heidelberg, 2nd Edition 2025

pletely secular state, this republican appeal was unequivocally against religion, excluding it from participation in the visionary project. The utopia of a peacefully united European federation bids farewell to the 'Christian genius of the West' and soberly seeks salvation in the politics of law. Lemonnier accused religion of ruthlessly pursuing its own interests and "sowing the seeds of war".[32] It is a simple fact that the utopia of a secular, politically united Europe did not exclude European imperialism. The vision of peaceful unification was certainly based on the desire to strengthen the continent's power.

Understandably, Rizal's utopia, which he published in several parts in *La Solidaridad* in 1889/90 under the title *Filipinas dentro de cien años* (The Philippines a hundred years hence), had a different aim. It is true that he was highly critical of the arbitrary rule of the Spanish clergy in the Philippines and did not hide his doubts about the benefits of religion. Nor was he far from secularism, if understood as the separation of the making of history from Providence, while at the same time retaining the moral orientation of Christian principles of action. It is therefore all the more remarkable that he has continued to support the agenda of an association agreement with the Catholic 'motherland' of Spain. For there, in the south-western corner of Europe, a climate of political restoration favoured theocratic ambitions that were precious for the clergy. The politically indeterminate conditions for association (also known as assimilation) were set out by the fictional high official quoted above. They can be summed up in the simple formula 'Law and Justice for the Philippines', which was basically too little for Rizal. For he emphatically demanded representation with voting rights for the new 'Filipinas', as he called them, in the Cortes, the constitutional bicameral parliament of the government in Madrid. In the Utopia-essay, he goes even further, detailing with the colonial regime what is 'necessary' to the colonial regime and reminding the gentlemen that the

32 C. Lemonnier: Les Etats-Unis d'Europe. Paris 1872, Introduction, VIII: "Je ne parle point de la religion, parce que la religion est elle-même une semence de guerre; parce que la religion, le même jour, à la même minute, bénit et condamne, excuse et flétrit, excommunie ou sanctifie, tous les drapeaux suivant son intérêt propre."

annals of history do not know of any country that has not at some time freed itself from unjust servitude by its own efforts:

> Applying these considerations to the Philippines, we must necessarily conclude, as a deduction from all that we have been saying, that if her population is not assimilated to the Spanish homeland, if the dominators do not appropriate the spirit of its inhabitants, if equitable laws and straightforward and liberal reforms do not make the one and the other forget that they are of different races, or if both peoples do not merge to constitute a social and politically homogeneous mass which is not troubled by opposing tendencies and antagonistic thoughts and interests, the Philippines must one day declare themselves fatally and infallibly independent. Neither Spanish patriotism, nor the clamour of all the tyrants of Overseas, nor the love for Spain of all Filipinos, nor the doubtful future of the dismemberment and internal strife of the islands among themselves, can oppose this law of destiny. Necessity (*necesidad*) is the strongest divinity the world knows, and necessity is the result of physical laws set in motion by moral forces.[33]

The message is unmistakable: independence would be a last resort, but not the desired association with a modern European state. For Rizal, independence carries the weight of a fatal threat, which, if it were to

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33 "Aplicando estas consideraciones á Filipinas, tenemos por fuerza que concluir, como deducción de todo lo que venimos diciendo, que si no se asimila su población á la patria española, si los dominadores no se apropian el espíritu de sus habitantes, si leyes equitativas y reformas francas y liberales no les hacen olvidar á los unos y á los otros de que son de razas diferentes, ó si ambos pueblos no se funden para constituir una masa social y políticamente homogénea que no esté trabajada por opuestas tendencias y antagónicos pensamientos é intereses, las Filipinas se han de declarar un día fatal é infaliblemente independientes. Contra esta ley del destino no podrán oponerse ni el patriotismo español, ni el clamoreo de todos los tiranuelos de Ultramar, ni el amor á España de todos los filipinos, ni el dudoso porvenir de la desmembración y las luchas intestinas de las islas entre sí. La necesidad es la divinidad más fuerte que el mundo conoce, y la necesidad es el resultado de las leyes físicas puestas en movimiento por las fuerzas morales." J. Rizal: Escritos políticos e historicos, Vol. VII. Manila 1961, 158

become a reality, would mean great losses not only for Spain but also for the Philippines. His dream, as the quoted passage suggests, is a symbiotic relationship between the 'motherland', Spain, and a self-governing Spanish Overseas province called "Las Filipinas".

As a utopian, Rizal did not play the Asian card, but remained true to his image of Europe and declared his allegiance to those who used utopian thought as a weapon of criticism against the corrupt powers of the present. This attitude placed him at the side of España Moderna, the intellectual outline of which was drawn up by Francisco Pi y Margall. Pi y Margall represented a moderate variant of anarchism that sought to combine non-violent party struggle for institutional and constitutional guarantees of freedom with the utopian ideal of self-government.

Rizal went much further in the novel by introducing the student Basilio who, before being disabused by reality, was fascinated by an almost libertarian scientific idealism. The utopian dream of Rizal's novelistic figure surpasses not only Pi y Margall's political vision, but also the boldest ideas of co-existence without domination. The beauty of Basilio's utopian dream is that it takes Immanuel Kant's "Idea of a Universal History on a Cosmopolitical Plan" to its logical conclusion:

> Science is more eternal, more human, more universal! replied the young man in a transport of enthusiasm. In a few centuries, when humanity will be enlightened and redeemed, when there will no longer be races, when all peoples will be free, when there will no longer be tyrants nor slaves, neither colonies nor metropolises, when justice will reign and man will be a citizen of the world, only the cult of science will remain, the word patriotism will sound like fanaticism, and whoever will praise patriotic virtues will doubtless be imprisoned as if he were a fanatic. And he who then boasts of patriotic virtues will be isolated no doubt like a dangerous sick person, a menace to social harmony.[34]

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34 "¡La ciencia es más eterna, es más humana, más universal! Replicó el joven en un trasporte de entusiasmo. Dentro de algunos siglos cuando la humanidad esté ilustrada y redimida, cuando ya no haya razas, cuando todos los pueblos sean libres, cuando no haya tiranos ni esclavos, colonias ni me-

Basilio will lose his enthusiasm in the face of the violence that awaits him. Rizal's image of Europe, as can be seen from the transformation of the novel's protagonist Ibarra alias Simoun, is not only characterised by the hopeful refrain of "free Europe". It remains an ambiguous image, all the more so because the project of a united Europe extended far beyond the borders of the old continent to the territories annexed and subjugated as colonies, regardless of the imperialist rivalries between the great powers. Rizal was always aware of this. But none of the writers or activists who wanted to give wings to the idea of Europe – whether they were called Hugo or Lemonnier – doubted the "civilising mission" of Europeans in the societies they suppressed and pillaged in Asia, Africa and the Americas.

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trópolis, cuando rija una justicia y el hombre sea ciudadano del mundo, solo quedará el culto de la ciencia, la palabra patriotismo sonará á fanatismo, y al que alardee entonces de virtudes patrióticas le encerrarán sin duda como á un enfermo peligroso, á un perturbador de la armonía social." J. Rizal: El Filibusterismo. Gent 1891, 50 f.

Utopia and Apocalypticism

The Philippines a century hence

In his utopian essay, "Filipinas dentro de cien años" (*The Philippines a century hence*) Rizal sketches in a few strokes the supposed level of development of the archipelago's pre-colonial culture and the reasons for its decline. This seemingly innocuous text starts with the maxim: "If you want to read the destiny of peoples, you have to open the book of their past", and continues:

> The past of the Philippines can be summed up as follows: Barely incorporated into the Spanish Crown, the Philippines had to support with their blood and with the efforts of their children the wars and the conquering ambitions of the Spanish people. In these struggles, in that terrible crisis of peoples when they change their government, laws, customs, traditions, religion and beliefs, the Philippines became depopulated, impoverished and backward. Since the shock of this metamorphosis, they no longer have confidence in their past, no longer believe in their present and have no promising hope for the future.[1]

1 "Para leer en el destino de los pueblos, es menester abrir el libro de su pasado. El pasado de Filipinas se reduce en grandes rasgos á lo que sigue: Incorporadas apenas á la Corona Española, tuvieron que sostener con su sangre y con los esfuerzos de sus hijos las guerras y las ambiciones conquis-

In: Dietrich Harth: Hero of the Nation and Citizen of the World.
Tracing José Rizal. Essays and Miscellanea. Heidelberg 2025, pp. 81–95.
https://doi.org/10.11588/heibooks.1635

Here a Filipino reduces the turbulent history of his country to the grey colour of decay. This is, of course, not a "book of the past", but it can certainly be read as a summary of the last 300 years. The author leaves no doubt as to the cause of the decay: colonialist annexation and the violence that accompanied it, including the exploitation of Filipino manpower. To bring it to the point: The violence inflicted on the Philippines was not only physical, but also cultural, in the form of missionary work to destroy the distinctive and identity-forming traditions of the indigenous peoples. The decimation of the male population through forced Spanish military service not only disrupted the succession of generations, it also weakened the economic potential for reproduction, while the loss of lived cultural memory left the existential question of 'where from' and 'where to' unanswered.

This is a rather harsh view of the course of history that circumscribes what can be understood as a discontinuity in the process of historical development, as a radical break with the past. At first glance, Rizal seems to blame the onslaught of the intruder's violence for the misery of the Philippine present. But this is not the case, because in the Utopia-essay he does not solely blame the colonial regime for the decline. Rather, he also laments the disunity of the Filipinos, which caused attempts at resistance to fail or not even emerge in first place. Consequently, he believes that the history of the Philippines' decline includes not only the violence of the colonial rulers, but also the resigned self-abandonment and paralysing hopelessness of the colonised:

> But for those who, disillusioned by sad experiences, saw everywhere confusion and disorder, apathy and brutalisation in the lower classes, discouragement and disunity in the higher ones, there was only one answer, and

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tadoras del pueblo español, y en estas luchas, en esa crisis terrible de los pueblos cuando cambian de gobierno, de leyes, de usos, costumbres, religión y creencias, las Filipinas se despoblaron, empobrecieron y atrasaron, sorprendidas en su metamorfosis, sin confianza ya en su pasado, sin fe aun en su presente y sin ninguna lisonjera esperanza en los venideros días." *La Solidaridad,* Nr. 16, 30 September 1889 – Cited from José Rizal: Escritos políticos e históricos. Manila 1961, 136

> that was to put their hands on the chains, to bow their necks, to submit to the yoke, and to accept the future with the resignation of a sick man who sees the leaves fall and foresees a long winter, among its snows he glimpses the edges of his grave. In those days, confusion was the cause of pessimism; a new generation, brought up in chains, adapted better and better to the new state of affairs.[2]

Comparing this lament with the end of the Indolence-essay,[3] it is clear that Rizal saw little hope for change in the present circumstances. The question arises as to how he intended to overcome the prevailing pessimism in favour of an optimism full of action. Before outlining his answers, I would like to take a closer look at the figure of thought that structures his Utopia-essay.

I don't refrain to call this way of thinking 'apocalyptic'. What does that mean? Well, in the Johannine sense, the apocalypse describes a future revelation that symbolises a new – messianically speaking – transcendent order from the downfall of an old one: the attack of the Antichrist from below calls the victorious heavenly forces of redemption into this battle, at the end of which a Golden Jerusalem rises from the world conflagration, replacing the old sinful order, and so on. The apocalyptic figure of thought is thus based on the idea that the path to freedom necessarily leads through a viper's pit, where human dignity does not count, but only what Rizal repeatedly describes as *embrutecimiento* (brutalisation). Applied to his construction of history, this means that at the lowest point of their subjugation, the Filipinos

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2 "Empero, para el que, desengañado a fuerza de tristes experiencias, veía en todas partes desconcierto y desorden, apatía y embrutecimiento en las clases inferiores, desaliento y desunión en las elevadas, sólo se presentaba una respuesta y era: tender las manos a las cadenas, baja el cuello para someterlo al yugo y aceptar el porvenir con la resignación de un enfermo que ve caer las hojas y presiente un largo invierno, entre cuyas nieves entrevé los bordes de su fosa. Entonces el desconcierto era la razón del pesimismo; pasaron nueva generación, procreada entre las cadenas, se adaptó cada vez mejor al nuevo estado de las cosas." Escritos políticos 1961, 139

3 J. Rizal: "Sobre la Indolencia de los Filipinos." Published as a series in: *La Solidaridad* 1890.

finally discovered the source of energy that fuelled their resistance to their oppressors: "So what they thought would be death turned out to be their salvation."[4]

However, the apocalyptic understanding of 'salvation' is not reflected in this term alone and in no way corresponds to the revolutionary war advocated by the hawks. This, as Rizal is painfully aware, only leads to self-destruction and thus far from the utopian Jerusalem in whose golden centre the Filipinos are supposed to find themselves. Yet, coming to oneself requires the long breath of self-assurance, which leads to the study of one's own history and requires – Rizal is convinced – the intellectual guidance of the *ilustrados.*

Technical, political and moral transformation

Rizal attributes the conditions that have had a lasting effect, creatively altering the official history and thus the country's vision of the future, to two profound spurts of development characteristic of the process of modernisation that transformed the social structures of traditional communities: The constitution of an educated bourgeois elite (forerunner of the middle class) and communication between social spaces that were geographically, ethnically and linguistically distant. Rizal's essay mentions steam navigation and telegraphy, for example, as the most important technical requirements for the comparatively quick spread of cross-border communication. As a frequent traveller between the continents, he was familiar with both. By the early 1880s at the latest, a telegraph cable had been in operation between the British crown colony of Hong Kong – where he and his family occasionally sought refuge – and Manila. In *Noli me tangere* even the naive villagers are allowed to characterise the telegraph operator as a man who, unlike the writer, talks through wires.[5] And in a satirical sketch called

4 "Entonces esto que creyeron que iba a ser la muerte fue precisamente su salvación." Escritos políticos 1961, 138

5 J. Rizal: Noli me tángere. Berlin 1887, 200

Por Teléfono,[6] Rizal has the monks of Manila talking so loudly on the phone to their superiors in Madrid that the smacking, chewing and slurping noises of the friars at a meal in the Philippine refectory can be heard very clearly in Spain.

Rizal argues that, in the long run, the islanders' knowledge of the world has expanded, not least because of increasing economic mobility. This has encouraged the direct exchange of experiences (*cambio de impresiones*), to which the growing number of Filipinos travelling abroad has also contributed, who, faced with "modern freedoms" (*espéctaculos de las libertades modernas*), have become aware of the misery in their country and are now united in demanding change. At this point, it is worth recalling the useful work of the *demonio de las comparaciones,*[7] since it was the comparison of the precarious conditions in one's own country with the state of developed societies that provided the starting point of these reflections.

Against this background, Rizal's statement about a 'logic' in the process of history seems at first strange, especially since its regularity – he believed – was unfathomable, but governments should nevertheless adapt to this 'logic' if they did not want to react haphazardly to coincidences. I suspect that this view of historical 'logic' coincides with the motor of progress that Rizal assumed would prevail against all odds once the colonial regime came to its senses: "En suma, pues, el adelanto y el progreso moral de Filipinas es inevitable, es fatal". (*In short, the development and moral progress of the Philippines is inevitable, even fateful.*).[8]

Once again we are not talking about technical progress, but about what Rizal deliberately called 'moral progress', which summarises the spheres of value of practical coexistence. The catalogue of principles of action that he found in the French Declaration of Human Rights

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6 A pamphlet published in Barcelona 1889 under the pseudonym Dimas Alang.

7 'The demon of comparisons' is an image that the narrator uses in *Noli me tángere* (1887, 43), to characterise the perceptions of the novel's hero Ibarra, who has returned to the Philippines after a long period of study in Europe.

8 J. Rizal: Escritos políticos. Manila 1961, 164 ff.

of August 1789, which he translated into Tagalog, formed a universally valid context for moral and political progress, not least freedom of thought and speech, freedom of the press and freedom of assembly. But he gave the value, belonging to the core of civilisation and transcending all practical norms, the form of a sentence that was almost carved in stone: "La Justicia es la virtud primera de las razas civilizadoras" (*Justice is the first virtue of civilised peoples.*).[9] This is a challenge to the European colonial powers who boasted of bringing civilisation to the 'primitive peoples'. Rizal was one of the first to criticise the inhumane policies of a European colonial regime by referring to the French *Déclaration des droits de l'homme et du citoyen.* This is all the more remarkable because in doing so he ascribed to the *Declaration* a universal validity that transcends national interests, with which its revolutionary authors had nothing to do.

Rizal's appeal to human rights is not merely theoretical. It encompasses both the critique of the colonial system's injustice and the concept of moral progress. Human rights, as a comprehensive concept, extend beyond a mere collection of fundamental rights, incorporating what Amartya Sen terms the ethical claim to freedom and justice:

> Human rights are ethical claims constitutively linked with the importance of human freedom, and the robustness of an argument that a particular claim can be seen as a human right has to be assessed through the scrutiny of public reasoning, involving open impartiality.[10]

At first glance, Rizal's construction of Philippine colonial history as a history of decay and his belief in 'moral progress' do not seem to fit together. Indeed, they seem to contradict each other. After all, the decay he deplores is not least the spirit of subservience and the resulting lack of resistance among his countrymen. It is true that the causes of this kind of 'moral decay' – as he never tires of pointing out – lie in the oppressive power of the colonial regime. In the words of the hermit Florentino in the novel *El Filibusterismo*: "A gobierno

9 Escritos políticos 1961, 147

10 Amartya Sen: The Idea of Justice. London 2009, 365 f.

inmoral corresponde un pueblo desmoralizado" (*An immoral government corresponds to a demoralised people*).[11] Against the backdrop of such a diagnosis, the patient's progress towards what constitutes civility and uprightness in order to advance self-liberation seems all the more questionable.

If we take seriously the attribution of these conditions to the apocalyptic turn, what is required is not patience but the courage to make the leap from a submissive attitude to one of rebellion. This presupposes the experience of the deepest, most hopeless humiliation. There is no question that Rizal favours progress, in other words the patient *learning process,* but he by no means rules out the apocalyptic leap. He warns the Spanish government against it, encouraging it to give the colonised a voice and a vote in order to do justice to them.

I tend to see the two views as complementary possibilities, one linked to the author's ideal, the other to the threat of rebellion. Neither active opposition to oppression nor learning for a better future make each other superfluous. In this respect, what Rizal writes in the Utopia-essay – as in other of his political writings – should not be misunderstood as a literary finger exercise. It is rather part of the rhetorical and appealing commitment he shared with his *ilustrado* comrades. Let us not forget: The idea of a 'moral progress' goes hand in hand with political progress in terms of justice and free self-determination. Rizal returned to this point repeatedly when he demanded that the Philippines be represented in the Spanish parliament, the Cortes, as stipulated in the Constitution. Although he was unsuccessful, the idea of giving the Philippines a voice in Madrid, guaranteed by the Constitution, was the right one, as it should have led to the recognition of the Philippines as a serious political player in the interest of self-determination. The Constitution of Cádiz of 1812 had once guaranteed such a right, but it lost its validity in the period of political regression that followed shortly afterwards, and so – despite some attempts to restore it – it remained a denial.

However, thanks to their authority in political, cultural and anti-racist matters, as well as their command of Spanish (and other lan-

11 El Filibusterismo 1891, 283

guages), the *propagandistas* saw themselves in the role of a leading elite – something they sometimes argued about. This was especially true for Rizal himself, who was firmly convinced that a peaceful and prosperous political "transformation" of the Philippines into a province on an equal footing with the Spanish nation could only come from the Filipino upper class (*clases superiores*). A revolution from below, on the other hand, would lead to ruin. Preventing this was the challenge that Rizal set himself by using the power of language at his disposal to transfer the 'leap' I spoke of to the literary public sphere and to consciously face up to the danger threatening him. In Rizal's opinion, the external conditions for the "transformation" from above were, as indicated, better than ever.

The spirit of nation

Indeed, he claimed, the "national spirit" – a phantom that had emerged from the womb of collective misfortune – was rearing its head in the Philippines:

> Today there is a factor that did not exist before: The spirit of the nation has been awakened, and the same misfortune and the same degradation have united all the inhabitants of the islands. There is a large enlightened class within and outside the archipelago, a class that has been created and is growing thanks to the clumsiness of certain rulers, who have forced the inhabitants to emigrate, to be enlightened abroad, and which is being maintained and fought for thanks to the excitement and the system of scouting that has been set up. This class, whose numbers are constantly increasing, is in constant contact with the rest of the islands, and if today it is only the brain of the country, in a few years it will form its entire nervous system and will manifest its existence in all its actions.[12]

12 "Hoy existe un factor que no había antes; se ha despertado el espíritu de la nación, y una misma desgracia y un mismo rebajamiento han unido a todos los habitantes de las Islas. Se cuenta con una nuerosa clase ilustrada dentro y fuera del Archipiélago, clase creada y aumentada cada vez más y más por las torpezas de ciertos gobernantes, obligando a los habitantes a

The reasons for the awakening of the 'national spirit' therefore did not lie in the inner strength of the coexisting, here and there perhaps co-operating peoples of the archipelago, but in the force imposed on them from outside. This is reminiscent of Herder's thesis that, as a rule, it was the "Right of the strongest" (*Recht des Stärkeren*) that subjugated particular, self-reliant communities to a unifying form of rule, thereby levelling out the dividing differences.[13]

On the other hand, Rizal's anatomical metaphor of the "brain of the country" impressively visualises the claim to leadership of the 'upper classes', i.e. an educated elite, in the struggle for recognition, a claim that was certainly justified in view of the anarchy, caused by the arbitrary violence of monasticism (*frailocracia*). For the "brains" – as the text suggests – now had the opportunity to attack the illegitimate colonial power at home from the outside, even from Spain, in whose relatively liberal metropolises the *ilustrado* circles had gained a foothold. What appeared in print there had to be disseminated in the Philippines as a Contrebande, a communication campaign that was particularly close to Rizal's heart and inspired him to develop a versatile variety of strategies.

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expatriarse, a ilustrarse en el extranjero, y se mantiene y lucha gracias a las excitaciones y al sistema de ojeo emprendido. Esta clase, cuyo número aumenta progresivamente, está e comunicacon constante con el resto de las Islas, y si hoy no forma más que el cerebro des país, dentro de algunos anos formará todo su sistema nervioso y manifesterará su existencia en todos sus actos." Escritos políticos 1961, 145

13 On 26 May 1890, Rizal wrote a long letter to Blumentritt from Brussels, stating, among other things: "Ich habe auch Herder's Sämmtliche Werke, die ich für Nichts gekauft habe. Hast du Herder gern, so schicke ich Dir die 38 Bände." (*I also have Herder's Sämmtliche Werke, which I bought for nothing. If you like Herder, I will send you the 38 volumes.* – The term "Nationalgeist" probably found its way into political discourse through Friedrich Karl von Moser's treatise *Von dem Teutschen Nationalgeist* published in 1765/66.

Renewal and invention in historiopoetic narration

Rizal wrote not only for his (few) Spanish-speaking compatriots, but also for and against the representatives, opportunists and fellow travellers of the colonial regime; this is also true of his fiction. Here, however, in the political essay addressed to friends and enemies, he appears in the stature of a knowledgeable person who not only knows what he is talking about, but who can also be credited with a capacity of judgement. He quotes Thomas More's *Utopia* and adds that the process of civilisation has long since left the state of affairs described there behind. He quotes verbatim from Machiavelli's *Il Principe* – from the Italian original – the famous statement in Chapter 11 that it is in the nature of man to enter into obligations on the basis of reciprocity, and adds that this is probably true, and yet pure sentimentalism (*sentimentalismo puro*), since hard-core needs and interests always prevail on the battlefield of politics. And he indirectly quotes Thomas Jefferson's paean to 'good government' (*buen gobierno*), except that he ironically reverses it and applies it to the oppressive policies of the colonial power. As if that were not enough, he compares the Philippines to Sancho Panza, who is allowed to play governor on the island of Barataria in the second part of *Don Quixote,* but is forced to starve by his personal physician for supposedly hygienic reasons and resigns from his government post in utter despair. In Rizal's parable, the delicious food that Sancho is only too happy to enjoy corresponds to the reforms that Madrid pretends to offer the Filipinos but never fully enacts.

I am not suggesting that Rizal subjected his writing to a consciously calculated rhetorical strategy. Nothing in his work is calculated in the sense of a one-sided or dogmatic dissent. On the contrary, the author is moving in the field of controversy with great freedom and, as already mentioned, likes to spice his speech with irony and sharp satire. Nevertheless, he writes in an appealing way and therefore in a way that is aimed at the addressee. But it also has the authoritarian air of someone who combines great self-confidence with the conviction that his words can make a difference, even if the result means suffering for the author and his family. He was determined to lead his compatriots in their fight for recognition, and he was prepared to face the con-

sequences of his writing as a partisan. In his letters, he wrote like a good Protestant that he would do it again, and apologised to his family.

As the French reform-socialist Jean Jaurès wrote about Rizal around 1900, it was a "cruel irony" of history when the USA destroyed the literary partisan's message of liberation in one fell swoop.[14] Much could certainly be said here about this fatality and its consequences for the image of Rizal in Philippine politics of remembrance. But I would now like to finally turn to the question of which past Rizal considered worth telling in order to strengthen that "national spirit" in his countrymen, the tender seedlings of which he saw sprouting here and there. The colonial period, as it coincided with the history of decline, was out of the question, especially since – as he noted in the Utopia- essay – it had largely erased the traces of their own cultural traditions (gobierno, leyes, usos, costumbres, religión y creencias).

The question, therefore, is how Rizal addressed the process I term 'historiopoetics' in order to provide his fractured country with a history, if indeed it had one in the sense of a written record. This was, in fact, an unfeasible undertaking, given that a self-determined Philippine country with a constitution did not exist during Rizal's lifetime. Moreover, such a geographically, ethnically, linguistically, and socially diverse entity was unlikely to be perceived as a coherent subject within a narrative framework. Yet, the quest for a self-determined future is inextricably linked to the construction and appropriation of cultural traditions embodied in historical narratives. Motto: No future without history!

The term 'historiopoetics' is used to describe a narrative process that encompasses both renewal and invention. The act of uncovering traditions that have been suppressed or buried can be seen as a form of renewal, as evidenced by the rediscovery of indigenous folklore traditions. Conversely, the act of invention can be viewed as a means of asserting a new beginning, one that is not contingent on existing traditions. The emergence of Filipino nationalism, for instance, can be seen as a result of this process, particularly in light of the association with

14 J. Jaurès in Henri Turot: *Les hommes de revolution. Aguinaldo et les Philippins.* Preface par Jean Jaurès. Paris 1900, IX

the name Rizal. One advantage of historiopoetic narration is that it does not have to eschew the plot contingency that, according to Aristotle, is inherent to every historical narrative, because of the principal uncertainty in acting. The process thus exhibits characteristics of both the historical novel and representational fidelity to the names and dates selected from given documents, or sources. Furthermore, it can serve as a catalyst for a biased narrative with normative claims that appeals, in the spirit of rhetoric, to the visionary 'builders of the future'.

In the Utopia-essay Rizal envisioned himself as a pioneering figure, striving to create a new and improved society. While he acknowledged the challenges that lay ahead, he maintained a cautious optimism about the potential for positive change.:

> The Philippines will most likely defend with unspeakable fervour the freedom that has cost so much blood and sacrifice. With the new people emerging from their midst, they may, remembering their past, choose the broad road of progress without hesitation.[15]

Unfortunately, if we look back over the hundred years from 1890 up to 1990, there is not much that would confirm Rizal's prophecy. It is true that a few years before the centenary, i.e. in 1986, Corazon Aquino's election victory ended the brutal repressive regime of Ferdinand Marcos, who had mercilessly plundered the maltreated republic during his almost 20-year dictatorship. However, the events that have transpired since Aquino's presidency, which are not part of my narrative, have little to do with utopian visions of the future.

But do we need to imagine a utopian future to make good on broken promises in the past? Utopia, especially since it always has to say 'not yet' (Ernst Bloch),[16] is nothing more than a hypothetical alternative to the existing. At best, it ties in with what promises a better

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15 "Muy probablemente las Filipinas defenderán con un ardor indecible la libertad comprada á costa de tanta sangre y sacrificios. Con los hombres nuevos que broten de su seno y con el recuerdo de su pasado, se dedicarán tal vez á entrar abiertamente en la ancha vía del progreso." Escritos políticos 1961, 163

16 Ernst Bloch: The Principle of Hope. Cambridge, MA, 1986

future within the framework of what is already possible today. Rizal himself gave us two examples: the abolition of slavery and of the death penalty for certain offences, such as those relevant to family law. The utopian asserts that when violence and subjugation are abolished, we have taken a step closer to freedom. The historians will not contradict; they will stand by the utopian. It are the historians who can tell the success stories and, by way of example, the struggles that were necessary to pave the way for these or similar freedoms in the world. The Angel of History is like the crayfish, the Angel of Utopia like the salamander; both share the moist element from which new life can emerge.

For an appropriation of precolonial Philippine history

Writing history is one of the methods of narrative worldmaking. Rizal uses this method in his contemporary historical novels, but rarely crosses the boundaries of the literary fiction design. When he reflects on the history of his (Tagalian) homeland, he follows the raciocination of the essay or ventures into the margins of a veritable subversive commentary. He did the latter on a grand scale in the new edition of Antonio de Morga's chronicle of the first almost 40 years of Spanish colonial rule in the Philippines, published in 1609.[17] Morga was an Andalusian administrative lawyer and differed from the clerical authors of most chronicles written about the Archipelago in Spanish simply because of the worldly offices he held in the Philippines.

A commentary is not a narrative, but an aid to reading and understanding that can also refer to the text of a narrative, be it historical or fictional. Rizal, however, used the commentary to correct the historical narrative of the Spanish writer de Morga and to refute its

17 Sucesos de las islas Filipinas por el Doctor Antonio de Morga, obra publicada en Méjico el año de 1609, nuevamente sacada á luz y anotada por José Rizal y precedida de un prólogo del Prof. Fernando Blumentritt. Paris: Librería de Garnier Hermanos, 1890. – [English Translation:] Historical Events of the Philippine Islands. Published in Mexico in 1609, recently brought to light and annotated by José Rizal. Manila: Comisión Nacional del Centenario de José Rizal, 1962

claims to truth. A reliable refutation, of course, depends on factual historical sources, which in this case were not available to the commentator, therefore he had to resort to those chronicles, which were exclusively written by monks and missionaries. Rizal's annotations are no more and no less than building blocks for a polemical historiography that undermines both the authority and the credibility of the Spanish author. Above all, they were intended to remind readers that the peoples of the Philippines had a proud pre-colonial history of their own, which had been stolen from them by the foreign colonial power. In the introduction to the annotated new edition of 'Morga', dedicated "á los Filipinos", he writes:

> In *Noli me tángere* I began the sketch of the present state of our country: the effect which my attempt produced made me realise, before going on to unfold before your eyes other successive pictures (*cuadros*), the necessity of first making known the past, in order to be better able to judge the present and to measure the road travelled for three centuries. Born and brought up in the ignorance of our Yesterday, like almost all of you; without voice or authority to speak of what we neither saw nor studied, I considered it necessary to invoke the testimony of an illustrious Spaniard who governed the destinies of the Philippines at the beginning of its new era and witnessed the last moments of our ancient nationhood. It is, then, the shadow of the civilization of our ancestors (*la sombra de la civilización de nuestros antepasados*) that the author will now evoke before you. […] If the book succeeds in awakening in you an awareness of our past, which has been erased from memory, and in rectifying what has been falsified and slandered, then I will not have worked in vain, and with this basis, however small, we will all be able to devote ourselves to studying the future.[18]

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18 "En el *Noli me tángere* principié el bosquejo del estado actual de nuestra Patria: el efecto que mi ensayo produjo, hízome comprender, antes de proseguir desenvolviendo ante vuestros ojos otros cuadros sucesivos, la necesidad de dar primero á conocer el pasado, á fin de poder juzgar mejor el presente y medir el camino recorrido durante tres siglos. Nacido y criado en el desconocimiento de nuestro Ayer, como casi todos vosotros; sin voz ni autoridad para hablar de lo que no vimos ni estudiamos, consideré necesario invocar el testimonio de un ilustre Español que rigió los destinos de Filipinas en los

Rizal's words outline a program to create collective self-confidence. He linked the successful work for the utopian ideals of the future to a necessary precondition. This condition requires the reconstruction of pre-colonial history and the critical examination of the history of colonial oppression. If Philippine society fails or forgets to do so, it will be caught behind the broken promises not only of past centuries but also by the crimes of the dictatorships ruling in the post-colonial era.

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principios de su nueva era y presenció los últimos momentos de nuestra antigua nacionalidad. Es, pues, la sombra de la civilización de nuestros antepasados la que ahora ante vosotros evocará el autor […]. Si el libro logra despertar en vosotros la conciencia de nuestro pasado, borrado de la memoria, y rectificar lo que se ha falseado y calumniado, entonces no habré trabajado en balde, y con esta base, por pequeña que fuese, podremos todos dedicarnos á estudiar el porvenir." Sucesos de las islas Filipinas 1890, p. V f.

Rizal's serious-comic novels

The author's choice

Rizal's novels are read by many interpreters as a portrayal of Philippine society suffering under the yoke of Spanish rule. However, the term 'Philippine society' can only be used in a limited sense. Although the locations of the author's two novels, with their manageable social groups, are relatively numerous, they are to be found in a single province on the main island of Luzon, and, in addition to the Spanish protagonists, they present – apart from Spanish colonialists – mainly people of different origins and social status living in this region. On the other hand, at the time of the novel's action (ca. 1880–1890), the archipelago's countless islands were inhabited by culturally diverse communities, without important organisational or ideological commonalities.

It is no mystery why Rizal chose the sophisticated form of the novel to bring the Filipino-Tagalog world he knew from memory and visualise it in vivid images. Polemics and critical essays offer no space for the creation of a polyphonic, dynamically moving world in which remembered experience can be embodied in a colourful cast of characters. Novellas and short stories offer snapshots and therefore cannot do justice to what the reader expects if he wants to engage with the pictures of a complex society entangled in contradictory actions. A successful novel, on the other hand, can offer a high degree of authenticity and, in the end, perhaps even a portrait of a fictional character who, as he goes

Rizal's serious-comic novels.
In: Dietrich Harth: Hero of the Nation and Citizen of the World.
Tracing José Rizal. Essays and Miscellanea. Heidelberg 2025, pp. 97–116.
https://doi.org/10.11588/heibooks.1635

through rough adventures, invites the reader to identify with him on a trial basis. This is particularly probable when the story that unfolds in the novel tells of a hero's struggle with more or less openly antagonistic forces that he either overcomes or succumbs to.

Epic fiction allows the author to distance himself from his ego and from his opinions by introducing an indeterminate or collaborative narrator. Thomas Mann, who ennobled the novel as an art form, celebrated this freedom by invoking an Apollonian figure of irony in whose light the fictional world appears in a dazzling, i.e. ambiguous "objectivity":

> The art of the epic is 'Apollonian' art, as the aesthetic term goes, because Apollo, the far-sighted, is the god of distance, the god of detachment, of objectivity, the god of irony.[1]

In the polemical essay, on the other hand, which takes up the contemporary challenges and can also use narrative forms, the author himself has to stand on the battlefield and is exposed to the consequences of his attacks without any distance. The mask of the pseudonym, which Rizal occasionally used, only protected him for a short time, as the experienced reader would soon be able to identify the author behind the mask by his individual style.

In the fictional cosmos the narrative follows neither biography nor history, which is peppered with dates. Instead, it creates a world in which space and time, people and objects have a virtual existence. However, this condition of existence, which is linked to the author's power of invention, does not limit the experiential content of the narrative; on the contrary, the veil of fiction can even be torn open for a moment here and there. When the author proclaims that his story will reveal the (imported) "disease" that afflicts him and his countrymen, he can rely on the thrust of his discursive style, which favours analy-

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1 "Die Kunst der Epik ist 'apollinische' Kunst, wie der ästhetische Terminus lautet; denn Apollo, der Fernhintreffende, ist der Gott der Ferne, der Gott der Distanz, der Objektivität, der Gott der Ironie." Thomas Mann: Essays I. Ausgewählte Schriften zur Literatur, ed. Michael Mann. Frankfurt a.M. 1977, 347

sis and polemic. I mention here only his unsparing indictment of the notorious incompetence of the Spanish colonial administration, published in *La Solidaridad* on 15 December 1890 under the title "Como se gobiernan las Filipinas" (*How the Philippines are governed*). Rizal's choice of epic narrative, however, was not only intended to widen the circle of his audience to include the diffuse readership that expected more from the book than just topical political commentary, but also to present the plight of his country – as he himself wrote – in a "series of images" (*cuadros sucesivos*).

The choice of a type of fiction known as the episodic novel was also in keeping with this intention, as it allows the narrator to move between unconnected settings and groups of actions. Rizal categorised the novel narrative as belonging to the rhetorical *genus mixtum.* In the ancient textbooks of rhetoric, this genre formed the middle between the 'high' (epic, tragedy) and 'low' (satire, comedy) registers of style and representation, thus participating in both, free and unbound to alternate between all registers and enrich them with new ones. The novel, as the literary theorist Mikhail Bakhtin concludes, is therefore not only the genre par excellence when it comes to embodying the 'serious-comic', but also when it comes to resolving the apparent contradiction between experience and invention in a narrative, yet protean and mutable form. Here, invention is as free in the processing of experience, as the latter – subjective as it is – provides brooding self-consciousness with the material for ever more expansive, ever more daring inventions. In short, the novel is the literary genre with the greatest potential for the critique of authority, since it has dethroned classical normative poetics in order to suggest by the plot the search for paths that run on this side of fatum, but through the unpredictability of the contingent.

With regard to *Don Quixote,* Rizal speaks of 'punishing and laughing' literature, while Bakhtin, referring to Dostoevsky's enthusiasm for *Don Quixote,* speaks of the 'serious-comic genre'.[2] The adventures

2 In a sketch from Rizal's student years with the title *Il consejo de los deoses* (The Court of the Gods), the goddess Minerva judges over Cervantes' famous novel: "El Quijote, su parto grandioso, es el látigo que castiga y corrige sin que derrame sangre, pero excitando la risa; es el néctar que encierra las

of *Don Quixote* are thus something of a source of inspiration for this never-ending series of enchanting novels, in which the reader can observe from a safe distance the comic and at the same time painful clashes between the rebellious imagination and prosaic reality. And all of this often takes place before the reader's eyes – as Dostoevsky puts it – in the light of "the most bitter irony".[3]

The serious-comic (Greek σπουδογέλοιον/spoudogéloion) narrative prose can be traced back – as can be seen in Bakhtin – to an old tradition of satirical writing, which is associated with the name of the Greek philosopher Menippos of Gadara (3rd century BCE).[4] Nevertheless, since the Renaissance at the latest, the 'Menippean satire' named after this Cynic (also known as 'Menippea') has produced a variety of forms that do not conform to a single, rule-based literary model or even normative expectations. Rather, it is the freedom that contributes to the attraction of the Menippea as an unprecedentedly flexible form of narrative: the licence to mix styles and switch between time and space on the fly, the self-ironic questioning of the role of the narrator, the blurring of the boundaries between dialogue and gossip, the breaking out of the illusionary space of fiction and, last but not least, the satirical tone that exposes the sacred and the sublime, heroism and the arrogant gesture of power to laughter.

A typical Menippean character, for example, is the wise jester Tasio in *Noli me tangere,* who wittily comments on the discord among Filipi-

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virtudes de la amarga medicina; es la mano halagüeña que guía enérgica a las pasiones humanas." (*Don Quixote, his [Cervantes'] great birth, is the whip that punishes and corrects without bloodshed, but excites laughter; it is the nectar that contains the virtues of bitter medicine, it is the flattering hand that energetically guides the human passions.*) J. Rizal: Obras Literarias II: Prosa. Manila 1961, 6

3 Quoted from M. Bakhtin: Probleme der Poetik Dostojevskijs. Berlin 1985, 143

4 See the article "Menippos" in New Pauly online: https://referenceworks.brill.com/display/db/npoe/. For information on the literary history of the Menippea see W. v. Koppenfels: Der Andere Blick oder Das Vermächtnis des Menippos. Paradoxe Perspektiven in der europäischen Literatur. München 2007

nos and, like the narrator in Voltaire's *Candide,* recommends tending the garden as a remedy. Rizal liked to take advantage of Menippea's liberties, using the carnivalesque strategies of disguise. Several of his texts serve as examples: The Tribunal of the Gods (*El consejo de los deoses,* 1880), The Thought of a Filipino (*Pensamiento de un Filipino,* 1884), a monologue by a man who, for the sake of his own peace of mind, wants to stay out of the dispute between progressives and clerics, the dream vision of Fratre Rodriguez (1889), the travesty of defence against Vicente Barrantes (1889/90) and the visit of the Lord to the Philippines (*Una visita del Señor a las Filipinas*), which drives Peter to flee and puts Jesus behind bars.

A key text in the Menippean style is a partly autobiographical, partly parodic text entitled *Llanto y risas* (Tears and Laughter), which Rizal used and varied in different contexts. The serious comedy here is attributed to those eccentric bodily reactions that change according to the circumstances, for which the Mexican poet Juan de Dios Peza, a contemporary of Rizal, found a few verses that hit the nail on the head better than any other, however ingenious explanations:

> El carnaval del mundo engaña tanto,
> que las vidas son breves mascaradas;
> aquí aprendemos a reír con llanto
> y también a llorar con carcajadas.[5]
>
> *The carnival of the world is so deceiving,*
> *that lives are short masquerades;*
> *here we learn to laugh while crying*
> *and likewise to cry while laughing.*

5 Juan de Dios Peza: Poesias Completas. Recuerdos y Esperanzas. Paris 1898, 22–24. I quote (and translate) here the last stanza of Dios Peza's poem *Reír llorando* (Weeping Laughing), which he dedicated to the English actor David Garrick.

Place, time and personnel of the plot

So far I have spoken of two novels when referring to the novel-dichotomy, an arrangement that I will largely maintain. It is true that *El Filibusterismo* links up with *Noli me tangere,* takes on some of the characters from it and explicitly appeals to the reader's memory. However, it is easy to read the second book without any knowledge of the first. According to the characters in the novel, there is an interval of thirteen years between the events narrated in the two books. The gap between the publication dates of both books – the production time of the second novel – is just under four years. The narrative time, which is represented in a novel as a list of hours, days, weeks, months or years, can be capricious, uncountable or undefined. In *Noli me tangere,* apart from the epilogue, the action takes place consecutively between the end of October (preparations for All Souls' Day) and the end of December (Christmas). The events of the sequel, *El Filibusterismo,* also take place in the comparatively cool months of December and January, and towards the end recall the "Deadly January" of the Cavite insurrection of 1872.

When discussing the different tenses used in the novel, one should not forget the external, historical time to which the narrative events can be related as a frame of reference. Do the stories describe Philippine society around 1882 (Rizal's departure for Europe), around 1887 (the year of publication of *Noli me tangere*) or around 1891 (the year of publication of *El Filibusterismo*)? The interval of thirteen years mentioned by the characters in the novel is of no help here, since it belongs to the interior of the fictional world and plays with the meaning of the 'number of death', which is rooted in popular numerical mysticism: '13 years ago to the day', it says in one chapter, Ibarra died (*Fili* 22), and on another page with the same wording, '13 years ago to the day', Basilio's mother died (*Fili* 38). Obviously, the events depicted in the novel take place in Rizal's present and can therefore be read as a commentary on time, which excludes neither the past nor the future, but rarely addresses them explicitly. Rizal occasionally spoke of the "last ten years" as a time frame, which roughly corresponds to the decade between 1880 and the publication date of the second novel.

The settings are also carefully chosen. While the events in *Noli me*

tangere take place mainly in the fictional village of San Diego, in *El Filibusterismo* the focus is on Manila's urban society. A carriage ride from the city takes the reader to the village, while a detour by boat up the river and back through the villages takes the reader to the city. In the village, the clergy rule unchallenged; in the city, they come into conflict with the urban milieu and rebellious students. Not only the settings, but also the power games of the colonialist profiteers are closely related. This is also true of those who try to find a way out, whether through patience or violence, and fail miserably. In *Noli me tangere*, the hero, who appears in the guise of a reformer, is broken by the intrigues of the *frailocracia*. In the sequel, in which, masked and under a false name, he plans a campaign of revenge disguised as a revolutionary, he fails because of himself.

Both books often talk about the abyss, but what is missing is the bridge that would allow the country and the community to be saved from the fall. In *Noli me tangere* the sage Tasio comments on this sinister threat with the following words:

> The government has no idea of a stable future. The government is the arm, the monastery the head. Out of habit, it drifts from abyss to abyss, becomes a shadow of itself and loses its meaning; weak and incapable, it places everything in venal hands.[6]

The relationships between the various characters and groups of protagonists in the novel are abysmal too: in the sense of social strife, open deceit and insidious violence. None of them has a happy ending, which, despite the ironic tone, gives the novels the character of an unfinished story, the reasons for which are left to the reader to discover. At no point do the novels provide examples of the social resource of solidarity that is needed to effectively limit the excesses of an unbridled power.

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6 "El Gobierno no sueña en ningún porvenir robusto, es un brazo, la cabeza es el convento, y por esta inercia con que se deja arrastrar de abismo en abismo, se convierte en sombra, desaparece su entidad, y débil e incapaz todo lo confía a manos mercenarias." Noli me tangere 1887, 139

Against the abuse of power

Menippean effects ensure that the difference between reality and appearance is blurred, and that the apparently simple reason for what is said is suddenly cast into twilight. These effects can also be found where one character or another, in the role of a trained speaker, intervenes in the narrator's action to address both a fictional counterpart and a potential reader. I would like to point out here that this dual engagement is a striking feature of the literary eloquence that characterises the successful political novel.

The prerequisites were there, for Rizal had received a solid rhetorical training in the schools of the religious orders, which he was able to use in a variety of ways with his own creative freedom. In the novel, the author's trained eloquence not only plays a role in the shaping of speech and counter-speech, but is also evident in those longer speeches which, although intended for the audience immanent in the fiction, at the same time speak to the potential reading public beyond the boundaries of fiction. These include the political reflections of the novel's outsider characters, such as the foolish sage Tasio, the outlaw Elias or the hermit Florentino. But they also include the inhuman inflammatory speeches of the vengeful Simoun (alias Ibarra) in *El Filibusterismo* and the All Souls' Day sermon of the monk-priest Dámaso in *Noli me tangere*. These speeches are successful examples of eloquence gone astray or turned into parody, which either misses the ears of the pious listeners or frightens them.

In short, in the narrative prose of the novel, literary eloquence works not only through persuasion, as in pragmatic speech, but also through the juxtaposition of antagonistic points of view embodied in speech and counter-speech, or – in the parodistic variant – through the grotesque exaggeration (hyperbole) of the speaker's persuasive intention. However, in those cases where Rizal's narrator lets the persuasive speech seep like a threat into the souls of the poor villagers, the author is usually a cleric who abuses the power of his words for the sake of mammon. In the chapter entitled "Sisa" (No. 16) of *Noli me tangere,* the narrator prepares such a scene in the form of an accusatory speech, the wording of which blurs the line between the simulated voice of the narrator and the real author:

> But the poor man, the pauper who barely earns enough to live on and has to bribe the directors, scribes and soldiers to let him live in peace, does not sleep as peacefully as the artisan poets think they do but never have suffered the hardships of misery. The poor man is sad and pensive. […] He prays in the language of his misery; his soul weeps for himself and for the dead whose love was his good. His lips may utter salutations, but his mind cries out complaints and lamentations. […] And you, Religion preached for suffering humanity, have you forgotten your mission to comfort the oppressed in their misery and to humble the mighty in their pride, and would you now only have promises for the rich, for those who can pay you?[7]

Basilio's mother, the penniless Sisa – the story continues – thinks to hear the preacher's voice during a sleepless night, urging her not to spend the coin she has saved for her children, but to give it to the church. "You must sacrifice yourself," says the voice, "Starve! Heaven is dear!" – which forces the narrator to conclude that it seems certain that the poor will not go to heaven! The poor in *El Filibusterismo* even go much further, blatantly denouncing religious teachers as great deceivers:

> Oh, God, oh God! said a poor woman, emaciated by dint of fasting; before You there is no rich man, no poor man, no white man, no black man … You will do us justice! – Yes, replied her husband; as long as the God they

7 "Pero el pobre, el indigente que apenas gana para mantenerse y tiene que sobornar a los directorcillos, escribientes y soldados para que le dejen vivir en paz, ése no duerme con la tranquilidad que creen los poetas artesanos, los cuales tal vez no hayan sufrido las carencias de la miseria. El pobre está triste y pensativo. […] Reza en el idioma de su miseria; su alma llora por sí y por los seres muertos cuyo amor era su bien. Sus labios pueden proferir salutaciones, pero su mente grita quejas y lamentos. […] Y tú, Religión predicada para la humanidad que sufre, ¿habrás olvidado tu misión de consolar al oprimido en su miseria y de humillar al poderoso en su orgullo y sólo tendrías ahora promesas para los ricos, para los que pueden pagarte?" Noli me tangere 1887, 73

> preach is not pure invention, a deception! They are the first not to believe in him![8]

While the poor woman repeats the mantra that all men are equal before God, the man expresses the radical suspicion of priestly fraud. However, the narrator has another arrow in his quiver, dedicated, so to speak, to the secular counterpart of the same medal. If on the one hand the clerical hypocrites are the target, on the other hand it is the political rulers. When the girl Julí wakes up from her nightmares, crying with fear, the narrator says:

> And in the meantime, those who were so happy with the fate of the people, those who ordered legal murders, those who violated justice and used the law to support violence, slept in peace.[9]

Criticism of religion and criticism of power go hand in hand in such passages. The criticism is aimed at the age-old nepotism between the Church and the Crown, which is peculiar to Spanish colonialism. The narrator does not directly take sides, but like the "limping devil" in Luis Vélez de Guevara's satirical novel of the same name, gives the reader a bird's-eye view of the parlours, bedrooms and hearts of his characters and asks disturbing questions.[10] "Dark is the night, quiet sleep the neighbours", begins the chapter on Sisa in *Noli me tangere,* only to let the gaze wander over the poor and the rich, the power-

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8 "¡Ah, Dios, ah Dios! decía una pobre mujer, demacrada á fuerza de ayunar; delante de tí no hay rico, no hay pobre, no hay blanco, no hay negro …. tú nos harás justicia! – Sí, le contestaba el marido; con tal que ese Dios que predican no sea pura invencion, un engaño! Ellos son los primeros en no creer en él!" El Filibusterismo 1891, 235. Translation by J. Ventura Castro.

9 "Y entre tanto los que disponían tan alegremente de los destinos de los pueblos, el que mandaba los asesinatos legales, el que violaba la justicia y hacía uso del derecho para sostener á la fuerza, dormían en paz." El Filibusterismo 1891, 233. Translation by J. Ventura Castro.

10 Luis Vélez de Guevara: The Limping Devil – El Diablo Cojuelo. Bilingual Edition. Translated & Annotated by Robert S. Rudder and Ignacio López-Calvo. Doral, FL: Stockcero 2018

less and the powerful, and finally through the shack and the troubled thoughts of the widow Sisa. Here the narrative not only simulates the ghostly flight, but also involves the reader in the internal perspective of the causes of poverty distorted by religious blindness and the abuse of power. The criticism of the alliance between the Crown and the Church, which I mentioned before, is unfolded here in perspective, embedded in the fictional experience of the narrated characters.

Before the following chapter (No. 17), which continues the story of Sisa, the author – note: not the narrator! – has inserted the well-known title *La vida es sueño* (Life is a dream) from a 17th-century tragicomedy by Pedro Calderón de la Barca. The dreams that haunt Sisa's son Basilio in this chapter belong to both spheres of experience, the serious and the comic (the tragicomic). In the first dream, he witnesses his brother's violent death at the hands of a priest; in the second, he finds himself in a bucolic fairy-tale world where his brother is alive and well, sitting in a tree and in a bell at the same time. At this point, the narrator takes the liberty of citing Hans Christian Andersen's *Sandman,* called Ole-Lukøie (eye-closer), as the author of the dreamed fairy tale. Rizal, it will be recalled, translated Andersen into Tagalog. For the nightmare, on the other hand, the author once again seems to feel personally responsible, shouting an almost mystical commentary from outside into the world of fiction.

In a footnote (*Noli,* page 79) he wonders whether it is a matter of "dream or reality" (*sueño ó realidad*), since the violent perpetrator in Basilio's dream is probably a Franciscan, but in the author's world he is an Augustinian, even known by name, who has the reputation of being a thug. It seems as if the author himself is speaking at this point, because the footnote is marked with the abbreviation "N. del T.", which means nothing other than 'Nota del Traductor', and this of course adds to the confusion, since a translator has no business here. The reader, however, has a choice: either to accept the author's careless handling of his text, or to take the formula "dream or reality" seriously, as if it were a magic spell, alluding to a fundamental ambivalence that runs like a common thread through Rizal's world of experience and fiction.

However, at the point where one might expect the author to make a direct statement about his intention to instruct or persuade, in the dedication to his countrymen that precedes the novel *Noli me tangere,*

Rizal holds back. His intention, he says, is to describe unsparingly the state of Philippine society, which is marked by a cancerous tumour. In medicine, symptom description and diagnoses are usually the necessary prerequisites for appropriate prescriptions and therapy recommendations. The author, however, expressly refrains from this and advises his readers to think for themselves about the nature and origin of the remedies. This corresponds to the speaker/narrator's appeal to his listeners/readers to form their own judgement.

Rhetoric of carnivalesque eloquence

Rizal's *impartialité* refers to this, a term that resembles like a twin the 'objectivity' favoured by Thomas Mann, but here in the sense of impartiality prohibiting the speaker/narrator from passing an unmediated judgement on the facts narratively presented. As the Roman historians (and Rizal) knew, a good orator is characterised by a combination of *fides et eloquentia,* credibility and eloquence. I am not at all suggesting that Rizal's narrator is guided by this ethos. But the author, Rizal himself, did it, claiming that everything in his novel was true. But if the narrator, or even the characters in the novel, were to submit to such an obligation, the masquerade on the narrative stage would become a lie, and it would prove right those grumpy know-it-alls who don't want to distinguish between fiction and fact.

A special feature of Rizal's novels is the link between the plot and the calendar of the church year: in *Noli me tangere* with All Saints'-Day and All Souls'-Day, in *El Filibusterismo* with Christmas. In many Catholic countries, the so-called threshold times, which can last several weeks depending on local tradition, have always been among the most popular occasions for day-long celebrations. All the souls – young and old – of the village or town communities take part in the preparation and performance of processions, passion plays, masses, recitals, dances, concerts, banquets and fireworks; every guest, no matter how foreign – rich or poor, friend or foe, Filipino or Spaniard – is also welcome (*Noli,* p. 143). During these days of celebration, the streets and squares become a fairground and a stage on which everyone, more or less masked or disguised, can pose and, whether in the role of jester or

penitent, enter into a kind of magical contact with a world other than the everyday world.

Mikhail Bakhtin explained this playful search for a different experience as the need to temporarily step out of everyday life without having to leave. The folk festival – whether religious or secular – 'carnivalises' the orderliness that has become fossilised in hierarchies and habits by placing it in a state of ritually stylised anarchy for a limited period of time. What is neatly separated for the sake of the prevailing order – the high from the low, the sacred from the profane, wisdom from folly, purity from impurity, etc. – is mingled together in this period between the seasons, thus taking on a highly ambiguous meaning. Rizal has devoted atmospherically dense descriptions to these carnivalesque events.

In the serious-comic novel, the Menippea lives on in the sublimated form of carnivalesque narrative strategies. Rizal encountered this tradition in Boccaccio's novellas, Cervantes' *Don Quixote* and Voltaire's *Candide*. Although the literary theorist Bakhtin drew his evidence from ancient European festival culture and its ritual dynamics, he seems to want to describe the need for the playful inversion of everyday order as a universal phenomenon. He explains the carnival attitude with the concept of a 'concrete-sensual form' of emotional expression that could be observed 'worldwide', while its performatively generated appearance would transcend the boundaries between the neatly separated realities managed by everyday common sense, in order to place all orders into a twilight of 'ambivalence'.[11]

This is not the place to elaborate on this theory. I mention it here because it opened my eyes to Rizal's intuitive appropriation of those narrative forms that manage to leave that inner contradiction without

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11 M. M. Bachtin: Problemy poetiki Dostoevskogo (1963), Sobranie sočinenij v semi tomach, tom 6 Raboty 1960-x–1970-x gg. Institut mirovoj literatury, im. M. Gor'kogo Rossijskoj akademii nauk. Moskva: Russkie slovari jazyki slavjanskoj kul'tury 2002, 138. – The satirical style of writing is not limited to the European literary tradition, but is part of world literature, cf. Zhang Longxi: The Poetics of World Literature. In: Theo D'haen, David Damrosch and Djelal Kadir (Hg.): The Routledge Companion to World Literature. London & New York 2012, S. 356–364

a neat resolution to which Bakhtin's alludes with the central concept of 'ambivalence'. The linguistic forms of such ambivalences are well known and are explained by Bakhtin primarily in terms of their rhetorical registers of expression and style; for example: ambiguity, parody, travesty, mystification, mundus inversus, and not least – I would add – the genre syncretism, which gleefully disregards the academic boundaries between the social novel, the thesis novel, the artist's novel, the Bildungsroman, the adventure novel, the picaresque, or the romance novel.

Such forms of subversive writing can be found in many of Rizal's literary texts, especially in his 'Romandyptichon'. The entry of the saints into the community – the so-called *paseo* – at the beginning of the religious holidays is part of both All Saints'-Day and Christmas. Rizal's narrator invests in both novels a great deal of space to such an event. In *Noli me tangere* a separate chapter (Chapter 38) is devoted to the procession that passes through the village for the fourth time; in *El Filibusterismo,* Basilio's carriage is caught in the middle of the Christmas procession that takes place on 5 January and re-enacts the entrance of the Three Kings (Chapter 5). The narrator describes the folklore in passing, but pays particular attention to the decorations, the lighting, the music, the bustle of the festivities and the wooden statues of saints that pass by. The narrator deceives the reader, who is eager for ethnographic descriptions of Filipino festival culture, by promising to satisfy his curiosity with feigned friendliness, but then presents him with two parodies of local newspaper reportage in a chapter entitled *Correspondencias* (*Noli,* chapter 28). The motto is: 'Everyone talks about the fair as they like' (*Cada uno habla de la feria como le va en ella*).

The narrator's comments are usually mocking and the observers' judgements ironic, if not sarcastic. The figures of the saints generally have a sad expression, the reason for which, as the text suggests, is their escort. In fact, in one exemplary passage, Saint Joseph "with a resigned and sad expression" is accompanied by two soldiers of the Civil Guard as if they had arrested him (*Fili,* p. 33 ff.). But then the narrator focuses on the wooden figure of the Virgin Mary, who follows Joseph at his heels. Not only is she dressed like an ancient *divina pastora,* but she also hides her sacred head under a "*sombrero de frondeuse*". She

too, the most beautiful, according to the narrator, "wears a sad expression, like all the images that Filipinos make" (*triste igualmente de espresion como todas las imágenes que hacen los filipinos*). But her accessory, the 'rebel hat' (*sombrero de frondeuse*), speaks another language, giving her the flair of an activist ready to take to the barricades like the women of the Paris Commune. The travesty has a double meaning here: literally, it stands for the disguise of Mary as the divine keeper (*divina pastora*), but figuratively it stands for the reinterpretation of the Good Virgin as a rebel, who even – as the text says – seems to be ashamed of the deformation of her figure by the rags that have been slipped under her skirt to reveal her impending motherhood.

The narrative play with ambivalences is, as Bakhtin argues, typical of the carnival experience, whose vanishing points are to be sought in the imaginary worlds of popular festive culture. Basilio senses the "delicious atmosphere of a joyful family celebration" (*Fili,* p. 35: *un aire tan deliciosamente de fiesta alegre y familiar*) as he wanders through the Christmas village. But nothing is the same as it used to be: poverty, he thinks, has increased because the rice harvest has failed, the deadly cattle plague has ravaged the draught animals, the rent keeps rising arbitrarily, and the Guardia Civil attacks are rampant.

Who is the Lord, who the Work?

What Basilio thought about the prevailing arbitrariness is then summarised in the fairground chapter (17) in the middle of the novel in a detailed picture of the topsy-turvy world. Here, one of the fairground stalls offers Filipino society for sale in the form of peasant-like carved wooden figures. Everyone is there, "in all sizes and shapes, types, races and professions of the archipelago, Indios, Spaniards, Chinese, mestizos, monks, priests, employees, mayors, students, military personnel, etc." The onlookers can recognise themselves in them. There is also the Guardia Civil, who escort a man in handcuffs who bears the title "*Pais del Abaká*" (land of the Manilahemp) and looks "as if he were being taken off to be shot" (*Fili,* p. 129). The wood-carved Manila monks on sale in the stall seem to belong to another world, if one takes the text literally:

> No, the friars of the Filipinas were different [unlike the European monks]: elegant, handsome, well-dressed, their tonsures well cut, their features regular and serene, their look contemplative, expression saintly, somewhat pink in the cheeks, a bamboo in one hand and little leather shoes on their feet, making you want to adore them and put them under a bell jar. In place of the symbols of gluttony and drunkenness of their brothers in Europe, those of Manila had the book, the crucifix, the palm of the martyr; instead of kissing simple peasant girls, those of Manila, gravely bowing and almost kneeling, gave their hand to be kissed to children and to adults; instead of the full pantry and dining room, their localities in Europe, in Manila they have the chapel and the study desk; instead of the mendicant friar who goes from door to door on his donkey and his sack asking for alms, the friars of Filipinas pour out gold with full hands among the poor indios …[12]

The beautiful world of wood-carved monks that the narrator describes was probably – if you put yourself in the shoes of the maker and seller – a tempting proposition, for a well-carved and neatly painted religious figure was and still is highly prized by Filipino Catholics. Those who could afford it had a shrine or chapel at home, where an array of wooden fetish figures from the Christian or mystical pantheon awaited worship by the householder. In *Noli me tangere* (Chapter 6), the nar-

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12 "No: los frailes de Filipinas eran otros: elegantes, pulcros, bien vestidos, el cerquillo bien cortado, las facciones regulares y serenas, la mirada contemplativa, espresion de santo, algo de rosa en las mejillas, baston de palasan en la mano y zapatitos de charol en los piés, que dan ganas de adorarlos y ponerlos bajo campanas de cristal. En vez de los símbolos de la gula é incontenencia de sus hermanos en Europa, los de Manila tenían el libro, el crucifijo, la palma del martirio; en vez de besar á las simples campesinas, los de Manila daban de besar gravemente la mano á niños y á hombres ya maduros, doblados y casi arrodillados: en vez de la despensa repleta y del comedor, sus escenarios de Europa, en Manila tenían el oratorio, la mesa de estudio; en vez del fraile mendicante que va de puerta en puerta con su burro y su saco pidiendo limosna, el fraile de Filipinas derramaba á manos llenas el oro entre los pobres indios …" El Filibusterismo 1891, 128. Translation: Jovita Ventura Castro: The Revolution (El Filibusterismo). Manila 1992, 181

rator describes such a collection of devotional objects in Captain Tiago's house with exuberant irony.

He attested to the master of the house a "noisy, sensational piety" (*ruidosa devoción*; *Noli,* p. 29), as well as an enormous respect for the animistic animation of the wooden or clay figures set up in his arsenal of fetishes, which he feared would occasionally erupt. In the above quoted text dedicated to the Kiapó Mass (*Fili,* chapter 17), the narrator is not content with a meagre description either, but conjures up the demon of comparison in order to use it to morally elevate the Filipino monks – their wooden idols, mind you – above their European counterparts. When Rizal wrote this, he could not have known that, after his violent death, he himself would be categorised as a wooden figure among the household gods worshipped by devout families, and eventually even in the canon of saints of the *Iglesia Filipina Independiente.*[13]

A few chapters later, the book provides a counterpoint to the apotheosis of the wooden monk idols. In the 25th chapter of *El Filibusterismo,* entitled "Risas – llantos" (*Laughter – Tears*), a student party is held to celebrate a defeat: The students had failed in their fight for an *Academia de Castellano* because of the opposition of the monks. In the midst of their celebration, which is accompanied by laughter and tears, the student Pecson launches into a speech – similar to a carnival sermon – to emphasise the omnipresence and indispensability of the monk in the life of the Filipinos. Without the monk, he warns his listeners, the Filipino house would collapse, the Filipinos would be bored for lack of the daily immorality staged by the clergy "after Boccaccio and La Fontaine". Pecson's mocking speech culminates in the quintessence:

> The friar is the Father, the indio the Word (*El fraile es el Padre, el indio el Verbo*); the former the artist, the latter the statue, because everything that

13 Quennie Ann J. Palafox: Jose Rizal, a Hero-Saint? National Historical Commission of the Philippines 2012. http://nhcp.gov.ph/jose-rizal-a-hero-saint (9. 6. 2022)

> we are, everything that we think and do, we owe to the friar, his patience, his work, his perseverance of three centuries to modify the form that Nature gave us.[14]

The student's speech puts the world, which has just been turned upside down, back on its feet and at the same time presents a prime example of well-formed ironic double meaning: the indio is allowed to carve a friendly little monk out of crooked wood for domestic use, after the monk, as the true creator and artist, has transformed the man living in the Philippines into an indio down to the marrow with his modelling hand. Rizal puts an allusion into the student's mouth – wrapped in the parodically alienated address of devotion – that would become one of the topoi of later criticism of colonialism: the colonialist potentate as the inventor and creator of the colonised. In *Les damnés de la terre* (1961), Frantz Fanon describes the consequences of this for the self-perception of the subjugated:

> Because it is a systematic negation of the other person and a furious determination to deny the other person all attributes of humanity, colonialism forces the people it dominates to ask themselves the question constantly: "In reality, who am I?"[15]

No matter how violently the students attack the monk teachers in the quoted chapter, the fear and violence spread by the regime has – it seems – made most of them despondent. For they break off the feast and run away when they suspect they are being watched by the monks' spies.

But there is one exception. He appears in the 27th chapter, called *El fraile y el filipino* (The Monk and the Filipino), in the person of the stu-

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14 "El fraile es el Padre, el indio el Verbo; aquel el artista, éste la estatua, porque todo lo que somos, lo que pensamos y lo que hacemos, al fraile se lo debemos, á su paciencia, á sus trabajos, á su constancia de tres siglos para modificar la forma que nos dió Naturaleza!" El Filibusterismo 1891, 200. Slightly modified translation by J. Ventura Castro 1992, 257

15 https://www.goodreads.com/quotes/8781407-because-it-is-a-systematic-negation-of-the-other-person (11. 11. 2024)

dent Isagani. He is the Filipino who takes up the sculptor's parable of the divine monk in order to advance the dialogue in an argument with the Dominican Fernandez, who is considered a liberal.

The old, somewhat hackneyed motto at the beginning of the chapter is *Vox populi, vox Dei* (The voice of the people is the voice of God) and seems to anticipate the victory of the Filipino student over the Spanish monk. Isagani is extremely eloquent and, in another chapter of the novel (Chapter 24), he has already distinguished himself as an enthusiastic advocate of progress and a friend of the unbridled industrialisation of the Philippines. Here he confronts his opponent directly, putting him on the defensive and calling him to account as the representative of the monastic regime in the educational institutions. Towards the end of the dialogue, he raises the question of guilt:

> You have made us what we are. A people that is tyrannised is forced to be hypocritical; he to whom truth is denied, indulges in lies; he who makes himself a tyrant, breeds slaves. There is no morality, you say, let it be so! Although statistics could refute you, because crimes are not committed here like those of many other peoples, blinded by their moralising airs. But, and without wanting now to analyse what constitutes character and to what extent education affects morality, I agree with you that we are defective. Who is at fault for this? Either you who have in your hands our education for three and a half centuries, or we who submit to everything? If, after three and a half centuries the sculptor was not able to do more than a caricature, he must really be stupid.[16]

16 "Lo que somos, ustedes lo han hecho. Al pueblo que se tiraniza, se le obliga á ser hipócrita; á aquel á quien se le niega la verdad, se le da la mentira; el que se hace tirano, engendra esclavos. […] No hay moralidad, dice usted, sea! aunque las estadísticas podrían desmentirle porque aqui no se cometen crimenes como los de muchos pueblos, cegados por sus humos de moralizadores. Pero, y sin querer ahora analizar qué es lo que constituye el carácter y por cuanto entra en la moralidad la educacion recibida, convengo con usted en que somos defectuosos. ¿Quién tiene la culpa de ello? O ustedes que hace tres siglos y medio tienen en sus manos nuestra educacion ó nosotros que nos plegamos á todo? si despues de tres siglos y medio, el escultor no ha podido sacar más que una caricatura, bien torpe debe ser." El Filibusterismo 1891, 210 f. Translation by J. Ventura Castro 1992, 268.

Looking over Isagani's shoulder at the author, the expert speaks here. For Rizal was a talented sculptor whose hand has moulded several fine terracotta figures. Isagani replies to the monk's objection that it is probably due to the poor material by saying that it is all the worse, because in this case the sculptor is behaving like a liar and thief, being paid for sloppy work.

The text explicitly states that the student emerges victorious from the argument with the monk. But is this true? The ambiguity of the story told in the novel, which Rizal's friends, after reading the book, found a disturbing and inappropriate riddle,[17] is particularly present in this central chapter. Although Isagani shows courage in his unwavering speech, his arguments are feeble, resigning himself to the indolence of his generation or, as can be read elsewhere, blind to reality, indulging in future fantasies. Unlike Pecson, who used the sculptor's parable satirically, Isagani even gives his opponent an advantage with this parable, since the figurative speech affirms the coloniser's reifying attitude towards the colonised. It is no coincidence that the monk refers to the indigenous people as "masa mala" (*bad modelling clay*), a reifying inhuman expression that Isagani echoes without contradiction. He simply wants to replace the sculptor, but in no way objects to the dependence on the arrogant Spanish paternalism.

In the monk's opinion, the argument between him and the Filipino finally ends inconclusively. The two adversaries politely take leave of each other, exchanging compliments. A short time later, Isagani is under arrest.

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17 In a letter to Rizal dated 2 October 1891, Graciano Lopez Jaena praises the novel, but considers it politically weak because it contains no encouraging message, but fobs off his compatriots in the Philippines with a riddle that they cannot solve and therefore drives them into despair: "Temo que nuestros paisanos de allá no lleguen á acertar ni atinar la solución del enigma y languidezcan en su desesperación." Epistolario Rizalino III. Manila 1933, 239.

A rare transcontinental example of late 19th-century critiques of racism

Focusing on Ferdinand Blumentritt, José Rizal and Franz Boas

Blumentritt's insight

Traces do not always point at first glance to their author or origin and lead the tracker directly to the data hidden underneath. In many cases, they offer at best ambiguous clues that require at least a minimum of contextual knowledge.

The Bohemian Philippinist Ferdinand Blumentritt laid such a trail in one of his numerous letters to Richard Andree (1835–1912).[1] Among other things, Andree was the editor of a popular journal called *Globus – Illustrierte Zeitschrift für Länder- und Völkerkunde* (Illustrated journal for regional and ethnological studies), which Blumentritt supplied with articles on ethnographic and political news from Southeast Asian, Caribbean and South American countries throughout his scholarly life. On January 30, 1892, he wrote to Andree (I quote an excerpt):

> I have gained an even deeper insight because the Indians [*indios* of the Philippines] regard me as an advocate of their human rights and as a brother and speak with the greatest frankness about their own people, what they otherwise do not do to any white person. One of them once

1 Johann Stockinger: Der große Verteidiger der Philippinen. Teil 1: Leben und Werk von Ferdinand Blumentritt (1853–1913). Wien 2017

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https://doi.org/10.11588/heibooks.1635

> described this relationship in the following words: "You know we civilized Indians find ourselves in the same position towards Europeans as a man in Europe who has risen from a low estate through his own strength and ability and now has to move among people of noble descent by virtue of his position. These high gentlemen may not all have as much sense as the intruder, most of them have also learned much less, but that does not matter, for them the self-made man remains an object of contempt, which of course is not expressed thanks to the social form, but which the 'parvenu' immediately senses. Now the European 'upstart' has it better than we do, for he can succeed in making up a civil service pedigree or the like, and in the end medals and ennoblement completely conceal his ancestry, but we carry our pedigree indelibly in our faces, can never deny it, and so, in the best case, we will be in protection. In the best case, we are favoured in the protective tone or regarded as 'exceptions to the rule', because we are naturally 'inferior beings', cannot grasp the times table and the like".[2]

Blumentritt is quoting a friend who expresses bitterness towards personal injuries caused by discrimination rooted in xenophobia and racism, which still harbour antihuman attitudes today. While class differences can be overlooked, racist stereotyping and patriarchal condescension cannot. Racists treat people as less than fully human beings and categorise them according to external characteristics that denote foreignness. This exclusionary discrimination is based on the idea of a biological racial hierarchy, which places individuals in lower ranks based primarily on their physical appearance.

Blumentritt's reference to human rights is noteworthy. He was undoubtedly acquainted with the Virginia Declaration of Rights of June 12, 1776, which is based on natural law and states that 'all men are by nature equally free and independent and have certain inherent rights.'[3] He would also have been familiar with Article 1 of the *Déclara-*

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2 I would like to thank Johann Stockinger for providing me with a copy of the Blumentritt letter.

3 https://www.archives.gov/founding-docs/virginia-declaration-of-rights (7. 4. 2024)

tion des Droits de l'Homme et du Citoyen of 1798, which begins with the sentence: 'Les hommes naissent et demeurent libres et égaux en droits.' However, the universal validity and worldwide dissemination of Human Rights, as we know them from the UN Charter adopted after the Second World War, were still beyond the scope of his and his contemporaries' vision. Blumentritt's connection between the defense of human rights and racism's limitation of these rights to the supposedly privileged representatives of the 'white race' is remarkable. This connection highlights the limitless claim to validity that the concept of universalism represents.

We know very well today that there is no scientific (biological) evidence for "racial" differences within the *homo sapiens* species: "Race is fabricated, socially made and politically manipulated", as the introduction to the Oxford *Companion to Racial and Ethnic Studies* rightly states.[4] It would therefore be wiser to banish the fatal term – "race" – from critical discourse altogether and instead speak of discrimination with reference to different ideologically biased issues (religious, political, social, cultural, etc.). This is because the biologistic, deterministic core of the word "race" will otherwise continue to exist, even if its use moves away from the narrow focus and shifts to diverse functions in the registers of negative semantics.

In Blumentritt's world, it was common practice to classify humanity into different 'races' based on skin colour. He adopted the racial classification system developed by physician and anthropologist Johann Friedrich Blumenbach (1752–1840), which was based on Carl von Linné's (1707–1778) taxonomy.[5] This system distinguished five 'main breeds':[6]

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4 A Companion to Racial and Ethnic Studies, ed. David Theo Goldberg/John Solomos. Oxford 2002, 3

5 Nicolaas Rupke/Gerhard Lauer (Hg.): Johann Friedrich Blumenbach. Race and Natural History, 1750–1850. London 2019

6 I quote from Blumentritt's essay "¿Hay razas superiores e inferiores?" in the bilingual edition of *La Solidaridad,* translated by Luis Maneru, Volume VII, 1895. Pasig City 1996, 71 ff.

- "white or Mediterranean Caucasians",
- "yellow Mongolians",
- "brown or olive-colored Malays",
- "red Indians",
- "black Africans".

Since the 18th century, the term 'Caucasian' has been used to refer to the 'white race' due to the belief that the 'cradle of humanity' was located in the Asian Caucasus, as loosely based on the Bible. According to this doctrine, the lineages of the Aryans, Semites (Jews), and Hamites (Africans) differentiated and spread across Europe and Africa. It is important to note that this phantasy is without any evidence and has been debunked. Neither Blumenbach nor Blumentritt could find any fault with this fiction. However, they were not racists who persecuted individuals based on their "race" or "caste" with derogatory and exclusionary actions and language.

German-American anti-racism

In 1895, Blumentritt published an essay titled "¿Hay razas superiores e inferiores?" in several instalments in the journal *La Solidaridad* run by young Filipino intellectuals in Spain. The reason for Blumentritt's publication was Franz Boas' lecture *Human Faculty as determined by Race,* which was published at the end of 1894. Ferdinand Blumentritt was convinced that Boas' remarks echoed his own long-cherished thoughts.[7] Therefore, he not only commented on the anthropologist's position critical of racism but also supplemented and reinforced it with detailed examples, as if co-lecturing.

7 In earlier publications, Blumentritt had already rejected the doctrine of "racial purity", citing the historical evidence of inter-racial mixing. In the annual review of the Leitmeritzer Zeitung of 5 November 1881 (p. 1018), there is a brief report on one of his lectures entitled "On the racial purity of the European peoples". I would like to thank J. Stockinger for this reference.

Franz Boas, born 1858 in Minden, Westphalia, started his studies in Heidelberg, worked for the ethnologist Adolf Bastian in Berlin and established modern Anthropology in the USA. In his Brooklyn lecture to the *American Association for the Advancement of Science,* he addressed the concept of "scientific racism", a pseudoscience based on social Darwinism and biology. This false doctrine has become increasingly popular since the 19th century, anticipating the crimes of eugenics and genocide. It is worth noting that three authors and key words were particularly successful in this regard: Arthur de Gobineau (1816–1882), a defender of "white racial purity"; Wilhelm Marr (1819–1904), a fanatical propagandist of "anti-Semitism"; and Houston Stewart Chamberlain (1855–1927), a prophet of "Aryan" imperialism.[8] Not forgetting the rigid apartheid legislation that had been rampant in the USA since the 1870s, which formed the background for Franz Boas' criticism of so-called "racial science".[9]

Boas's own scientific approach aligned with a culturally relativistic hermeneutics that aimed to avoid ethnocentric and racial generalisations. Instead, it demanded that foreign cultures and ways of life be understood on their own terms (emic perspective). This approach does not exclude exchange and cooperation between different cultures and societies. Boas attributed all known forms of civilizational advancement to the recognition of cultural pluralism as a prerequisite for reciprocal learning processes that depend on "intercommunication". The lecture states:

> Proofs without number have been forthcoming which show that ideas have been disseminated as long as people have come into contact with each other and that neither race nor language nor distance limits their diffusion. As all have worked together in the development of the ancient civ-

8 Arthur de Gobineau: Essai sur l'inégalité des races humaines (1853–55); W. Marr: Der Sieg des Judenthums über das Germanenthum (1879); H. S. Chamberlain: Die Grundlagen des neunzehnten Jahrhunderts (1899)

9 On the reactions of scholars to American racial legislation, cf. Charles King: Schule der Rebellen. Wie ein Kreis verwegener Anthropologen Race, Sex und Gender erfand. München 2020, 106

> ilizations, we must bow to the genius of all, whatever race they may represent: Hamitic, Semitic, Aryan or Mongol.[10]

In his lecture, Boas expressed dissatisfaction with the unequal living conditions for 'black' and 'white' citizens in the USA. Similarly, Blumentritt reflected on the inequalities between Jews, 'gypsies', and the German majority society. He clearly rejected the notion of race-related 'innate' characteristics based on one's 'blood'. He attributed the 'parasitic' lifestyles of certain minorities to historical and social conditioning factors, such as work restrictions imposed by the majority society, religious prejudices, and occasional persecution. He believed that all individuals, regardless of their appearance or lifestyle, possess the same intellectual capacity. Blumentritt was sceptical about improving living conditions through assimilation, as this could lead to the loss of the group's characteristic traditions. According to Blumentritt, it is the differences and the richly varied socio-cultural forms of expression within a community that reject compulsive collectivism under the thumb of a dominant 'race'. In his own words: 'Pero entre las esféras de una misma nación, no reina la hemogeneidad.'[11] (Not even between the spheres of one and the same nation reigns homogeneity.)

After conscientiously examining all the knowledge available up to that point, Blumentritt concluded that "there are no special intelligences for any particular race that indicate superiority or inferiority. Neither the white race in general nor its Aryan subgroup in particular can claim any privileges with regard to their intelligence."[12]

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10 F. Boas: Human Faculty as determined by Race. Salem, Mass. 1894, 5

11 La Solidaridad 151, 15. Mai 1895, 104

12 La Solidaridad, ed. Luis Maneru, Volume VII, 1895. Pasig City 1996, 168 ff.

Intelligence innate or acquired?

José Rizal, who was in the third year of his exile on the island of Mindanao when the *Solidaridad* edition cited here was published in 1895, was one of Blumentritt's closest friends and comrades-in-arms. As a vehement critic of the corrupt colonial administration and the abuse of religion, Rizal was targeted by the Spanish authorities for persecution. Upon returning to his Philippine homeland in the summer of 1892, he attempted to establish a reform alliance, the *Liga Filipina,* but was denounced, arrested by the Guardia Civil and immediately deported to his place of exile by order of the Governor General. Despite surveillance by the censorship authorities, he was able to maintain contact with Blumentritt and other European scholars, mainly natural scientists.[13]

Rizal agreed with Blumentritt's theses but also reflected on the genesis, promotion, and development of intelligence. This topic alone shows that he believed intelligence development to be malleable, which contradicts the hereditary-biological claims of racial science. On July 4, 1895, after reading Blumentritt's essay, he wrote to him in *Spanish* (as directed by the police supervising the exile):

> Regarding the intelligence of different races, after careful consideration, I agree that it is not a matter of limited intelligence. Rather, there are disparities in wealth and resources between nations and individuals. It is a misconception that some are born into wealth, as everyone is born equally vulnerable and dependent. The wealthy have simply inherited the assets accumulated by their parents. Intelligence is believed to be inherited. Races that have been forced to use their brains due to certain conditions have developed them more and passed them on to their descendants. The European nations are rich, but the present nations cannot without temerity say that they were born rich: they have needed centuries of struggle, wise combinations, freedom, laws, thinkers, etc., who bequeathed these

13 Cf. the detailed narrative in D. Harth: José Rizals Kampf um Leben und Tod. Facetten einer kolonialismuskritischen Biografie. Heidelberg ²2025, 145–169

> riches to them. The races that are now intelligent are so after a long process of inheritance.[14]

Rizal's heredity thesis is not to be understood biologically, but refers to accumulation through learning processes. When he speaks of "ciertas condiciones especiales", he seems to be suggesting that intelligence, like a survival mechanism, develops in the face of resistance, such as unfavourable living conditions. The conditions he mentions are complex: one driving force is the fight against the one-sided educational monopoly of the Spanish religious schools in the Philippines; other conditions require sensible planning, as this is the only way to put anarchy and arbitrariness in their place; still others are the fight for freedom and legal certainty (*libertad, leyes*) and, last but not least, the abilities attributed to philosophers (*pensadores*) to get to the bottom of these very conditions and to justify them.

The demand for respect for human rights runs like a leitmotif through Rizal's writings criticising colonialism. He had translated the 1789 French *Declaration of the Rights of Man and Citizen* into his native Tagalog. He knew what he was talking about because he and his family had experienced inequality in the form of ethnic and racial discrimination since his earliest youth. He also later reflected on his own prejudices, which had led him, as a student who could do everything with ease, to conclude that his Spanish classmates were lazy and therefore all Spaniards lacked intelligence.

"Tout comprendre, c'est tout pardonner" was the ironic comment he made to Blumentritt on the result of his self-criticism. This seems quite true when one considers what the friend has to say about the man murdered by the colonial regime in his obituary. In this obituary, published in 1897 in the *International Archive for Ethnography* (published in Leiden, Paris, London and Leipzig), Blumentritt endeavoured to characterise his friend through his own statements. After all, he had been involved with him for many years in fierce journalistic battles against the racist polemics of the Spanish supporters of co-

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14 Escritos de José Rizal, Tomo 11: Correspondencia Epistolar II: Cartas entre Rizal yel Profesor Fernando Blumentritt. Manila 1961, 877

lonialism, and had discussed strategies with him in numerous letters. In his obituary, Blumentritt also paraphrases the objections to the devaluation of the indigenous intelligentsia in Rizal's letter from exile of 4 July 1895 (see above). And he even repeats in his own words the complaint of an anonymous Filipino – Eureka! so they were Rizal's words – from the letter to Andree of 30 January 1892 that I quoted at the beginning. In the obituary, he writes without mincing his words (92):

> The Europeans consider themselves the irreplaceable masters of the globe, their race the only bearer of progress and culture, themselves the only legitimate species of the genus *homo sapiens,* while they declare the other races to be inferior, i.e. they deny them the ability to ever appropriate European culture; thus, according to the Europeans, the coloured races are varieties of the genus *homo brutus.* Rizal now asked himself: Are these views correct? […] The coloured man, however noble and accomplished a gentleman he may be, usually finds himself in the position of a second-class parvenu, for his ancestry is indelibly marked on his countenance, which, with the prejudices of the Europeans, brings with it embarrassing humiliations for the coloured man. Everything is criticised; a small mistake, easily overlooked in the case of a cobbler's son who has become a baron, […] provokes a smile and the remark "what's wrong, it's only a coloured man". If you do not violate any etiquette, if you are a skilful lawyer, a capable doctor, this is not taken for granted, but you are admired with the same benevolence as a well-dressed poodle in the circus, but not as an equal human being.[15]

To deny a person or group their cognitive abilities and human dignity is part of the standard repertoire of racist misanthropy. Rizal – writes Blumentritt in his obituary –

> felt deeply as a boy that the Spaniards treated him with contempt simply because he was an *indio.* From that time on, he tried to find out what moral right the Spaniards and the whites in general had to look down on a per-

15 Internationales Archiv für Ethnographie, 10 (1897), 88–92; page numbers in brackets.

> son who thought the same way, learned the same things, and was able to do the same things as they did, just because he had brown skin and straight hair (89).

The discussion of 'moral right' is tricky because it involves the justification of what is or should be 'human'. If Human Rights are taken as the yardstick, the only normative statement is that being human alone justifies the defence of moral rights. But I am human *with* other humans, and 'Mitmenschlichkeit' (common humaneness) involves recognition as well as understanding. Those who are forcibly denied their humanity may appear to settle into the role of *homo brutus,* while secretly laughing at the racist usurper, or they may courageously dedicate themselves to the non-violent struggle for recognition.

"The law has no skin, nor does reason have nostrils"

As is well known, the specific goal of Rizal's reform agenda linked to this struggle was peaceful "association" with the "mother country" Spain, involving a degree of autonomy and self-determination yet to be negotiated with the colonial power. This pointed to a long road of mutual understanding, which might even lead to full independence. But understanding presupposes the recognition of the equality of all concerned, which racism denies by invoking a supposedly scientifically based, allegedly insurmountable inequality between the 'human races'. In short, racist stigmatisation is nothing more than the denial of recognition of the other's "Mitmenschlichkeit". Under these circumstances, there is little chance of understanding, which is why the struggle for recognition must first and foremost be a struggle against the false doctrines of "racial science" and against all varieties of everyday "racial delirium".[16]

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16 I was inspired to choose this metaphor by the Italian anarchist Camillo Berneri (1897–1937), who in 1934 took on the fascist spawn of the "pure race" and the "Aryan" myth in a brilliant essay peppered with quotes from

At least, Blumentritt attested to his friend's ability to understand and explain the prejudices of Europeans. His knowledge of many languages, his ethnographic curiosity, his extensive study of ethnological literature, his boundless travel experiences – all this, together with "the analysis of the feelings that whites and coloured people have for each other", had led him to bring the "Filipino Malays" and the Europeans "closer together as human beings" (88).

However, if we follow Blumentritt, it is not only the social, economic and legal disadvantages, but above all the violence inflicted on the Filipino people and the permanent moral humiliation that Rizal holds against the 'mother country' Spain. His novels tell of the corrupting consequences for everyone, masters and servants, sometimes with a laugh, sometimes with a lament. The metaphor of the "social cancer", with which the author introduces his narrative, reveals the infectious "moral corruption" for which, at the end of the novel, even the well-meaning observer has no convincing cure:

> It's true that the vices of a government are fatal to it. They cause its downfall, but they also kill the society in whose bosom they develop. An immoral government corresponds to a demoralised people. It's a vicious circle: an administration without conscience, rapacious and servile citizens in the villages, bandits and thieves in the mountains! Such a master, such a slave. Such a government, such a country.[17]

The mimesis that appears in the novel is dedicated to the destructive effects of distorted and distorting communication: deception, lies, dissimulation, betrayal and denunciation. In this world, the boundaries between what is norm and what is deviation, what is right and what is wrong, become blurred. By choosing a perspective that is as grotesque as it is disturbing, the author poses the question to the reader as to which "moral right" the 'colourless' European in the role of colonial

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Hitler, Goebbels and Mussolini's speeches. His essay was published a year later in a Buenos Aires publishing house under the title *El Delirio Racista,* and has remained in print for some time.

17 José Rizal: El Filibusterismo. Gent 1891, 283

ruler is supposed to invoke in order to deny "Mitmenschlichkeit" to the 'colourful' part of humanity.[18]

Let's go back to Rizal and ask him directly. In his essay *The Philippines in One Hundred Years,* published in 1889, his advice is not to try to battle racist stereotypes:

> It is pointless to refute certain derogatory remarks made by some nice writers about more or less brown skin, about more or less snub-nosed faces [or about the vapours of wild mountain peoples]. China, for example, which has 414 million inhabitants and a very old civilisation, finds all Europeans ugly and calls them Fan-Kwai [?] or red devils. After all, the [Chinese] aesthetic has 100 million more followers than that of the Europeans. If it really mattered [for example, skin colour], then we would also have to accept that the Latin peoples, especially the Spanish, are inferior to the much whiter Saxons. And as long as it is not said that the Spanish parliament is a meeting of Adonises, Antinouses [classical beauties], *boys* and other such angels; as long as it goes there to legislate and not to philosophise (*socratizar*) or to roam about in imaginary hemispheres, we believe that the Government should not stop at such inconveniences. The law has no skin, nor does reason have nostrils.[19]

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18 In a physical sense, white is not a colour. This shows how stupid it is to say that a "white" race is superior to the "coloured".

19 "Inútil de refutar ciertos inconvenientes de algunos lindos escritores, sobre las pieles más ó menos morenas, y los rostros más ó menos narigudos. En cuestión de estética, cada raza tiene la suya la China, por ejemplo, que tiene 414 millones de habitantes y cuenta con una civilización muy antigua, encuentra feos á todos los europeos á quienes llama Fan-Kwai, ó sea diablos rojos. Su estética tiene 100 millones más de partidarios que la estética europea. Además, si de eso se ha de tratar, tendríamos que aceptar la inferioridad de los latinos, en especial la de los españoles, respecto de los sajones que son mucho más blancos. Y mientras no se diga que la Cámara española es una reunión de Adónises, Antínoos, *boys* y otros *angelos* parecidos; mientras se vaya allí para legislar y no para socratizar ó errar por hemisferios imaginarios, creemos que el Gobierno no se debe detener ante esos inconvenientes. El Derecho no tiene piel, ni la razón narices." José Rizal: Escritos políticos e históricos. Manila 1961, 152

Hunter-gatherer Rizal

The future will do justice to his aspirations and his work!
Oskar Böttger

A scientific tribute

In 1898, a report was published in the *Abhandlungen des Zoologischen und Anthropologisch-Ethnographischen Museums zu Dresden* (Treatises of the Zoological and Anthropological-Ethnographic Museum in Dresden) under the heading "Rhacophorus rizali. A new tree frog from Mindanao", a report by Oskar Böttger (1844–1910), head of the herpetological department of the Senckenberg Museum in Frankfurt am Main. In the preface to his description of the new species, Böttger thanked the museum in Dresden for sending in several "Philippine reptiles" and announced the name of the discoverer of the exotic tree frog:

> At the suggestion of A. B. Meyer, this beautiful frog should be named in honour of Dr. José Rizal. This writer of Tagalog descent, who was successful in the fields of linguistic research, history, geography and literature, who was also a notable sculptor, and who developed a recognised activity as a doctor, especially as an ophthalmologist, collected for years in the fields of zoology and ethnography for the Dresden Museum during his political imprisonment in Mindanao. As is well known, he was shot by the

Hunter-gatherer Rizal.
In: Dietrich Harth: Hero of the Nation and Citizen of the World.
Tracing José Rizal. Essays and Miscellanea. Heidelberg 2025, pp. 129–148.
https://doi.org/10.11588/heibooks.1635

> Spaniards under martial law on 30 December 1896 as one of the intellectual instigators of the revolution that still prevails in the Philippines. The future will do justice to his aspirations and his work![1]

This remarkable short homage raises all kinds of questions, for example, what Rizal had to do with the museum in Dresden and with beautiful frogs in Mindanao, questions which the following essay will try to answer. However, the fact that a German academic is paying the highest tribute to the achievements of a Filipino deserves a brief consideration in the introductory section of my essay.

It is well-known that the Bohemian scholar Ferdinand Blumentritt was particularly active in promoting Rizal's reputation among German scholars, not to mention the food for thought that Rizal owed to him, who condemned with good reason and sharp words the racism and colonialist abuse of religious doctrines that were rampant at the time. Blumentritt's recommendations had introduced the young Asian to the great figures of science, who had created an important platform for interdisciplinary and research-political activities with the founding of the *German Society for Anthropology, Ethnology and Prehistory* in Berlin. In 1887, Rizal became a member of this society, a rec-

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1 "Der schöne Frosch soll auf Vorschlag A. B. Meyers zu Ehren Dr. José Rizals genannt werden. Dieser auf den Gebieten der Sprachforschung, Geschichte, Geographie und schönen Litteratur erfolgreiche Schriftsteller tagalischer Abstammung, der auch als Bildhauer nicht unbeachtet geblieben ist, und der als Arzt, speziell als Ophthalmologe, eine anerkannte Thätigkeit entfaltet hat, sammelte während seiner politischen Gefangenschaft auf Mindanao Jahre hindurch auf den Gebieten der Zoologie und Ethnographie für das Dresdner Museum. Er wurde bekanntlich als einer der intellektuellen Anstifter der jetzt noch auf den Philippinen herrschenden Revolution am 30. December 1896 von den Spaniern standrechtlich erschossen. Die Zukunft wird seinen Bestrebungen und seinem Wirken gerecht werden!" Oskar Böttger: Rhacophorus rizali. Ein neuer Baumfrosch von Mindanao, nebst Fundortnotizen von den Philippinen überhaupt. Abhandlungen und Berichte des Königlichen Zoologischen und Anthropologisch-Ethnographischen Museums zu Dresden, Bd. 7, Nr. 1. Berlin: Friedländer 1898. – All translations in this essay are the property of the author unless otherwise noted.

ognition that made his name known in the German scientific community and beyond, and opened doors to other scientific institutions. It is therefore no exaggeration to see Rizal as a central mediating figure in the exchange between the cultural studies interests of the Filipino elites that emerged at the end of the 19th century and the established German cultural studies scholars doing research in the Philippines.

For young Filipino intellectuals committed to reform and active in Europe, German scholarship became a weapon in the struggle against the arbitrary rule of the Spanish colonial regime in their homeland.[2] This is also reflected in Böttger's passage that Rizal was shot by the Spanish as an "intellectual instigator" of the revolution. That Böttger understands this as an insinuation by the Spaniards, and thus does justice to Rizal's non-violent resistance, is at least hinted at in the last sentence of his homage, which I have chosen as the motto for my review of Rizal's collaboration with German cultural and natural scientists.

A visit to Dresden and the impact

During his four-year exile near Dapitan on Mindanao, Rizal not only kept in touch with Ferdinand Blumentritt, he also corresponded with other European scholars and scientists who spoke German, including the entomologists Napoleon M. Kheil (1849–1923) and Karl Maria Heller (1864–1945), the naturalist and cultural researcher Wilhelm Joest (1852–1897) and the museum director Adolf Bernhard Meyer (1840–1911). However, it was not just an exchange of geographical, linguistic or ethnographic issues, for which one only needs a sheet of paper, a pen, some ink, an envelope, postage and a messenger service. Rather, well-packaged small and large containers, the contents of which were described in accompanying letters, were soon sent to and fro on the long intercontinental journeys, in the manner of a barter transaction.

2 Nathaniel Parker Weston: Specters of Germany. Colonial Rivalry & Scholarship in the Philippine Reform Movement & Revolution. Quezon City 2021. Thanks to Joanna Pfaff for this book.

Of particular interest is the exchange with Adolf Bernhard Meyer, the director of the *Royal Zoological and Anthropological-Ethnographic Museum* in Dresden, which had evolved from a royal "Kunst- und Naturalienkammer" (Art and Natural History Chamber). Rizal, having been recommended by Blumentritt, visited Meyer when he travelled from Heidelberg to Berlin.[3] Meyer had received the guest personally and wanted to show him the collections of the Dresden museum. Rizal wrote about his visit to the museum in a letter to Blumentritt (4 November 1886): "The museum seemed very important to me, unfortunately I was not allowed to stay longer to slowly study everything." (*Das Museum schien mir sehr wichtig, leider dass ich nicht länger bleiben durfte, um langsam Alles studieren zu dürfen.*)[4] When Rizal was working on the draft for an *Association Internationale des Philippinistes* in Paris in 1889, he corresponded with Meyer in order to win him and, with his help, other members of prestige for his ambitious scientific-political project. Meyer himself was full of praise for Rizal's "phenomenal intellectual gifts" (*phänomenale Geistesgaben*).[5]

Rizal's letters to Meyer from 1889 to 1890, of which six have survived,[6] deal with lexical or etymological and other language problems, drugs (hashish), geographical designations in the travelogues of the Maghrebian Ibn Battuta (1304–1369),[7] the search for old and new books, the history of the Filipinas, and not least the lack of common sense on the part of the Spanish colonialists.[8]

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3 On the friendship between Blumentritt and A. B. Meyer see Johann Stockinger (Hg.): Der große Verteidiger der Philippinen Teil 3: Ferdinand Blumentritts Korrespondenz mit A. B. Meyer. Wien 2023

4 Cartas entre Rizal y el profesor Fernando Blumentritt. Manila 1961, 20

5 Cf. Blumentritt's letter of 2 January 1890 to Rizal. In: Cartas entre Rizal y el profesor Fernando Blumentritt, 590

6 Nos. 54, 57–60, 62, published in: Escritos de José Rizal. Cartas entre Rizal y otras personas. Manila 1961.

7 Rizal refers to *Voyages d'Ibn Batoutah,* tr. par C. Defrémery et B. R. Sanguinetti, 4 vols. Paris 1853–1879.

8 In letter no. 59 of 1 December 1889, Rizal sends Meyer a list of the books acquired by Adelbert von Chamisso (1781–1838) in the Philippines with a

After a break of several years Rizal again contacted A. B. Meyer from his exile in Dapitan. Eleven letters from June 1893 to May 1895 have been preserved.[9] As these show, Rizal now turned his attention to the study and collection of more or less unknown species of the endemic fauna of Mindanao. In a letter dated 8 June 1893, he offered to buy 'birds, reptiles, etc.', specimens he wanted to send to Europe via the chemist Alexander Schadenberg (1852–1896), who lived in Manila. Curiously, in order not to pay too much for the planned purchases, he asked Meyer for a current price list. Rizal was by no means a poor exile, for he had been the winner of a large sum of money in the *Reales Loterías Españolas de Filipinas*.

Insects native to Mindanao (beetles, butterflies, etc.), vertebrates and skulls (birds, lizards, snakes, etc.) and the shells of marine molluscs (snails, clams) were considered for trade. To study the latter, Rizal even immersed himself in conchology in order to be able to organise his collections according to the international zoological nomenclature.[10] An assistant to Meyer, Dr. K. M. Heller,[11] instructed Rizal on the basics of preservation and packaging and encouraged him to intensify his hunt for rare species with the help of the locals. On the occasion of a new parcel from Dapitan, he wrote to Rizal:

> I will describe and photograph the new beetle […]. The species is very rich in varieties, which in part are very difficult to recognise, I thought for practical reasons I should not have to dispense with giving it its name, without choosing a name, which also determines the variety […]. I have no doubt that your next shipment will bring something new again and I will then have the opportunity to fulfil my promise. If you were to get the

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request to send them to him or Pardo de Tavera; among them are several Tagalog textbooks, but also a copy of the *Sucesos de las Islas Filipinas* (1609) by the Spanish colonial official Antonio de Morga.

9 Nos. 109, 111, 112, 118, 121–124, 127, 129, 130, 133

10 Notas sobre Conchología e Ichtiología. In: Escritos de José Rizal: Escritos Varios II. Manila 1961, 341–345

11 Cf. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Karl_Borromaeus_Maria_Josef_Heller

natives to collect, there would undoubtedly be many new varieties there, for in 13 beetles to find a novelty is an extraordinarily favourable result. If you succeeded in collecting a few hundred beetles, the result would be very remunerative for science.[12]


NOTE XXI.

ZWEI NEUE APOGONIEN VON DEN PHILIPPINEN

BESCHRIEBEN VON

Dr. K. M. HELLER.

Apogonia Rizali, sp. n. ♂, ♀.

Patria: Insulae Philippinae, Mindanao, Dapitan, leg. Dr. José Rizal [1]), Mus. Dresd. N°. 9221 ♂ und 10609 ♀.

1) José Rizal, auf Luzon geboren, von tagalischen Eltern stammend, studirte in Manila, Madrid, Leipzig, Berlin, Paris, London und Brüssel und hat sich als Schriftsteller auf den verschiedensten Gebieten, als Arzt und Künstler einen hervorragenden Namen gemacht. Er sammelte, in politischer Verbannung auf Mindanao lebend, Jahre lang für das Dresdner Museum. Am 30. December 1896 liess er sein junges Leben für seine persönlichen und patriotischen Ideale. Er wurde standrechtlich von den Spaniern in Manila erschossen.

Notes from the Leyden Museum, Vol. XIX.

Königl. Zool. Mus. Dresden, October 1897.

Dapitan
Mindanao
10609. ♀
Staatl. Museum für Tierkunde Dresden

Copy from an article by K. M. Heller, published in *Notes from the Leyden Museum* XIX (1897), 191–193. The picture of the specimen, a member of the *Scarabaeidae* family, is a later addition

12 "Describire y fotografiare el nuevo escarabajo, pero como se me llego en el sexto … y la especie es muy rica en variedades, que en parte son muy dificiles de reconocer, crei por motivos practicos no tener que prescindir de darle su nombre, sin elegir un nombre, que tambien determine la variedad, a saber: *Atonia ochroplagiata*. No tengo la menor duda de que su proximo envio algo nuevo otra vez traera y tendria entonces la ocasion de cumplir mi promesa. Si Vd. lograse que los nativos coleccionasen, alli habria sin duda alguna, muchas variedades nuevas, pues en 13 escaraba-

What Heller promised, the combination of the newly discovered beetle's provenance with Rizal's name, only became reality in 1897. And there were – also posthumously announced – several other species that would immortalize Rizal's name in the realm of zoological knowledge: a flying lizard (*Draco rizali*), the tree frog (*Rachophorus rizali*), and another beetle (*Spathomeles rizali*).

Dead nature in exchange for "Geist"

One of the triggers for Rizal's hitherto unknown passion for hunting and collecting (he even bought a hunting rifle) was the increasing demand from European scientists who, through Meyer, asked him in his forced exile for help in their search for previously undiscovered species in this part of the world. Also, unlike before, in his rural exile Rizal had more direct contact with the flora and fauna of his surroundings, so that the new observations and experiences awakened in him his peculiar thirst for discovery: "In the field of natural sciences, my country can offer treasures yet undiscovered; there are many species yet unknown in zoology and botany, judging by the discoveries that are being made".[13]

On 10 April 1894, he wrote to Meyer, referring to a shipment of goods sent via Manila with the help of Alexander Schadenberg:

> Do not worry about what it [the specimens he sent] is worth. This and what I will send later will not be enough to pay for the collection of books you have sent me. I send you dead nature and you send me your spirit, the

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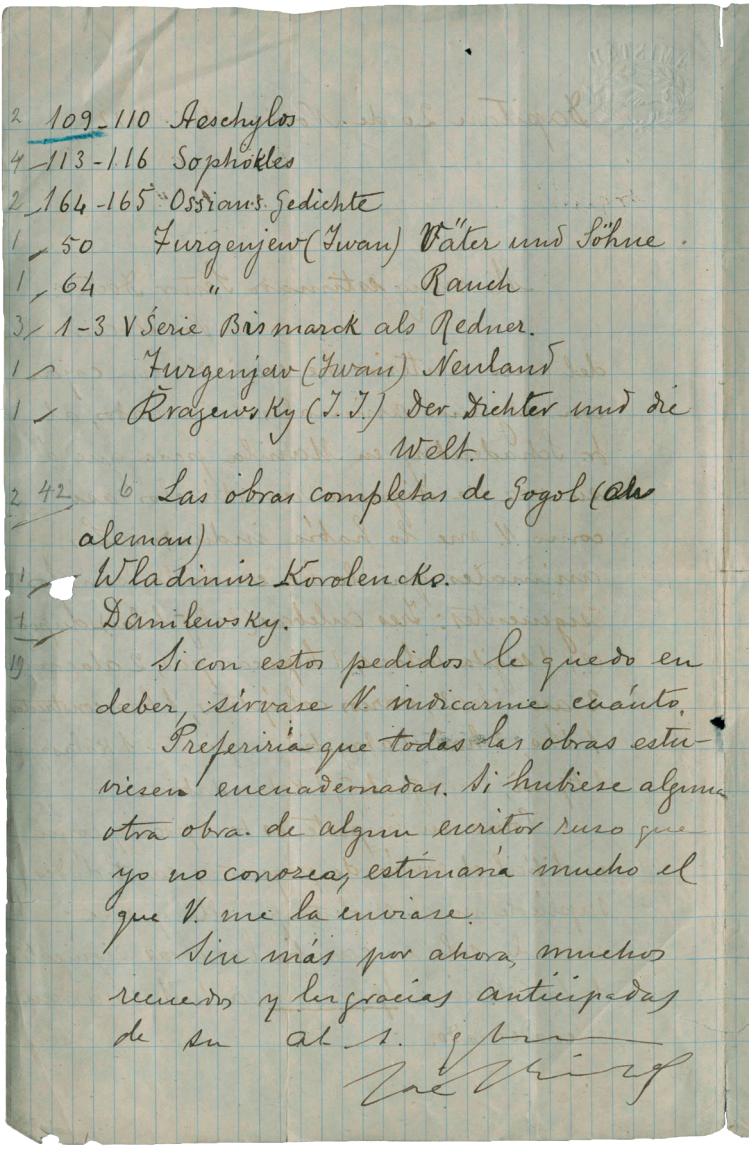
jos encontrar una novedad es un resultado extraordinariamente favorable. Si Vd. lograse coleccionar algunos cientos de escarabajos, el resultado seria muy remunerativo para la ciencia." Cartas entre Rizal y otras personas 1961, 332

13 "En el ramo de las Ciencias Naturales mi pais le puede brindar tesoros no descubiertos aún; hay muchas especies no conocidas aún en la Zoología y en la Botánica á juzgar por los descubrimientos que se van haciendo." Letter of 15 January 1895 to Blumentritt. The Rizal–Blumentritt Correspondence, Vol. II. Manila 1992, 496


2 109-110 Aeschylos
4 113-116 Sophokles
2 164-165 Ossians Gedichte
1 50 Turgenjew (Iwan) Väter und Söhne.
1 64 " Rauch
3 1-3 V Série Bismarck als Redner.
1 Turgenjew (Iwan) Neuland
1 Krajewsky (J. J.) Der Dichter und die Welt.
2 42 6 Las obras completas de Gogol (ale-
aleman)
1 Wladimir Korolenckos.
1 Danilewsky.
19 Si con estos pedidos le quedo en deber, sírvase V. indicarme cuánto.
Preferiría que todas las obras estuviesen encuadernadas. Si hubiese alguna otra obra de algun escritor ruso que yo no conozca, estimaría mucho el que V. me la enviare.
Sin más por ahora, muchos recuerdos y las gracias anticipadas de su ab. s. y

Extract from the order letter dated 20 November 1893 to A. B. Meyer (https://collections.carli.illinois.edu/digital/collection/nby_eeayer/id/7296 [10. 3. 2025])

> *Geist,* on the book pages. From now on I will send you what I can; you will appreciate it and send me in scientific and literary works what you think it is worth. When I have more freedom, I will look for skulls of the Monteses. […] Do you want ethnological collections?[14]

The cargo mentioned by Rizal included both very small and very large specimens: among other things the skeletons of a seahorse, a boa and a shark (French: *requin*). The books to which he referred as 'spiritual goods', he had ordered in 1893 as 'payment' for the expenses he had incurred in various shipments. The titles of the books he wanted to read, he took from a catalogue published by the Wilhelm Spemann Verlag in Stuttgart.

Rizal's choice is somewhat surprising, since in addition to Greek classics (Aeschylus, Sophocles) and four nineteenth-century Russian authors (Ivan Turgenev, Nikolai Gogol, Vladimir Korolenko, Nikolai Danilevsky) – all in German translation – he also ordered James Macpherson's Gaelic Songs of Ossian,[15] Bismarck's speeches and a book by the Polish-German bestselling author Józef Ignacy Kraszewski (1812–1887). Apparently, Rizal was in the process of constructing a library of world literature in German.

However, he was not only interested in expanding his fiction and political library. To ensure that the consignments of naturalia that Rizal wanted to send to Europe reached his distant business partners in good condition, he was forced to get to grips with the professional techniques of conservation, preparation and packaging. On 14 March 1895, he wrote to Meyer again, this time to thank him for the relevant technical literature that the cooperative director of the Museum had

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14 "No se ocupe Vd., en lo que esto vale; esto y lo que en viaré después no serán suficientes para pagar la colección de libros que Vd. me ha enviado. Yo le remito la muerta naturaleza y Vd. en cambio me envía su espíritu, el *Geist* en las páginas de los libros. En adelante le enviaré lo que pueda, Vd. lo apreciará y me remitirá en obras científicas y literarias lo que Vd. crea que vale. Como tenga más libertad le buscaré cráneos de monteses. […] ¿Desea Vd. colecciones etnológicas?" Escritos de José Rizal. Correspondencia Epistolar IV: Cartas entre Rizal y otras personas. Manila 1961, 310 f.

15 https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/James_Macpherson

sent him. In his letter of thanks, he abbreviated the titles of the books as follows 'Naturaliensammler' and 'Präparieren und Ausstopfen'. According to my research, these abbreviations refer to the following textbooks:

- Johann Max Hinterwaldner: Wegweiser für Naturaliensammler. Eine Anleitung zum Sammeln und Conservieren von Thieren, Pflanzen und Mineralien jeder Art, sowie zur rationellen Anlage und Pflege von Terrarien, Aquarien, Volièren etc. Wien: A. Pichler's Witwe und Sohn, 1889 (*A guide for natural history collectors. An instruction to collecting and preserving animals, plants and minerals of all kinds, as well as to the rational organisation and care of terrariums, aquariums, aviaries, etc.*)
- Leopold Martin: Taxidermie, oder die Lehre vom Konservieren, Präparieren und Naturalien sammeln, Ausstopfen und Aufstellen der Thiere. Weimar: Bernhard Friedrich Voigt, 1869/1870 (*Taxidermy, or the science of preserving, preparing and collecting natural specimens, stuffing and mounting animals*)

Among the animal specimens sent by Rizal to Meyer's address was the carcass of a tree dweller from the Tarsiidae family preserved in spiritus (English: *tarsier;* German: *Koboldmaki*; Cebuano: *mawumag*). The specimen from Mindanao bears the subspecies name *Carlito syrichta carbonarius.* In his publication *Säugethiere vom Celebes- und Philippinen-Archipel* (Mammals from the Celebes and Philippine archipelagos) Meyer mentioned the sender's name (p. 9)[16] and had an illustration added to the description, an enlargement of which is now on display on one of the facades of the *Philippine National Museum of Natural History* in Manila.

16 Also Schadenberg sent a tarsier specimen to Meyer. In Meyer's description from 1895, Rizal's name is not mentioned. However, the text distinguishes between a stuffed Tarsius carcass and one preserved in spirit from Mindanao. This makes it clear that the latter was preserved and shipped by Rizal. Cf. Abhandlungen und Berichte des Königlichen Zoologischen und Anthropologisch-Ethnographischen Museums zu Dresden, Bd 5, Nr. 1

Adolf Bernhard Meyer: Säugethiere vom Celebes- und Philippinen-Archipel 1–2. Königl. Zoologisches und Anthropologisch-Ethnographisches Museum zu Dresden. Berlin: R. Friedländer & Sohn, 1896–9, plate IV

The graveyards of physical anthropology

Rizal's commitment to scientific collecting and the related activities he developed in rural exile may have flattered his intellectual agility, but it also cast a shadow over his new passion. Because, it seems, he was trying to compete with those European exponents of physical anthropology who were not reticent to use measuring sticks and craniometers to go to the body of the natives in the colonies. In two different letters to Meyer, he asks for the delivery of the instrument called a "craniometer", which is essential for measuring skulls. In one case (letter dated April 10, 1894) he promises to look for skulls of the mountain dwellers (Monteses); in another case (letter dated July 31, 1894) he promises "une bonne rémission de têtes pour l'Anthropologie" (a good remission of heads for Anthropology) and then claims like a positivistic anthropologist: "An interesting study of the Mindanaw races may prove useful."[17] But in an earlier letter (14 March 1894) Rizal had written in German: "Leave also the craniometric instruments aside; I don't think they will let me go after the Subanos". (*Lassen Sie auch die kraniometrischen Instrumente beiseite; ich glaube sie lassen mich nach den Subanos nicht.*) His fear, or hope, at the time was that he might be transferred to another part of the archipelago. In any case, the correspondence with A. B. Meyer that has survived

17 "J'attends toujours ma liberté pour séjourner quelques semaines parmi les subanos, monteses et moros de cette ile. Je suis convaincu qu'il y a encore beaucoup à étudier. Comptez avec une bonne rémission de têtes pour l'Anthropologie. Si vous croyez que je peux encore recevoir un petit étui d'instruments de craniométrie pour mes oiseaux, poisson etc. je le préfèrerais certainement. Une intéressante étude sur les races de Mindanaw pourra être d'utilité." Cartas entre Rizal y otras personas, [p. 318b]. – Subanos and Monteses (today called Bukidnon people) are peoples in Mindanao with different ethnic orientations. "Moros", however, is not an ethnic label but refers to various groups of Muslim faith in and out Mindanao, so craniometric studies would be pure nonsense in this case. – I quote Rizal's letters to Meyer from the copies of the facsimiles in: https://collections.carli.illinois.edu/digital/collection/nby_eeayer/id/7390

is just as confusing as the situation of exile in which Rizal found himself.[18]

Since the eighteenth century, cranial measurements have been part of the standard repertoire of anthropological research methods. The positivist bias of drawing conclusions about the psyche and intelligence from external appearance or measurable anatomy gained momentum in the 19th century, primarily through its connection with biological race-theories. In this connection, the dimensions and volume of skulls – whether of living or dead people – were treated as facts with the help of which radical racists sought to prove the existence of natural inequality characteristics and, at the same time, the cognitive superiority of European-Atlantic brains.

Today, such pseudo-scientific methods are suspected of stigmatisation and dehumanisation and are rightly criticized as an expression of "group-focused misanthropism".[19] However, the stacks of many ethnological museums in Europe still contain enough remnants of the anthropometric furore to embarrass the administrators of such scientific graveyards with the unpleasant questions of how, from where, and to what purpose. Since the Enlightenment, the growing demand for bones among anthropologists had given rise to a macabre business model of collecting, buying, and trading. Moreover, anything that was not based on mutual, trust-based agreements and transported via traceable trade routes had a dark, not to say criminal, background. Grave desecrations and robberies are well documented, and the perpetrators were often respected members of the scientific community.

Rizal's penfriend and trading partner, Adolf Bernhard Meyer, was one of the obdurate adventurers among scholars who did not shy away from the violent opening of graves and subsequent bone snatching. In 1878, when he was already director of the Dresden Museum, he had a small book privately printed entitled *Ueber die Negritos oder Aëtas*

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18 Cf. chapter 7 "Verbannung und Tod" (*Banishment and Death*) in my book *José Rizals Kampf um Leben und Tod,* 2025; especially page 161 f.

19 On the concept of "gruppenbezogene Menschenfeindlichkeit" (*group-focused enmity/misanthropism*) see Andreas Zick, Beate Küpper, Andreas Hövermann: Die Abwertung der Anderen. Eine europäische Zustandsbeschreibung zu Intoleranz, Vorurteilen und Diskriminierung. Berlin 2011

der Philippinen (On the Negritos or Aëtas of the Philippines). His intention was, he wrote in the preface, to distribute the booklet among the Germans and those who understood German in the Philippines, so that the willing among them could assist him by collecting "skulls and skeletons, ethnographic objects, dictionaries, sentences and coherent speech in the various Negrito dialects" and sending them to him. In Meyer's eyes, the hunter-gatherer societies of the Negritos and Aetas, whom he, a follower of Darwin, regarded as living fossils, were in danger of extinction, which is why he was in a hurry to gather as much information as possible about these dark-skinned, small-bodied mountain peoples. Outside help, even from laymen, was welcome and obviously did not contradict Meyer's ethically unconcerned understanding of science in other respects. In his private publication of 1878, he openly describes how he proceeded on his forays through the Negritos' graves:

> As I was not constantly surrounded by so many Negritos here and therefore less observed, and as I sent these savages away a few days before my departure, I succeeded, with the help of the Christian Tagals who lived in the hut where I had set up my quarters, in locating a number of Negrito graves and robbing them of their contents at night and armed, although not entirely without risk to my life. Let it not be thought that I touched without hesitation the most sacred thing that these poor savages might possess, knowing that I would hurt them as much if they realised the robbery as it would hurt us to see the bones of our relatives dug up by strangers, packed in sacks and dragged away. I therefore endeavoured to work as secretly and carefully as possible, which was also necessary for my own safety, so as not to expose myself to their revenge, and to always restore the graves to such a state that the robbery could not easily be outwardly betrayed. But I could not make up my mind to refrain from this robbery altogether.[20]

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20 "Da ich hier nicht von so vielen Negritos beständig umgeben und daher weniger beobachtet war, auch einige Tage vor meiner Abreise diese Wilden fortschickte, so gelang es mir mit Hülfe der christlichen Tagalen, welche die Hütte, bei der ich mein Quartier aufgeschlagen hatte, bewohnten, eine Reihe von Negrito-Gräbern ausfindig zu machen und sie nächtlicherweile und be-

Meyer's confession may sound like a shameful admission of a morally reprehensible act. In truth, however, it shows all too clearly that nothing was sacred to the narrow-minded scientist's mind when it came to outdoing the competition of French travellers to the Philippines and anthropologists in the competition for data and tangible materials.[21] However, he probably despised the Tagals who had helped him in his raid as much as he despised the Negritos, noting that they regarded those "not as human beings at all, but – with great injustice – as a kind of ape" (*gar nicht als Menschen, sondern – mit großem Unrechte – als eine Art Affen*).[22] Perhaps Meyer's assessment of the racist devaluation of Negritos as a "great injustice" is nevertheless an indication that he was able to recognize something human in the other, even if he was dark-skinned. Evolutionary theory suggests this, since it holds that the living fossil is less animalistic than an early phase of anthropogenesis.

It is not my intention in this case to draw a clear conclusion. Rather, I wonder if Rizal was aware of Meyer's boasts about his grave robberies in the Philippines. In a letter dated 31 July 1894, he thanks Meyer for his "magnifique ouvrage sur les Negrítos". It remains unclear, however, which of Meyer's publications on the Negritos he is referring to. In any case, there is no entry for A. B. Meyer's booklet in Esteban de Ocampo's *Rizal as a Bibliophile* (1960), even if this offers no conclusive evidence.

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waffnet, wenn auch nicht ganz ohne Gefahr meines Lebens, ihres Inhaltes zu berauben. Man möge nicht glauben, dass ich ohne Schwanken das Heiligste, was diese armen Wilden vielleicht besitzen, antastete, da ich wusste, dass ich sie ebenso empfindlich verletzte, wenn sie den Raub bemerkten, wie es uns verletzen würde, die Gebeine unserer Anverwandten von Fremden ausgegraben, in Säcke gepackt und fortgeschleppt zu sehen. Ich suchte daher so heimlich und vorsichtig als möglich zu Werke zu gehen, was auch meiner eigenen Sicherheit wegen, um mich ihrer Rache nicht auszusetzen, geboten war, und die Gräber stets wieder in einen solchen Zustand zu bringen, dass äusserlich der Raub sich nicht leicht verrathen konnte. Allein von diesem Raube ganz abzustehen, konnte ich mich nicht entschliessen […]." A. B. Meyer 1878, 21

21 See D. Harth: José Rizals Kampf um Leben und Tod. Heidelberg ²2025, 253 ff.

22 Ibid. 23

It may sound bizarre, but there was another Meyer with the first name Hans, who gave Rizal a book in which he describes his own grave robbery among the Igorot in the Philippines. Hans Meyer belonged to the Meyer family, which became known as the publishers of 'Meyers Konversations-Lexikon'. He was a far travelling globetrotter, who published in 1885 his experiences in a report entitled *Eine Weltreise: Plaudereien aus einer zweijährigen Erdumsegelung* (A trip around the world: Chats from a two-year circumnavigation of the globe).[23] Rizal met Hans Meyer when he was in Leipzig on his way from Heidelberg to Berlin. It is highly likely that the Igorot skulls H. Meyer got hold of ended up in Rudolf Virchow's laboratory in Berlin.

Works and days in Talisay

Rizal knew that the German anthropologists he had met in person, including Rudolf Virchow, were carrying out skull and body measurements on dead and living people on a large scale. In this way they wanted to confirm to what extent supposedly innate characteristics could be deduced from the data they perceived and measured externally. Did Rizal, who – without becoming doctrinaire – sympathised with progress through science, take part in skull measurements or carry them out on his own initiative?

On May 9, 1894, he did not yet have any craniometric tools at his disposal. On this day, he wrote to Blumentritt from his exile residence in Talisay:

> With this letter I beg your friend Herr [Napoleon M.] Kheil, whom I greet affectionately. I am sending the butterflies to my friend in Dresden, who will arrange for them to be forwarded to you: this is what I have begged him to do. They are all butterflies collected in my garden by my seven boys during the month of April and the beginning of May. I will try to make other, better collections than this one, as I am learning. Here I have had

23 H. Meyer reports on his grave robbery on pages 269 ff. of his 'Plaudereien'.

R. Virchow with craniometer and sculls (https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Rudolf_Virchow,_1891,_by_Hanns_Fechner.jpg)

> three Subanos living in one of my houses for two months. One was operated because of a tumour weighing two and a half kilos. He retired cured, like Abelard of the Middle Ages. I was able to study their customs. They are a peaceful, hard-working and very quiet people. I have not been able to take craniometric measurements because I have no instruments. How are you doing over there? Here we have the southwest (monsoon) and the waters again. Gott möge uns beistehen […] The stream near the house has become a torrent; the sea on the beach is active night and day; and when the tide comes in it throws 15 metres from our dining room huge raging waves that only subside at the foot of my orange trees.[24]

In this remarkable letter, Rizal talks, among other things, about the butterflies in his garden (*jardín*). In fact, he had begun early to "civilise" (his words) the fallow land he had acquired.[25] He had his nipa-roofed

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24 "Por esto correo complazco a tu amigo Herr [Napoleon M.] Kheil a quién saludo afectuosamente. Envío las mariposas a mi amigo in Dresden quien se encargará de remitírselas: así se lo he suplicado. Son todas mariposas cogidas en mi jardín por mis siete chicos, durante el mes de abril y principios de mayo. Procuraré hacer otras colecciones mejores que esta pues voy a aprendiendo. Aqui he tenido tres Subanos viviendo en una de mis casitas durante dos meses. Uno fue operado de un tumor que pesaba siete libras y media. Se retiró curado. como Abelardo de la Edad Media. Yo he podido estudiar sus costumbres. Son gente dpacifica, trabajadora y muy callada. No he podido tomar medidas craneométricas por no tner instrumentos. Como van Uds. alli? Aquí tenemos otra vez el sudoeste (monzón) y las aguas. Gott möge uns beistehen. […] El arroyo cerca de casa se ha convertido en torrente; el mar en la playa se fecunda noche y día; y cuando sube la marea nos arroja a 15 metros de nuestro comedor, enormes olas furibundas que van a morir al pie de mis aranjos." Letter to Blumentritt dated 9 May 1894, published in: J. Stockinger: Der große Verteidiger der Philippinen, Teil 2: Biografische Skizzen zu Ferdinand Blumentritt (1853–1913). Wien 2020, 401. The original letter is in the possession of Blumentritt's descendants.

25 Letter to Blumentritt dated 15 February 1893: "Vivo con el Señor Gobernador, sin embargo de que la mayor parte del día la paso en mis terrenos, en una casita que me he mandado construir *sub tegmine manguferae,* en medio de arboles frutales (artocárpeas, theobromas, sansonias, etc.). Me dedico a desmontar mis terrenos para sembrar café y cacao, que se dan muy bien, a pesar de lo montuosos y pedregosos que son. Tendré probablemente unas hectáreas compradas a los diferentes dueños que las tenían abando-

bamboo house built, he wrote, "sub tegmine manguferae" (*under a mango canopy*) in the midst of fruit-bearing trees. The immediate surroundings were cleared, comfortable paths, steps and benches were laid out, and there was obviously no shortage of flowers, as evidenced by the abundance of butterflies. Everything served the purpose of refreshment and aesthetics, while the cash crops – Abacá, coffee, cocoa, etc. – grew outside the boundaries of Rizal's garden.

And yet, the landlord in exile was not entirely satisfied, because from his words one can almost hear the self-proclaimed anthropologist's regret that he had no measuring instruments and therefore could not act. Nevertheless, it was easy for him to slip into the role of ethnologist to observe the *costumbres* of the guests from the Subano tribe, who were at home on the Zamboanga Peninsula (Mindanao). The reason for their visit was apparently some kind of physical ailment of one of them. The nature of the "operation" mentioned in the letter is not concealed. The comparison with Abelard provides a clear answer: Peter Abelard (1079–1142) was a famous French theologian of high scholasticism who lived in forbidden love with a girl named Heloisa and was punished for this 'sin' by her relatives with castration.[26] It is quite possible that Rizal's "operation" had to do with some weird *costumbres* of the Subanos he mentioned.

Rizal's letter gives the reader a complex insight into his versatile activities and the circumstances he had to deal with. In a later letter addressed to his friend from Leitmeritz on December 19, 1894, he will describe the routines of his daily business. Here, however, he lists some of his special activities as a naturalist, a surgeon, and as a farmer who has to worry about his orange plantations. The life on his land

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nadas; están situadas a orillas del mar, dentro de la bahía de Dapitan. […] Me voy haciendo agricultor, porque aquí apenas, apenitas me dedico a la medicina. Ya tengo parte de los bosques limpia: aunque es muy pedregosa, tiene, sin embargo, buenos puntos de vista, hermosas rocas acantiladas: estoy abriendo caminos para hacer un bosque civilizado, con sendas bien trazadas, con escaleras, bancos, etc." Epistolario Rizalino IV, 111 f. On the contexts, see D. Harth: José Rizals Kampf um Leben und Tod. Heidelberg ²2025, 156 f.

26 https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Peter_Abelard

seems to unfold between anthropological ambitions and the turmoil of nature. But he neither forgets his penchant for scholarly allusions, nor his resistance to his Spanish prison guards by calling on God in German, thus circumventing the language ban imposed on him.

It is rather unlikely that Rizal later came into possession of the craniometric tools he was asking for; I have found no evidence that he was able to get his hands on such a tool. He would not have been able to do much of anything without instruction in its professional use, as his German correspondents were probably aware. Moreover, it was unlikely that the Spaniards would have allowed him to travel to the territories of the indigenous peoples whom he naively regarded as potential objects of research.

Rizal's excursion into animal and human sciences remained an episode in his short life. However, the lively exchange with European friends and researchers gave him the opportunity to get to know, name and shape the environment into which the banishment had thrown him. In his numerous letters he recorded his many activities during the years of exile (1892–1896): he worked as a doctor, a landscape-builder, a teacher, a farmer and as a reliable, self-educating partner for established scientists in Europe. Of course, his Spanish enemies kept an eye on him there, but they did not prevent him from moving relatively freely in the fields of activity listed here, making himself useful and gaining recognition at the same time.

It is all the more difficult to understand why he wanted to leave all this behind to take up the duties of a Spanish military doctor in Cuba. He knew very well what he was getting into: a colonialist bloody war against an independence movement.[27]

27 John Lawrence Tone: War and Genocide in Cuba, 1895–1898. Chapel Hill 2006

Rizal's Wanderlust

A trilogy and a postscript

Where you are not, there is the happiness!
Georg Philipp Schmidt, 1821

I Wandering and travelling in different worlds

There is something sentimental about walking long distances on foot on hiking paths (*auf Wanderwegen*) in the countryside for one's own pleasure and refreshment. Modern city dwellers cultivate "wandern" as a leisure activity and as a compensation for the purposeful motivation demanded of them by societies trimmed for performance. Beautiful hiking trails associated with Rizal's name can be found in the Philippines, for example the Tutuban Rizal Trail on the island of Masbate; or in Germany, the forest path connecting Wilhelmsfeld with Heidelberg, which Rizal used almost daily between April and June 1886 on the way from Pastor Ullmer's vicarage to the eye clinic of the university.

Rizal was well aware that his familiar approach to the unpredictable forces of nature was categorically different from the European view of nature. In a short text entitled *Discurso en Leitmeritz,* he describes the habit of wandering in nature as a touristic and cult-like custom of the "pueblos germanos", but also mentions its therapeutic and aesthetic benefits:

> Certainly the vegetation of my homeland is rich and the entire landscape enameled with brilliant colours. But this country (Bohemia) is also beau-

Rizal's Wanderlust. A trilogy and a postscript.
In: Dietrich Harth: Hero of the Nation and Citizen of the World.
Tracing José Rizal. Essays and Miscellanea. Heidelberg 2025, pp. 149–180.
https://doi.org/10.11588/heibooks.1635

> tiful for its simplicity and the idyllic landscape. For tourists here, nature is an object of admiration and of a special cult that serves to uplift the soul. When our nerves are frayed, we cannot tolerate the best music in the world, nor the comfort of friends, nor the distractions of social life. But if, as in the European countries inhabited by the Germanic peoples, we are accustomed to read in the expression of nature (*a leer en la expresión de la naturaleza*), we find the best consolation in the solitude of the forest, gazing at the clouds crossing the sky, admiring the beauty of the flowers and listening to the lively song of the little birds. We forget our worries and sorrows, the hand of the Creator caresses us, and when we return home we feel refreshed, for nature has rejoiced over what had previously saddened the soul.[1]

This is actually a romantic description that presupposes man's ability to read the 'language of nature', the idioms of which can be perceived in the forests, the clouds, the flowers and the chirping of the birds. Rizal's reflection alludes here to the idea of a divine creation of nature, without paying tribute to the religious sources of this idea. It is noteworthy that he immediately switches from the distanced description of others to the mode of self-affliction (*estamos afligidos …; estamos*

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1 "Seguramente la vegetacion de mi patria es rica y todo el paisaje esmaltado de brillantes colores: pero este pais (de Bohemia) es tambien hermoso por su sencillez y lo idilico del paisaje. Para los turistas de aquí la naturaleza es objeto de admiración y de un culto muy especial que sirce para enaltecer la alma. Cuando estamos afligidos, nuestros nervíos se agitan, no podemos tolerar el eco de la mejor música del mundo, ni el consuelo de los amigos, ni las distracciones de la vida social. Pero si como sucede en los países Europeos poblados por los pueblos germanos – estamos acostumbrados a leer en la expresión de la naturaleza, encontramos el mejor consuelo en la soledad del bosque; mirando las nubes que cruzan el espacio, admirando la hermosura de las flores y escuchando el canto mocente do los pajaritos, nos olvidamos de nuestros duelos y cuitas, la mano del Criador nos acaricia, y al regresar al hogar nos sentimos como refrescados, pues la naturaleza ha alegrado lo que antes había entristecido el alma." *Discurso en Leitmeritz, Bohemia,* in: Escritos de José Rizal, Tomo III: Obras Literarias: Prosa. Manila 1961, 64. Rizal delivered this short impromptu speech to the tourism association in Leitmeritz in German. It should be noted that Blumentritt later translated it into Spanish.

acostumbrados …; nos olvidamos …: nos sentimos …). In this respect, his description is not only aimed at his friends, it also provides information about himself.

A survey of general meanings draws attention to 'wandering' (*wandern*) also as a habit of nomadic tribes. So when Rizal claimed that he still had "the wanderlust of the Malays" (*die Wanderungslust der Malaien*) in his blood,[2] one might assume that he was referring to tribal groups such as the forest nomads of the Penan in North Borneo or the sea nomads of the Bajao. But Rizal, like most of his contemporaries, used "Malaien" as an alleged ethnic designation of origin. That was in accordance with the classification of five "races" spread across the globe – Caucasian, Mongolian, Malayan, Ethiopian, American – proposed by the German anthropologist Johann Friedrich Blumenbach (1752–1840).[3]

If we were to talk today about the 'wanderlust' of the former Austronesian settlers, including the Malays and the aborigines of the Philippines, we would probably make fools of ourselves. The question of when and how these groups 'migrated' to the Pacific, and thus to the Philippine archipelago, is a much debated topic in migration studies. Older German migration studies, which primarily sought to reconstruct the paths of Germanic conquest and settlement groups in Europe, used the concept of 'Völkerwanderung' (migration of peoples). But it is precisely this term, which was widespread in the 19th century and not least politically charged, that current migration research has eliminated from its vocabulary because of the suspicion of myth-making.[4] To speak of 'Völkerwanderung' is doubly misleading: on the one hand, the term 'Volk' suggests the existence of a community based on uniform linguistic and cultural characteristics, which contradicts the

2 Escritos de José Rizal. Tomo 11: Correspondencia Epistolar. Libro Segundo. Cartas entre Rizal y el profesor Fernando Blumentritt. Edición del Centenario. Manila 1961, 88 f.

3 https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Malay_race (19. 5. 2025)

4 Felix Wiedemann, Kerstin P. Hofmann and Hans-Joachim Gehrke (Eds.): *Vom Wandern der Völker. Migrationserzählungen in den Altertumswissenschaften.* Berlin 2017

real heterogeneity of parentage or origin; on the other hand, the movements of these communities corresponded in the rule to a targeted immigration with the aim of gaining new land in a foreign country by warlike means.

Research methods for investigating the demographic composition of large territorial populations and their whereabouts are now based on the analysis of genome sequences, which sometimes leads to surprising new findings. While the colonisation of the Philippine archipelago was previously attributed to waves of immigration either from Taiwan or from the so called Sundaland, genome analyses have now revealed a completely different picture. A study from the Department of Organismal Biology at Uppsala University in Sweden summarises the findings of multiple migrations to the Philippines over the past 50,000 years:

> We show that the Philippine islands were populated by at least five waves of human migration. […] Our findings reveal a multi-layered history of the Philippines, which served as a crucial gateway for the movement of people that ultimately changed the genetic landscape of the Asia-Pacific region.[5]

In view of these findings, we can completely dispense with the concept of 'race', which is based on a pseudo-scientifically manipulated illusion. The content of this illusion is the assertion that the species *homo sapiens* is inherently hierarchical by nature, with a particularly 'pure', i.e. particularly valuable, 'race' at the top, while the 'races' below it are characterised by gradually increasing impurity and intellectual inferiority.

Even today, great attention should be paid to those critics who, in the 19th century, at the height of pseudo-scientific racism, raised their voices against this baseless claim. Among these critics – and there were few – was Rizal's friend and mentor Ferdinand Blumentritt, although he had not acquired his undoubtedly great knowledge of human nature

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5 Multiple migrations to the Philippines during the last 50,000 years. In: PNAS 2021 Vol. 118 No. 13. https://doi.org/10.1073/pnas.2026132118 (20. 5. 2025)

by travelling and wandering around the world.[6] He called himself a "sedentary cosmopolitan" (*cosmopolita sedentario*),[7] a self-description that at least suggests that he was able to see far beyond the boundaries of his city, province and country, even without being driven by wanderlust. What enabled him to do so? The answer is: extensive knowledge of languages, an ever-growing multifarious private library, great hospitality and an extremely productive worldwide correspondence. In the words of a study aptly titled *Migrating Minds*: Cosmopolitanism is "a way of inhabiting the world that entails constant self-interrogation, creative interaction with other peoples, cultures, and languages, and a political sense of justice always to come."[8]

If there is one way that shows us how to overcome racist intolerance and how we can develop respect for the otherness of others, it is the cosmopolitan attitude committed to the idea of the Enlightenment. In his obituary for Rizal, published in 1897, Blumentritt celebrated his friend as a wanderer who explored the world without prejudice and embraced him, so to speak, like a brother in the struggle for a sensitive humanity. Rizal, he wrote, had sought to understand racial stigma through personal experience, including his own susceptibility to uncritical prejudice:

> He was particularly interested in analysing the feelings that whites and people of colour instilled in each other. No one was more qualified than he to study this question, so important for ethnic psychology, and to bring it closer to a solution. For he was himself a person of colour, having lived at home among his simple compatriots, as well as among the whites, mestizos, and other castes of Manila, and had not become acquainted with Europe, Hong Kong, Japan, and the United States as a "fleeting tourist." His extensive knowledge of languages opened his eyes to the ethnological

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6 See my article "A rare transcontinental example of late 19th-century critiques of racism" in this book.

7 F. Blumentritt: La previa censura. Observaciones de un *cosmopolita sedentario.* In: La Solidaridad 1, 31 December 1889, 251–254

8 Didier Coste, Christina Kkona, Nicoletta Pireddu: Migrating Minds: Theories and Practices of Cultural Cosmopolitanism. Routledge, 2022, 3

> writings of all cultures, and his perceptive mind did not cling to superficiality.[9]

Anyone familiar with Rizal's writings and his letters addressed to Blumentritt, his family, friends, and enemies, will not fail to agree with Blumentritt's words. Rizal was not only a globetrotter, but also a bibliophile who, wherever he went, sought out the books he coveted, in libraries, second-hand bookshops, and bookstores. Language barriers were hardly an obstacle for him. So if we take his commitment to wanderlust seriously, we can also understand what it means not just to walk along meadow and forest paths, but to entrust oneself as a traveller to the stagecoach, the railway and the steamship, or quite simply open a book.

'Wandering' and 'travelling' are not only related verbs in terms of content and life-symbolic connotations, they can also be used and understood as metaphors when it comes to tracing the movement of the mind through the worlds of knowledge recorded and preserved in written language. Blumentritt's words already hinted at this, and Rizal expressed this eloquently in an essay entitled *Los Viajes*:

> Who doesn't love travel, whether it is the dream of youth when feeling for the first time the awareness of life, whether it is a book for mature age, when the yearning for knowledge occupies the mind, and, finally, when the aged bid farewell to the World to undertake the most mysterious of roads? To travel is a caprice in childhood, a passion in youth, a must for the grown-up, and in old age a reason to grieve. […] At all times and in

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9 "Ihn beschäftigte besonders die Analyse der Gefühle, welche Weiße und Farbige einander wechselseitig einflössen. Niemand, wie er, war so geeignet diese, für die Völkerpsychologie so wichtige Frage zu studieren und der Lösung nahe zu bringen, denn er war selbst ein Farbiger, hatte daheim unter seinen einfachen Landsleuten, wie unter den Weißen, Mestizen und anderen Kasten Manilas gelebt und Europa, Hong-Kong, Japan und die Vereinigten Staaten nicht als 'flüchtiger Tourist' kennen gelernt. Seine ausgedehnten Sprachkenntnisse erschlossen ihm die völkerkundlichen Schriften aller Culturvölker und sein scharfsinniger Geist blieb nicht an dem Oberflächlichen haften." F. Blumentritt [Obituary for José Rizal]. In: Internationales Archiv für Ethnographie, 10 (1897), 88–92

> all ages of history, travel has been the powerful lever of civilisation (*la palanca poderosa de la civilización*), for it is only through travel that the heart and the mind are formed, educated and enlightened; because it is only by travelling that we can see and study all the advancements: Geology, Geography, Politics, Ethnology, Linguistics, Meteorology, History, Fauna, Flora, Statistics, Sculpture, Architecture and Painting, etc. Everything that is part of human knowledge passes by and is exposed to the eyes of the traveller.[10]

In the quoted passage, Rizal employs a way of speaking that draws on Christian and Islamic metaphorical traditions, albeit unconsciously. Aurelius Augustinus used the metaphor of the "book of the world" (Epistulae, no. 43). The bishop did not recommend travelling, but this has not stopped posterity from attributing the recommendation to him. The Qur'an even states that human existence is an "endless journey", and death is only one stage of this journey. It is clear that many other religions and doctrines of salvation have similar ways of speaking, where the crossing of boundaries is usually associated with the attainment of redemption and spiritual enlightenment.

Rizal's elaboration of metaphorical speech is all the more remarkable: not only does the success of the history of civilization depend on travel, but the individual life cycle is also closely linked, both pragmatically and emotionally, to the urge to travel. If, at the stage of

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10 "¿Quién es el que no ha viajado? ¿Quién no ama los viajes, si son el sueño de la juventud al sentir por primera vez la conciencia de la vida, si son un libro para la edad madura, cuando el ansia de saber ocupa el espíritu, y, en fin, son el último adiós del anciano cuando se despide del Mundo para emprender el más misterioso de los caminos? El viaje es un capricho en la niñez, una pasión en el joven, una necesidad en los hombres y una elegía en los ancianos. […] En todos los tiempos y en todas las edades de la Historia, los viajes han sido la palanca poderosa de la civilización, porque sólo en los viajes se forman, educan e ilustran el corazón y el espíritu, porque sólo en los viajes se ven y estudian todos los adelantos: Geología, Geografía, Polítca, Etnología, Lingüística, Me teorología, Historia, Fauna, Flora, Estadística, Escultura, Arquitectura, y Pintura, etc., todo cuanto forma parte del saber humano, pasan y se exponen a los ojos del viajero." J. Rizal: Los Viajes [1882] In: Obras Literarias II: Prosa. Manila 1961, pp. 18; 23

adulthood, travel refers to the world of books (*un libro para la edad madura*), then the meaning of the metaphorical speech shifts unmistakably to "journey" as reading with the goal of acquiring knowledge. The subsumption of scientific disciplines, the liberal and practically applicable arts, under the concept of "advancements" at the end of his reflections shows how little interest he had at this point in what predominates in the mystical travel metaphor: the experience of an unpredictability that is incompatible with the available boundaries of the world drawn on grid squares and book pages.

II Rizal in the air: A brief meditation on José Rizal's longing for freedom[11]

Who was José Rizal? The question cannot be answered in one sentence. Because there is not just *one,* there are at least *three* José Rizals:

> On the one hand – from the perspective of his clerical opponents – there is the *blasphemous* Rizal.
> On the other hand – from the perspective of the state-sponsored personality cult – there is the 'holy' *Father of the Philippine nation.*
> And finally, there is the radical intellectual, which is what friends of independent thought most appreciate about him.

A great deal could be said about each of the Rizals mentioned here, especially when it comes to justifying or refuting the characteristics ascribed to him as an individual. In the numerous books on Rizal that have been published, especially in the Philippines, one can find plenty of arguments for either this or that, or even for the overlapping of all three attributions. Yet in my brief meditation, I don't want to dwell on this question. I am much more interested in how Rizal saw *himself.* And even on this point I have to hesitate, because in his letters – de-

11 First presented in abridged form under the heading "José Rizal's Wanderlust" on 27 October 2024 in Wilhelmsfeld as part of the launching programme *Philippines as Guest of Honour at the Frankfurt Book Fair 2025*

pending on mood or addressee – he also sketched out more than only one fancied self-image.[12]

A very ironic and at the same time cunning self-description, which deserves a special mention here, can be found in a letter from Rizal to Juan Zulueta, dated 14 August 1891. Zulueta represented the Propagandistas in Manila and was involved in a dispute over Rizal's contested position in the group. The letter, in which Rizal denied the accusations against him, was actually addressed to all members of the group. After a detailed description of the 'sins' of which he was accused, the letter concludes with a series of particularly far-fetched comparisons:

> I have my satisfaction in remembering that in this fatal age for personalities, mine, the smallest and the least accomplished, is the happiest because it still retains your sympathies. And to erase somewhat bitter memories, I will tell you that Bismarck, after founding and consolidating a mighty empire like no other, is now abandoned and forgotten. Why? For nothing! [Charles Stewart] Parnell, who unified the Irish spirit, is now discredited and ignites civil war. Why? Because of a woman! [Georges] Boulanger, after touching an imperial crown at close quarters and spending fourteen million, lives here obscure and forgotten. Why? Because he was too prudent! I, on the other hand, who have only created a P. Damaso and a Captn. Tiago, who beside the German empire, the Irish league, and the imperial crown of France, are less than puppets beside the Apollo of Belvedere – I have escaped this storm and am happy with the friendship that you dispense to me.[13]

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12 In my biography "José Rizals Kampf um Leben und Tod" (*José Rizal's Fight for Life and Death. Facets of a Biography Critical of Colonialism*), published online in 2021 and 2025, I introduce Rizal as a transcultural traveller between Asia and Europe and as a wanderer between erudition and literary fiction. He was, in my eyes, a literary migrant, a keen fan of Weltliteratur who was never inclined to be ensnared by national narrow-mindedness.

13 "Tengo mi satisfacción al recordar que en esta época fatal para las personalidades, la mía la más diminuta y la que menos ha hecho es la más feliz porque conserva aún las simpatías de Vds. Y para borrar recuerdos algún tanto amargos, voy a decirles que Bismarck, después de fundar y consolidar un imperio poderoso como ninguno, ahora está abandonado y olvida-

It's bizarre, yet entirely in the spirit of ironic exaggeration, that Rizal mentions a number of European politicians whose fates were highly publicised at the time. And to compare the literary figures created by him with the Apollo of Belvedere is a really funny joke.

However, I do not want to follow this trail any further here. Instead I will resort to a single, politically innocent self-portrait. It is in fact a very short self-revelation hidden beneath a casual remark in a letter of Rizal to his Bohemian friend Ferdinand Blumentritt (9 March 1887). Rizal had been in Berlin since the beginning of November 1886, his novel *Noli me tangere* was in print, when he complained that he often felt unwell and wanted to leave the city; he just didn't know where to go.

> Ich weiß noch nicht, wohin werde ich ziehen. Ich habe noch in meinem Blut die Wanderungslust der Malaien; möchte ich es immer behalten, und Humor und Gelegenheit dazu.[14]

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do, ¿por qué? ¡por nada! Parnell, el que unificó el espíritu irlandés, ahora está desprestigiado y enciende la guerra civil, ¿por qué? por una mujer. Boulanger, después de tocar de cerca una corona imperial y gastarse catorce millones, vive aquí oscuro y olvidado, ¿por qué? por haber sido demasiado prudente. En cambio yo, yo que no he creado más que un P. Dámaso y un Capn. Tiago, que al lado del imperio alemán, de la liga irlandesa, y de la corona imperial de Francia, son menos que títeres al lado del Apolo de Belvedére, yo me he escapado de esta tormenta y soy feliz con la mistad que Vds. me dispensan." Cartas entre Rizal y sus Colegas de la Propaganda. Segunda parte (1889–1896). Manila 1961, 679. – Otto von Bismarck (1865–1898), Chancellor of the German Empire from 1871, was sacked by Kaiser Wilhelm in 1890. Charles Stewart Parnell (1846–1891) was a leader of the Irish *Home Rule League,* which advocated self-government for Ireland; he stumbled over an affair with the wife of a party colleague. Georges Boulanger (1837–1891) was a charismatic leader of the authoritarian-populist movement known as 'Boulangism', tried to seize state power and shot himself at his lover's grave after his political defeat.

14 Escritos de José Rizal, Tomo 11: Correspondencia Epistolar. Libro Segundo. Cartas entre Rizal y el profesor Fernando Blumentritt. Manila 1961, 88 f.

I don't know yet where I will move to. I still have the wanderlust of the Malays in my blood; I hope to keep it forever, and the humour and opportunity to do so.

Rizal seems to be exaggerating a bit here, because in Berlin he had accomplished a lot, had been admitted to one of Germany's most important learned societies, presented a kind of inaugural lecture on Tagalog verse in German before its members, which included celebrities such as Rudolf Virchow and Adolf Bastian, continued his medical training as an ophthalmologist, and – last but not least – had his novel, *Noli me tangere,* produced and published. And yet he was full of restlessness, because ahead of him lay his visit to Blumentritt in the Bohemian town of Leitmeritz, and afterwards a long journey through several major European cities including Vienna and Rome.

I think it noteworthy that he mentions humour and wanderlust in the same breath. 'Wanderlust' is actually an expression that goes back to 19th-century Romantic poetry; Rizal was probably aware of that.[15] When we ask about the deeper meaning of the word 'humour', we can see that it perfectly matches a significant side of Rizal's personality. To paraphrase from the German *Duden* Dictionary: *Humour is the ability to face the world and people with a cheerful attitude, even when things don't go well.*[16] We know, of course, that Rizal didn't always succeed in maintaining this humour, which is, besides, a creative and effective form of self-protection.

As his allusion to his innate wanderlust suggests, he was a wanderer in both the literal and figurative sense. Let's look at the literal sense first: as we all know, Rizal not only roamed through the major European cities, travelling back and forth between Madrid, London and Paris, and between Europe and his Asian homeland, even taking

15 Wilhelm Müller's poem "Das Wandern ist des Müllers Lust" (1821), set to music by Franz Schubert, should be mentioned here, for example.

16 Duden: Das Herkunftswörterbuch. Mannheim 2007, Lemma Humor: *Humor ist die Begabung eines Menschen, der Unzulänglichkeit der Welt und der Menschen, den alltäglichen Schwierigkeiten und Missgeschicken mit heiterer Gelassenheit zu begegnen.*

detours via Japan and the USA. He comments on this in the lines of one of his last poems:

> […] errante por doquiera sin dudas, sin temores,
> gasté en tierras extrañas de mi vida el abril.[17]
>
> *wandering everywhere, free from doubt and fear,*
> *I spent the spring of my years in foreign lands.*

It was on a simple 'Wanderung' in Heidelberg that he met pastor Karl Ullmer for the first time, before he got to know him better, which meant that he had to complete a very long hike between Wilhelmsfeld and Heidelberg almost every day for several weeks. As if that wasn't enough, the pastor also led him on the most beautiful hiking trails (*Wanderwege*) over the heights and through the valleys of the Odenwald. Rizal recalled this in a letter to Ullmer, in which he mentioned a strawberry punch with Waldmeister (*woodruff*), among other things.[18] A letter from his exile in Dapitan to Blumentritt shows how much he enjoyed these 'Wanderungen' and how long he remembered them; the letter is dated 20 November 1895, so it was written more than nine years after Rizal's stay in Wilhelmsfeld:

> ¡Ah, excursiones campestres de Alemania! Oh excursions to the countryside in Germany! One walks through the forests, gathers strawberries, and at the nearest tavern one orders Rhine wine, and makes strawberry punch bowl with sugar and Waldmeister if there is some! And then one reaches a little village, orders a meal at the restaurant, one eats with appetite, and later takes a nap under the pine trees on a soft carpet of pine needles.[19]

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17 "… where slaves there are none …" The Complete Poems of José Rizal in Spanish and English. Translated into English by Alfredo S. Veloso. Manila1961, 137. English translation: D. H.

18 8 June 1888, written in London. In: Cartas entre Rizal y otras personas. Escritos de José Rizal, Vol. II. Manila 1961, after page 106 folio 2 verso.

19 Cartas entre Rizal y el Profesor Fernando Blumentritt, Vol. 2. Manila 1961, 881: ¡Ah, excursiones campestres de Alemania! ¡Se anda por los bosques, se cogen fresas, (Erdbeeren) y en la próxima taberna se pide vino del

But Rizal not only enjoyed the happy wanderlust he recalls in such detail. Rather, he also saw himself in the role of a traveller who roamed foreign worlds with the eyes of an inquisitive ethnologist, everywhere accompanied by the "demon of comparisons" (*demonio de las comparaciones*).[20] His aim was to get to know the customs and traditions practised in the foreign lifeworlds. In a letter written in Berlin to his relatives (11 November 1886), he proudly remarks:

> […] estoy aquí en Alemania vagando de ciudad en ciudad, de pueblo en pueblo, visitando todos los centros de enseñanza, las escuelas de los pueblos, las parroquias, las iglesias […], lo que observo aquí: hay algunas muy hermosas y buenas costumbres.[21]
>
> *I am here in Germany wandering from town to town, from village to village, visiting all the educational centres, the village schools, the parishes, the churches […], what I observe here are some very beautiful and good customs.*

Both wandering in nature and the unlimited wandering between cultures and languages is like an act of freedom, which Rizal was well aware of and found enthusiastic expression in his repeated talk of 'free Europe'. He felt free in Spain, England, France and Germany. But he was threatened with persecution and bondage in his homeland, where Spanish Europe acted as an oppressive power. As an ostracised man in Dapitan, Rizal saw himself in the guise of perhaps the most famous

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Rhin, y se hace con azúcar Erdbeerenbowle (bebida con fresas); y si ha y Waldmeister se pone también! (Yo creo que Waldmeister en Español es aspérula). ¡Después se llega á un pueblecito, se encarga la comida á un restaurant, se come con apetito y luego se va uno á dormir debajo de los pinares, sobre la mullida alfombra de los Tannennadeln! (hoja acicular del pino). – Bracketts by Rizal, D. H.

20 In *Noli me tángere* (Berlin 1887, 43), the narrator employs the image of the "demon of comparisons" to portray the perceptions of the novel's protagonist, Ibarra, who has returned to the Philippines after a prolonged period of study in Europe.

21 Cartas entre Rizal y los membros de la familia. Primera parte. Comisión Nacional del Centenario de José Rizal: Manila 1961, 259.

wanderer and exile in literary history when he quoted from the first lines of Dante's *Divina Commedia* in a letter to Blumentritt (31 July 1894):[22]

Nel mezzo del cammin della mia vita	Nel mezzo del cammin di nostra vita
[mi ritrovai] per una selva scura	mi ritrovai per una selva oscura …
Rizal	Dante

In the middle of my path of life
[I found myself] *in a dark forest*

Rizal not only expressed his experience by quoting a great European exile, he also gave it a poetic form of his own. The Spanish dictionary presents quite a number of potential translations for the German term "Wanderer," e.g. "el itinerante," "el vagabundo," "el viajero," or "el peregrino."[23] Rizal's poem *El Canto del Viajero,* written in exile, evokes the peregrino, who aspires to return to his paternal home. – I quote an excerpt:

Volverá el peregrino a su patria
y a sus lares tal vez volverá,
y hallará por doquier nieve y ruina
amores perdidos, sepulcros, no más.
Vé, Viajero, prosigue tu senda,
extranjero en tu propio país;
deja a otros que canten amores,
los otros que gocen; tu vuelve a partir.[24]

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22 Cartas entre Rizal y el Profesor Fernando Blumentritt, Vol. 2. Manila 1961, facsimile two pages before page 481.

23 In the *German Dictionary* by Jacob Grimm and Wilhelm Grimm, the Latin variants of 'wandern' are the verbs *peregrinari, pervagari, vagari, itinerare, meare, migrare,* used quasi as synonyms in many Romance languages. [https://www.woerterbuchnetz.de/DWB?lemid=W05959 (30. 9. 2024)]

24 "… where slaves there are none …" 1961, 139 f. English translation by Encarnación Alzona, in: Rizal's Poems. National Historical Institute: Manila 1962, 151

To his country the pilgrim will return
and perhaps he will return to his home,
and he'll find everywhere all snow and ruins,
lost loves, sepulchres, everything gone.
Go, traveller, proceed on your way,
in your own native land a stranger thou art.
Leave thou to others the song of love,
to others the joys; you again depart.

For the wanderer in this poem, that recalls Franz Schubert's song cycle "Winterreise", there is no real homecoming. He is like the 'caballero errante', who encounters not love but death and a cold winter, where in former times there used to be warmth for him: a stranger in his native country. He, the homeless, must move on whether he likes it or not.

It is obvious to connect these lines to Rizal's biography: to his experience of suffering as a persecuted person and as an exile. However, the poetic form goes beyond such a narrow interpretation. It gives 'wandering' the metaphorical meaning of 'making a turn' (*eine Wende vollziehen*).[25] This can be seen more clearly in the path that Ibarra takes, the protagonist in Rizal's novel *Noli me tangere*: Ibarra, returning from Europe, brings philanthropic ideas with him to his home village, is confronted with the disgraceful death of his father, loses the love of his youth and – persecuted by the colonial powers and despised by the villagers – has to run for his life. In the end, Ibarra turns from philanthropist to terrorist, acting in accordance with the credo 'Violence before Justice'. Ibarra continues to wander, so he does not stick to the verse "Vé, viajero, no vuelvas el rostro/*Go, traveller, don't turn your face*".[26] For he returns to set about his devious campaign of revenge, of which he himself will become the victim.

The meaning is pretty straightforward: violence breeds violence, and there is no way of trusting in God to break this cycle. On the contrary, it is the Catholic Church – represented by the characters in

25 Etymologically, 'wenden' and 'wandern' are related in German.

26 "… where slaves there are none …" 1961, 140

the novel who are dressed in monastic robes – that is responsible for the negative experiences the young philanthropist Ibarra had to go through.

It is time to come to a close. I want to do this with a quote from Rizal's last poem, written on death row, to which his friend Mariano Ponce gave the title "Mi último pensamiento" (*My last thought*). I quote from the 12th stanza of the poem:

> Entonces nada importa me pongas en olvido;
> Tu atmósfera, tu espacio, tus valles cruzaré;
> Vibrante y limpia seré para tu oido:
> Aroma, luz, colores, rumor, canto, gemido,
> Constante repitiendo la esencia de mi fe.[27]
>
> *Then it doesn't matter that you should forget me;*
> *Your atmosphere, your skies, your vales I'll sweep;*
> *Vibrant and clear note to your ears I shall be:*
> *Aroma, light, hues, murmur, song, moanings deep,*
> *Constantly repeating the essence of the faith I keep.*

The second-to-last line is particularly remarkable because it blends the beauty (*aroma, luz, colores*) and the dissonant polyphony (*rumor, canto, gemido*) of Las Filipinas. There is ultimately a charming paradox in these verses. For Rizal agrees to be forgotten (… *me pongas en olvido*) and at the same time promises to remain: a poet whose powerful voice roams the valleys and hills, and will – he hopes – be heard by his "querida Filipinas" (*Vibrante y limpia seré para tu oido*). The paradox is a figure of speech that appeals not to the intellect but to the sensual intuition (*sinnliche Anschauung*), to suggest something for which there is no fixed term. So what Rizal is trying to say with his ambiguous self-image can best be summed up in the following: he does not want to be remembered as a historical individual, defeated by those in power. He would rather be remembered as the spirit of an eternally wandering

27 "… where slaves there are none …" 1961, 144. E. Alzona's English translation in: Rizal's Poems 1962, 154

poet using artistic freedom to sing – "*in the air*"[28] – the beauty and the dissonance of his native land, which he calls "nuestro perdido edén", *our Paradise Lost.*

III World literature in the luggage

José Rizal, a born Filipino, wrote his poems, essays and his novels (Noli and Fili) not in his native language, but in Spanish, a language which not only reinforced the rule of the colonialist regime but also remained unknown to the vast majority of Philippine locals. Nevertheless, his stories are set in the heart of the Philippine archipelago, in places that can be identified on a map. They are embedded in the endemic nature of the islands and populated by characters who adhere to Filipino-Tagalog customs and traditions. It is a remarkable configuration, especially considering that he was writing in a global language about the life and suffering of local communities, i.e. in a world incompatible with life in Spain. With the ceremonial inclusion of his works in the pantheon of Spanish-language literature in spring 2023, Rizal has undoubtedly moved closer to achieving world literary significance. Had he written in Tagalog, this recognition would have been denied to him.

I believe it's no exaggeration to assume that Rizal himself was fully aware of the significance of his linguistic and literary strategies, which had nothing whatsoever to do with national-literary aspirations. His literary works are not written in pure Castellano, but in the mixed forms that migrated with the monks from Mexico to the Pacific Islands, including Creole. He has further enriched this diversity by adding Tagalog elements, which require the reader to consult the editors' commentary for clarification. However, this does not create a sense of local colour, as even characters from lower social milieus, including the uneducated capitalist Capitán Tiago and the poor widow Sisa, speak Philippine Spanish like everyone else in Rizal's novels.

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28 Motto of the kick-off-programme *Philippines Guest of Honour at the Frankfurt Book Fair 2025* in Heidelberg & Wilhelmsfeld, October 2024.

What is more, Rizal skilfully utilised European world literature in the choice of paratexts in his novels, quoting mottos, often enough from memory, even in the original languages (Latin, Hebrew, German, English, French, Italian). The novels *Noli me tángere* and *El Filibusterismo* comprise a total of 102 chapters (63 in Noli and 39 in Fili), 19 of which begin with a motto (11 in Noli and 8 in Fili). He used a variety of material for this purpose, including biblical quotations, popular sayings, and fragments from texts by Virgil, Niccolò Machiavelli, Lope de Vega, Heinrich Heine, Adolfo Bécquer, and the dramatic literature of Pedro Calderón de la Barca and Victor Hugo. Not to mention the quotations in the novel itself, as well as in Rizal's letters and essays. Allusions to countless texts from the literature of classical antiquity can be found alongside works by Dante, Shakespeare, Voltaire and many others.[29] Analysing the form and function of these quotations would be going too far here.[30] Instead, I am going to explore related forms of world literary language through Rizal's poetry.

Rizal's poem *El Canto del Viajero,* written in exile, could be compared to lyric written by German poets in the epoch of Romanticism. The tone of their texts is often called 'melancholic'. In Rizal's poem, the traveller longs to return to his homeland, but encounters "snow and ruins, lost loves, and sepulchres", so that in the end he has to conclude: "in your own native land a stranger thou art." He must continue his journey, but whether it comes to a happy end remains open. This is close to a text that Franz Schubert set to music under the title *Der Wanderer.* The fifth stanza of this poem published 1821 by Georg Philipp Schmidt (1766–1849) reads:

Die Sonne dünkt mich matt und kalt,
Die Blüte welk, das Leben alt,
Und was sie reden, tauber Schall,
Ich bin ein Fremdling überall.

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29 See Andreas T. Zanker's informative in-depth study (forthcoming): José Rizal, the Philippines, and Greco-Roman Antiquity, London (Routledge)

30 Cf. chapter 16 "Exkurs über die Kunst des Zitierens" in my book *José Rizals Kampf um Leben und Tod.* Heidelberg 2025, 407–419: https://books.ub.uni-heidelberg.de//heibooks/catalog/book/1356

The sun seems dull and cold to me,
The blossom withered, the life old,
And what they speak, deaf sound,
I am a stranger everywhere.

The famous last line of this poem reads:

Da, wo du nicht bist, ist das Glück!

Where you are not, there is the happiness!

The melancholy tone in the poetic configuration stems from a contradictory combination: the pursuit of the essence of 'happiness' in the fulfilment of superior ideas, alongside a sense of sadness over the loss of a familiar and reliable way of everyday life. For the exile, this is only true to a limited extent, since the loss of his homeland is real for him and not an allegory symbolising the search for a new way of expression obscured by the language of conventional signs and images.

Both the wandering poet and the wandering unhoused are world literary figures and hence not the property of European literatures. The motifs of 'wandering' and the 'wanderer' are indeed part of the repertoire of classical literatures in Asia. The Chinese *Li Sao* (Encountering Sorrow), an allegorical-like elegy from the 3rd century BCE, tells of a long journey that leads to the sources of truth, to the heavenly gate and finally to the end of the world, where the wanderer, to his great surprise, comes across his homeland again. "In many ways, all Chinese travel literature and landscape writing", the sinologist Stephen Owen notes, "can be traced back to the heavenly wanderings of the *Li Sao*. But the same model is no less true of spiritual journeys than of physical ones."[31]

A very similar fusion can also be found in the poetry of the Bengali writer and intellectual Rabindranath Tagore. Like Rizal, he was born in 1861 and, like Rizal, was constantly traveling all over the world. In one

31 Stephen Owen: An Anthology of Chinese Literature. Beginnings to 1911. New York/London 1996, 176

of his best-known songs, translated into English by the author himself, the wanderer greets the fellow traveller (the reader?) with words that – like the Romantics[32] – strike the elegiac or melancholy tone of the ambivalent journey through life:

> Comrade of the road,
> Here are my traveller's greetings to thee.
> O Lord of my broken heart,
> Of leave taking and loss,
> Of the grey silence of the dayfall,
> My greetings of the ruined house to thee!
> O Light of the new-born morning,
> Sun of the everlasting day,
> My greetings of the undying hope to thee
> My guide,
> I am a wayfarer of an endless road,
> My greetings of a wanderer to thee.[33]

Tagore's admirers called him an "itinerant", someone travelling from place to place; or – alluding to the ancient school of philosophy in Athens – a "peripatetic", someone who delves into the deepest thoughts while walking.

The wanderer motif is prevalent in literature around the world, creating the impression of a travelling motif itself. Even comparative literary studies today discuss the global interactions of world literary texts under the label of the "Große Wanderung".[34] Perhaps this attraction is due to the atavism inscribed in a hidden corner of the brain from our evolution from the tribal days of nomadism. But it may also be that the bodily motion of 'walking' through wide, physical and at the same time imaginary spaces, which are withdrawn from total

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32 Cf. Krishna Dutta/Andrew Robinson: Tagore. A biography. New York 1995, 45

33 ogo pother sathi nomi (ওগো পথের সাথী নওমি): https://www.geetabitan.com/lyrics/rs-o/ogo-pother-saathi-nomi-bengali-notation.html (27. 5. 2025)

34 Frank Zipfel (Ed.): Fremde Ähnlichkeiten. Die "Große Wanderung" als Herausforderung der Komparatistik. Stuttgart 2017

disposal, enables us to experience the environment we are travelling through – be it an alphabet or a botanical garden – with all our senses, i.e. synaesthetically.

While wandering is primarily a motif in lyrical texts, the figure of the wanderer also frequently appears in the prose worlds of short stories and novels. Here the wanderer is sometimes a driven figure like Cervantes' Don Quixote, sometimes a companion figure protecting against persecution like Eugène Sue's *le Juif errant* (The Wandering Jew). The books in which these characters were immortalized were among Rizal's favourites. In Cervantes's work, not only is a monk knocked out by the hero, but piety, the church, and preaching are also cast in a dubious light of bigotry. The Inquisition only objected to individual passages in Cervantes's book, whereas Sue's *Le Juif errant* was immediately placed on the index of the Roman Curia. The reason for this condemnation was obvious: Sue's novel portrays the Jesuit order as a mafia-like organisation intent on seizing a family's inheritance by force.

The monk may not be a world literary figure. But he is a popular subject in European fiction, and I'm not just talking about the itinerant preachers and poor mendicants. Rizal mentions the Italian Trecento writer Giovanni Boccaccio,[35] who populated many of his novellas with greedy and lustful monks; a century later Masuccio Salernitano was his rival in this genre. Curiously, Rizal encountered an Austrian imitation of Masuccio during his travels from Leitmeritz to Rome. The strange thing is not that he came across an imitation far from world literature, but that he recognised his own literary monk creatures in it and foresaw the persecution that awaited him in his homeland in the Philippines. This story originates from a letter which has only recently been confirmed as an original Rizal manuscript.[36]

In May 1887 Rizal travelled with Maximo Viola from Berlin via Leitmeritz, Brünn and Linz to Vienna, where they met Ferdinand Blumentritt's old friend, the publicist and writer Johannes Nordmann

35 In the 25th "Risas – llantos" titled chapter of *El Filibusterismo.*

36 Johann Stockinger: José Rizal, Johannes Nordmann und die "Frühlingsnächte in Salamanca" 5. Dezember 2024 (Version 1.03): https://www.academia.edu/126093938/José_Rizal_Johannes_Nordmann_und_die_Frühlings_Nächte_in_Salamanca

(1820–1887). Nordmann was a well-known figure in the town, largely due to his popular books and his involvement with the Vienna police's censorship department. In a letter of thanks (24 May 1887) to Blumentritt, Rizal enthused about the "*sympatique* old gentleman ":

> Wenn ich einen Vater auswählen könnte, […] so hätte ich den Herrn Nordmann zum Vater erwählt, denn er und mein Vater gleichen [sich] im Geist sehr: mein Vater ist auch liebenswürdig, gesellig, höflich und hat die jungen Leute gern.
>
> *If I could choose a father, […] I would have chosen Mr Nordmann as my father, because he and my father are very similar in spirit: my father is also amiable, sociable, polite and likes young people.*

Nordmann's literary oeuvre includes short novels and novellas, as well as glosses on Viennese salon culture. He also published a book of poems and a hiking book entitled *Meine Sonntage* (My Sundays), which describes over 50 hiking routes of cultural and historical interest in the Austrian highlands. As with his poems, this book contains so many references to 'Wanderlust' that it is tempting to apply the so-called 'lust effect' to Nordmann's entire literary oeuvre. To a certain extent, this is confirmed by a story that the author first published in instalments in a journal, and later released in book form. He sent this very book to Rizal, who was staying in Geneva, Switzerland for around two weeks prior to setting off for Rome. The book sent to Geneva has the title *Frühlingsnächte in Salamanca* (Spring Nights in Salamanca), but begins with a 'police-novella' entitled "Als Opfer des Concordats" (As a Victim of the Concordat).

The concordat referred to was a treaty signed in 1855 by the Austrian head of state, Emperor Franz Joseph I, and the papal curia in Rome. It granted the Church significant influence over education and marriage, as well as the power to restrict public freedom of expression. Nordmann became a victim of this concordat when he wanted to publish the first part of his story set in 15th century Salamanca, Spain. The content of the story is the passionate love affair of a catholic cleric, which is ruined by intrigues involving courtiers and monks of rather weak understanding. In short: a funny story, told – as Nordmann

writes in his preface – according to the patterns of the novellas written by the Italian Masuccio Salernitano. When the Concordat was finally cancelled in 1870, Nordmann seized the opportunity to seek revenge against his state persecutors, who had even sought to expel him from the city. He recounted his sufferings in the form of a satirical police novella, a fitting overture to the Salamanca novel.

Rizal was delighted and wrote to Nordmann after reading the book:

> Genf den 16ten Juni 1887
>
> Sehr geehrter Herr und Freund!
> Die Ueberraschung, welche Sie mir vorgestern durch die Übersendung Ihres köstlichen Romans bereitet haben war so gross und angenehm, dass ich nicht habe antworten wollen, ehe ich das ganze Buch von Anfang bis zum Ende gelesen habe, damit ich nicht nur meinen Dank sondern auch meine Bewunderung aussprechen könne.
> Die kleine Erzählung *Ihrer Odyssé*[37] durch die Ministerien, die Herrn Weiss und Starkenfels, Lewinsky, Bach und der "*Pressrath*" haben mir[38] nicht nur köstlich unterhalten und amusiert, sondern auch einen Vorgeschmack von meinem Vaterlande gegeben. Ja, auch der Pater Diego, die Fra[tre]s Antonio und Piedro sind echte philippinischen[39] Mönche, und wenn Sie nur Spanisch könnten, werden Sie dergleichen in meinem Romane *Noli me tángere* finden, mit dem Unterschied dass die Meinen nicht so glänzend dargestellt sind wie die Ihrigen. Das Lesen Ihres classischen Romanes habe ich nur einmal unterbrochen, und es war als ich zum Tisch gerufen wurde; es hat mir[40] so ausserordentlich interessiert, und ich lese es noch vielleich[t] zum zweiten Mal, wenn ich nicht viel zu besorgen habe, wie meine Gepäcke, Passport, Einkäufe etc. etc., dennoch Morgen lese ich es wieder wenn ich nach Chamonix gehe.

37 corr. Odyssee

38 corr. mich

39 corr. philippinische

40 corr. mich

Geben Sie dem Herrn Starkenfels eine spanischen Namen, und machen Sie ihn noch dreimal gröber, dem[41] Lewinsky auch dreimal schlauer und dem[42] "*Pressrath*" lächerlicher und arrogant, so werden Sie unsere Obrigkeiten kennen lernen, die mir einen viel schlimmeren Gang wegen meines Romans vorbereiten. Sie haben eine vortreffliche Schilderung der *Vergangenheit* der Klöster geschrieben, und dennoch mussten Sie so viel leiden; was werde ich leiden, der ich, der ich die *Gegenwart unserer* Klöster in einem mittelmäßigen Romane geschrieben habe? Und bei uns leben wir noch im Mittelalter, und da herrschen die Mönche besser wie die Clericalen zur Zeit de Concordats. Meine Mönche sind auch Minoriten und Dominicaner.

Am zwanzigsten dieses Monats reise ich nach Italien, leider dass ich nicht Zeit genug habe um besser das Land der schönen Künste besuchen zu können.

Am dritten Juli fahre ich von Marseille ab, mit dem *Jang-Tsé,* einem Dampfschiff von fünfhundert Pferde Kräfte glaube ich.

Ehrfurchtsvoll küsse ich die Hand Ihrer guten Frau Nordmann grüße die liebenswürdige Tochter und empfehle mich ganz ergebenst

José Rizal

Mein Freund [Maximo Viola] lässt ~~sich~~ Sie freundlich begrüßen[43]

Geneva, 16 June 1887

Dear Sir and friend!

The surprise you gave me the day before yesterday by sending me your delightful novel was so great and pleasant that I did not want to reply until I had read the whole book from beginning to end, so that I could express not only my thanks but also my admiration.

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41 corr. den

42 corr. den

43 My transcription refers to the manuscript of the letter, which can be viewed at the following link: Wienbibliothek im Rathaus. https://resolver.obvsg.at/urn:nbn:at:AT-WBR-937397; Public Domain Mark 1.0.

The little story of your Odyssey *through the ministries, Mr Weiss and Mr Starkenfels, Lewinsky, Bach and the* 'Pressrath'[44] *not only entertained and amused me delightfully, but also gave me a foretaste of my fatherland. Yes, Father Diego, Fratres Antonio and Piedro are also real Filipino monks,*[45] *and if you only knew Spanish, you would find the same in my novel* Noli me tángere, *with the difference that mine are not as brilliantly portrayed as yours. I have interrupted the reading of your classic novel only once, and it was when I was called to the table; it interested me so much, and I may read it a second time if I do not have much to do, such as my luggage, passport, purchases, etc., etc., but tomorrow I will read it again when I go to Chamonix.*

Give Mr Starkenfels a Spanish name, and make him three times coarser, Lewinsky three times cleverer, and the 'Pressrath' more ridiculous and arrogant, and you will get to know our authorities, who will prepare a much worse course for me because of my novel. You have written an excellent account of the past *of the monasteries, and yet you have had to suffer so much; what will I suffer, I who have written the* present *of our monasteries in a mediocre novel? And here we still live in the Middle Ages, and there the monks rule better than the clerics at the time of the Concordat. My monks are also Minorites and Dominicans.*

On the twentieth of this month I am travelling to Italy, unfortunately I do not have enough time to visit the land of fine arts.

On the third of July I leave Marseilles on the Jang-Tsé, *a steamship of five hundred horse power, I believe.*[46]

I respectfully kiss the hand of your good Mrs Nordmann, greet her amiable daughter and recommend myself most devotedly.

José Rizal
My friend sends you his kind regards

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44 Presserat, an institution for monitoring the press during the concordat period; in this case "Pressrath" is a person representing the institution. All names refer to officials at the time of the concordat.

45 These names refer to protagonists in the fictional Salamanca-narrative.

46 Rizal would not have got far on such a weak steamship. On 3 July 1887, he boarded the "Djemnah", a 2,900 hp ocean liner, in Marseille.

At first glance, it may seem strange how much Rizal diminishes himself while paying the most devote compliments to Nordmann. Nordmann's Salamanca story is certainly not one of the unforgettable creations of Viennese literature and leaves much to be desired in terms of humour. I think what Rizal struck particularly was the Police-novella. In his battle with the surveillance authorities, which the Viennese author describes from the perspective of a victim, Rizal recognised the foreshadowing of his coming sufferings. He was afraid because he realised that the satirical attacks on the *frailocracia* in his *Noli me tángere* would not be without harsh consequences for him in his home country. In a letter to Blumentritt from Geneva (19 June 1887), he pours out his heart to his friend and at the same time expresses his courage to return home:

> Wenn uns die Regierung dazu nöthigt, das heißt, wenn uns keine Hoffnung auf der Erde mehr bleibt als unser Verderben [im] Krieg zu suchen, wenn die Philippiner es vorziehen, lieber [zu] sterben als das Elend zu ertragen, dann theile ich auch das Schicksal meiner Landsleute. Es liegt in den Händen Spaniens die Wahl zwischen Frieden und Verderben, denn es ist allgemein bekannt, dass wir geduldsam, allzu geduldsam sind, friedfertig, "pacatos", "sangre de horchata" [lustlos] etc. […] Aber ich kann nicht glauben, dass Sie, ein freier Mann, ein Bürger Europas, Ihrem guten Freunde rathen [wollen], Alles unbedingt und wie ein mutloser Mann zu ertragen. Seien Sie dennoch versichert dass ich das Glück meines Vaterlandes wünsche und solange ich glaube, dass es nur in dem spanischen Regierungssystem liegt, werde ich alles bekämpfen, alles was gegen Spanien gedacht wird.
>
> *If the government forces us to do so, that is, if we have no hope left on earth but to seek our ruin [in] war, if the Filipinos prefer [to] die rather than endure misery, then I also share the fate of my compatriots.*[47] *It is in the hands*

47 The official English translation reads "then I will also become a partisan of violent means", thus falsifying Rizal's statement into a commitment to violence. The Rizal–Blumentritt Correspondence, Vol. I. Manila 1992, 105

> *of Spain to choose between peace and ruin, for it is well known that we are patient, too patient, peaceable, 'pacatos', 'sangre de horchata' [lackadaisical], etc. […] But I cannot believe that you, a free man, a citizen of Europe, would advise your good friend to endure everything unconditionally and like a despondent man. Be assured, however, that I desire the happiness of my fatherland, and as long as I believe that it lies only in the Spanish system of government, I will fight everything that is thought against Spain.*

By making these statements, Rizal is giving the Madrid government a chance to implement the reforms he and his fellow Filipinos in Spain have demanded. He disagrees with the timid attitude of his compatriots in the homeland, while he himself takes the courageous stance of a writer, who will expose the abuses of corrupt colonial rule. He is not giving up on the liberal Spain, whose understanding of the necessary revision of the colonial administration in the Philippines he is pinning his hopes on. But his hopes will soon be dashed, and it is his literary resistance that will be his undoing.

The assassination of Rizal by the Spanish crown was an attack not only on the individual, but also on the call for freedom of thought and expression. If these demands are recognised as valid in the context of world literature, then Rizal's life and work should take a rightful place in the history of resistance literature that has an impact outside the national zone.

Postscript

On 4 November 1896, Rizal was imprisoned in Fort Santiago in Manila and held *incommunicado.* His desire to travel and wander had already been severely tested by his exile since the beginning of July 1892. However, under the circumstances of solitary confinement, he had no choice but to prepare his defence and occasionally 'travel' through the pages of a book. Until well into December, he was under investigation for inciting sedition against the Spanish crown. Occasionally, he received oral reports on particular points of the charges against him. On 10 December, the public prosecutor asked him to appoint a defence lawyer of his choice – a hollow formality. On 26 December, the court

martial sentenced him to death. He was informed of the sentence on 29 December and executed early the next day.

During his time in prison, Rizal was meticulously monitored, with everything recorded, what his guards deemed useful for their murderous intention. The reconstructed log describing Rizal's 'activities' on 12 December reads thus:

> Rizal made several annotations and underlined several quotations from [Luís de] Camões [1525–1580], translated in German in the book, *Egger's German Reader,* pp. 273–280, also in the footnotes to [the drama] *Camoens* by Friedrich Halm [1806–1871], p. 296, and *Orations to the German Nation* by [Johann Gottlieb] Fichte, pp. 33–36, and [Pierre-Jean de] Béranger's [1770–1857] *Adieu,* p. 60. Rizal on December 29 gave the *Egger's German Reader* to his sister with the request to forward it to his good friend Dr. Blumentritt as expressing his last thoughts to him.[48]

The book, in which Rizal travelled, so to speak, and wanted to communicate his last thoughts to his friend, cleverly using statements by others, came from the library of Blumentritt. In a letter addressed to Adolf Bernhard Meyer dated September 4, 1897, the school headmaster wrote:

> Es ist eine Schulchrestomathie für unsere deutsch-östr. Mittelschulen, die ihm, als er bei mir geweilt, gefallen hatte u. die ich ihm gegeben. Rizal übergab dies Buch seiner Schwester mit dem Bemerken, sie möge es mir durch eine sichere Mittelsperson übergeben und mir gleichzeitig sagen, dass die in dem Buche von ihm mit Bleistift eingestrichenen Stellen gleichsam seine letzten Gedanken (seine geistige Biographie) enthielten.[49]

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48 Quoted according to Carlos E. da Silva: Discovery of Rizal's improvised Chapel-Cell at Fort Santiago. Appendix A: Brief chronology of Rizal's 56 days of confinement in the prison-cell, Fort Santiago, November 3 to December 28, 1896. In: The Journal of History, Manila, Philippines, Vol. IX Nos. 2&3, June–September, 1961, 207

49 Johann Stockinger (Ed.): Der große Verteidiger der Philippinen Teil 3: Ferdinand Blumentritts Korrespondenz mit A. B. Meyer. Wien 2023, 119

> *It is a school-chrestomathy for our German-Austrian secondary schools, which he liked when he stayed with me* [in May 1887] *and which I gave him. Rizal handed this book over to his sister with the remark that she should give it to me through a safe intermediary and at the same time tell me that the passages he had pencilled in the book contained his last thoughts (his intellectual biography).*

The author of the textbook was an Austrian pedagogue named Alois Egger (1829–1904), the title of the book: *Deutsches Lehr- und Lesebuch für höhere Lehranstalten. Teil 2, Literaturkunde,* Wien 1879 (German textbook and reader for secondary schools. Part 2, Literature). It contains informative introductions and many excerpts from the works of German-language classics, also a "Weltliteratur"-section with German translations from canonical works of classical antiquity and various European languages.[50]

Blumentritt's copy, which had been marked in pencil by Rizal, was, it seems, lost during its adventurous journey. Before its return to Blumentritt, it was buried in Philippine soil for six months. It then arrived in Leitmeritz via a tangled route, but did not stay there long; Blumentritt despatched it in autumn 1898 to the Swedish ethnographer Hjalmar Stolpe. The accompanying letter is rather interesting, because Blumentritt mentions a possible connection with Rizal's famous farewell poem, which posterity has given the title *Mi último adiós.* He had perhaps noticed – vaguely speaking – similarities in content and language between Rizal's poem and the pencil marks the friend had made in Egger's Lesebuch. At best, there may be echoes that could suggest that reading the poems in the Austrian textbook had prompted Rizal to write an elegiac valedictory poem in view of his last journey.

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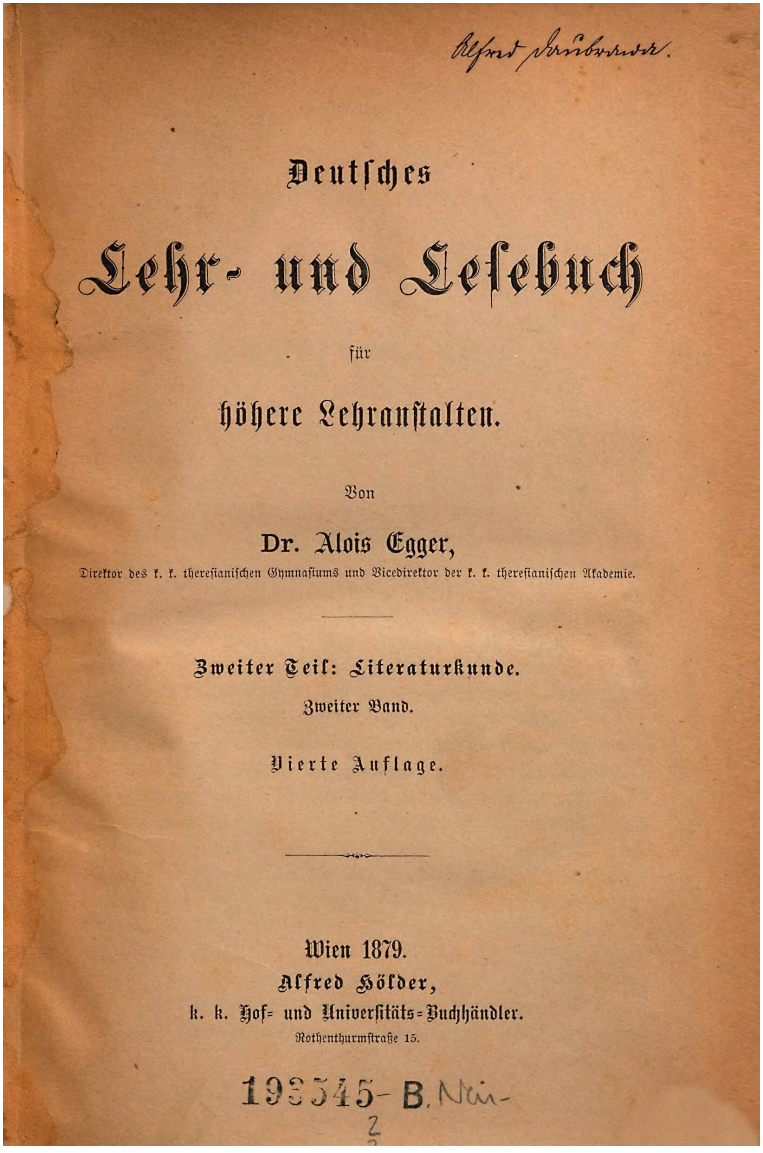
50 The edition of Egger's book – there were many – that I consulted online is slightly different to the one that Rizal had. Therefore, the page numbers I have reproduced are only approximate: Luís de Camões, p. 80; F. Halm, p. 278; J. G. Fichte, p. 43; P.-J. de Béranger, p. 71 f. – Cf. Egger's book online: https://viewer.onb.ac.at/117D5998 (10. 6. 2025)



Deutsches

Lehr- und Lesebuch

für

höhere Lehranstalten.

Von

Dr. Alois Egger,

Direktor des k. k. theresianischen Gymnasiums und Vicedirektor der k. k. theresianischen Akademie.

Zweiter Teil: Literaturkunde.

Zweiter Band.

Vierte Auflage.

Wien 1879.

Alfred Hölder,

k. k. Hof- und Universitäts-Buchhändler.

Rothenthurmstraße 15.

193545-B. Nat-

2

Alois Egger: German Textbook and Reader for Secondary Schools. Part 2: Literature classes, Vol. 2. Vienna, 4th edition, 1879

However, Blumentritt leaves it at 'conjecture', referring to the fact that Rizal wanted to communicate his 'last thoughts' – "ultimos pensamientos"[51] – to the recipient with the markings in Egger's book. If this is the case, he ponders, 'último adiós' would be a more fitting title to the farewell poem than 'último pensamiento' (as Mariano Ponce had suggested). At the end of his letter to Stolpe, Blumentritt writes that some of the marked passages in the textbook, especially the pages with Camões-quotes, would "always move me to tears".

I have selected and translated the excerpts from the edition of Eggers, available to me, which I assume Rizal could have marked in the prison cell on 12 December 1896. An exact match is of course out of question.

Excerpt from Luís de Camões' The Lusiads

Ein neues Reich zu baun in ferner Zone,
Das sie erhoben zu der Länder Krone, […]
Soll mein Gesang vor aller Welt verkünden,
Wenn sich Natur und Kunst in mir verbünden.

To build a new Reich in the distant zone,
Which they raised to the crown of lands, […]
Shall my song proclaim before the world,
When in me art and nature will unite.

Excerpt from Friedrich Halm's dramatic poem *Camoens*:

Ich bin erschöpft! Mich schüttelt Fieberfrost,
Und Dämmerung umschleiert mir das Auge.
Ist das der Tod, der mahnend mich begrüßt,
Eh er den Atem von der Lippe küsst?

51 In Stockinger's book (2023), where the story is told and documented, *pensamientos* is rendered as *posamientos,* a printing error.

I am exhausted! A feverish chill shakes me,
and twilight veils my eyes.
Is this, coming to warn me, death,
before kissing the breath from my lips?

Excerpt from Johann Gottlieb Fichte's *Reden an die deutsche Nation* (1808):

Es lässt sich der strenge Beweis führen, […] dass kein Mensch und kein Gott, und keines von allen im Gebiete der Möglichkeit liegenden Ereignissen uns helfen kann, sondern dass allein wir selber uns helfen müssen, falls uns geholfen werden soll.

It can be proven beyond doubt […] *that no man, and no God, and no event lying within the realm of possibility can help us; but that we must help ourselves if we are to be helped.*

Excerpt from Pierre-Jean de Béranger's *Adieu*:

O Frankreich! In die Lüfte rinnt mein Leben;
Doch soll dein Namen, eh es ganz zerstiebt,
Geliebte Mutter, mir vom Munde schweben,
Denn niemand hat dich mehr als ich geliebt.
Dir galt dereinst des Kindes erste Lallen,
Mein letzter Seufzer auch gilt deinem Wohl.
Lasst auf mein Grab nur eine Träne fallen
Für so viel Treu! Mein Frankreich, lebe wohl!

O France! My life runs out into the air;
But let your name, before it dies away,
Beloved mother, float from my mouth,
For no one loved you more than I.
You were the child's first babble once,
Also my last sigh is meant for you.
Let but one tear fall on my grave
For so much loyalty! My France, farewell!

Spain pays homage to José Rizal

On 6 February 2023, the director of the Instituto Cervantes in Madrid, Luis García Moreno, opened the armoured door to the vault of the *Caja de las letras* (Bank of Literature) to deposit José Rizal's literary legacy as a "Legado in Memoriam" in safe deposit box number 1690. The Philippine Ambassador and the Spanish Ambassador to the Philippines were among the few guests and speakers present during this act of state.

After well-placed words of praise and remembrance, various editions of the novels *Noli me tángere* (Berlin 1887) and *El Filibusterismo* (Ghent 1891), described in the Aviso as "grande novelas", as well as other writings by the Filipino author, were packed into the metal box of the literature bank and carefully sealed.

The *Caja de las letras* was created after the Instituto Cervantes moved into the former National Central Bank building in 2007. The converted vaults in the basement are designed to preserve the works of those who have contributed and will contribute to Spain's cultural heritage, like a tangible and accessible memory repository; in the official language of the Institute: "literary, artistic and scientific legacies (legados) of Spanish-speaking culture". It is to be hoped that the cabinets will not be misunderstood as columbaria, but that each ritual of consignment will be an invitation to make the work thus canonised known to all lovers of world literature.

The inclusion of Rizal's literary works in Spain's literary heritage is long overdue. 127 years after the unlawful execution of the Filipino in-

Spain pays homage to José Rizal.
In: Dietrich Harth: Hero of the Nation and Citizen of the World.
Tracing José Rizal. Essays and Miscellanea. Heidelberg 2025, pp. 181–185.
https://doi.org/10.11588/heibooks.1635

tellectual by the Spanish crown, this act of 2023 seems like a belated act of reparation. The decision of the Institute's directors to place Rizal's legacy in a vault next to that of the Basque philosopher Miguel de Unamuno speaks for itself. Unamuno was three years younger than his Filipino "neighbour", but outlived him by 40 years. The Filipino and the Basque studied at the same time at the Central University of Madrid, sometimes attending the same lectures.

Unamuno was familiar with Rizal's writings. He contributed a particularly perceptive characterisation of the Filipino as a postscript to the biography of Rizal by the Spanish Filipinoist Wenceslao Retana, published in 1907. In the epilogue, Unamuno wrote of the novels: "Like Plato, he poured out his ideas in dialogues. His novels are nothing more than sociological, sometimes philosophical dialogues. He needed more than one character to show his intellectual versatility".[1] A judgement, I think, that gives much food for further meditations.

Carta al Director del Instituto Cervantes Madrid

22 enero 2024

Estimado Sr. García Montero,

con fecha 6 de febrero de 2023 se han incorporado a la Caja de las letras del Instituto las novelas *Noli me tángere* y *El Filibusterismo* del escritor filipino José Rizal. En la correspondiente página web del Instituto[2] unas palabras hacen referencia a algunos datos biográficos de la vida de Rizal. Permítame llamar su atención sobre los graves errores de esta breve biografía:

1 Wenceslao Retana: Vida y Escritos del Dr. José Rizal. Madrid 1907, 475–498. https://archive.org/details/vidayescritosdeoounamgoog/page/498/mode/2up?q=unamuno

2 https://cultura.cervantes.es/espanya/es/Caja-de-las-Letras:-José-Rizal-in-memoriam/157697

1. Rizal no era un revolucionario, por lo que es erróneo escribir "Pese a sus intentos por congraciarse con el gobierno español fue acusado de asociación ilícita con *otros revolucionarios* y…" Los gobiernos filipinos lo celebran oficialmente como héroe nacional revolucionario por razones de política identitaria. Sin embargo, al igual que Gandhi, rechazó toda forma de violencia y exigió a la madre patria española igualdad ante la ley, un reparto justo de la tierra y un sistema educativo laico.
2. Rizal nunca se "congració" con los gobernantes coloniales españoles, sino que criticó valientemente la corrupción de la administración colonial y el feudalismo antimoderno de las órdenes monásticas españolas. Pero, sobre todo, defendió los intereses de su familia, maltratada por la Guardia Civil.
3. La siguiente frase también es incorrecta: "Rizal sentó las bases del independentismo filipino." Rizal no era anticolonialista, era y siguió siendo amigo de la *España moderna*. No deseaba la independencia y condenaba enérgicamente el uso de la violencia revolucionaria. Como muchos de sus amigos filipinos, soñaba con una Provincia Española de Ultramar semiautónoma. En diciembre de 1896, escribió en un llamamiento a la paz a sus compatriotas: "*He dado pruebas como el que más de querer libertades para nuestro país […]. Pero yo ponía como premisa la educación del pueblo, para que por medio de la instrucción y del trabajo tuviese personalidad propia y se hiciese digno de las mismas. He recomendado en mis escritos el estudio, las virtudes cívicas, sin las cuales no existe redención. He escrito también […] que las reformas, para ser fructíferas, tenían que venir de arriba, que las que venían de abajo eran sacudidas irregulares e inseguras. Nutrido de estas ideas, no puedo menos de condenar y condeno esa sublevación absurda, salvaje, tramada a espaldas mías, que nos deshonra a los filipinos y desacredita a los que pueden abogar por nosotros; abomino de sus procedimientos criminales, y rechazo toda clase de participaciones.*"

Quisiera pedirle que corrija en consecuencia los textos que figuran en el sitio web del Instituto. Estaré encantado de ayudarle en esta tarea, por lo que también me gustaría llamar su atención sobre mi gran estudio sobre Rizal:

José Rizals Kampf um Leben und Tod. Facetten einer kolonialismuskritischen Biografie
(La lucha de José Rizal por la vida y la muerte. Facetas de una biografía crítica con el colonialismo). Heidelberg 2021. Open Access: https://doi.org/10.11588/heibooks.839

Le saluda muy atentamente
Prof. Dr. D. Harth (Heidelberg)

To the Director of the Cervantes Institute Mr. Luis García Montero

22 January 2024

Dear Sir,
on 6 February 2023, the novels *Noli me tángere* and *El Filibusterismo* by the Filipino writer José Rizal were added to the Institute's Caja de las Letras. On the Institute's website (https://cultura.cervantes.es/espanya/es/Caja-de-las-Letras:-José-Rizal-in-memoriam/157697), a few words refer to some biographical details of Rizal's life. Let me draw your attention to the errors in this short biography:

1. Rizal was not a revolutionary, so it is wrong to write "Despite his attempts to ingratiate himself with the Spanish government he was accused of illicit association with *other revolutionaries* …" Philippine governments officially celebrate him as a revolutionary national hero for reasons of identity policy. However, like Gandhi, he rejected all forms of violence and demanded equality before the law, a fair distribution of land and a secular education system from the Spanish motherland.
2. Rizal never "ingratiated" himself with the Spanish colonial rulers, but courageously criticised the corruption of the colonial administration and the anti-modern feudalism of the Spanish monastic orders. But, above all, he defended the interests of his family, which was abused by the Guardia Civil.

3. The following sentence is also incorrect: "Rizal laid the foundations of Philippine independence". Rizal was no anti-colonialist, he was and remained a friend of *Espagna moderna.* He did not want independence and strongly condemned the use of revolutionary violence. Like many of his Filipino friends, he dreamed of a semi-autonomous Spanish Overseas Province. In December 1896, he wrote in an appeal for peace to his compatriots: "*I have given proof as much as anyone of wanting liberties for our country […]. But my premise was the education of the people, so that through education and work they could have their own personality and become worthy of them. In my writings I have recommended study and civic virtues, without which there is no redemption. I have also written […] that reforms, to be fruitful, had to come from above, that those coming from below were irregular and insecure. Nourished by these ideas, I cannot but condemn and I do condemn this absurd, savage uprising, plotted behind my back, which disgraces us Filipinos and discredits those who can advocate for us; I abhor its criminal procedures, and I reject any kind of participation*".

I would like to ask you to correct the texts on the Institute's website accordingly. I will be happy to assist you in this task. I would also like to draw your attention to my study on Rizal: *José Rizals Kampf um Leben und Tod. Facetten einer kolonialismuskritischen Biografie.* Open Access: https://doi.org/10.11588/heibooks.839

Sincerely yours
Prof. Dr. D. Harth (Heidelberg)

Index

Index.
In: Dietrich Harth: Hero of the Nation and Citizen of the World.
Tracing José Rizal. Essays and Miscellanea. Heidelberg 2025, pp. 187–190.
https://doi.org/10.11588/heibooks.1635

The contributions in this volume build upon the monograph published by cultural studies scholar Dietrich Harth in 2021 under the title "José Rizals Kampf um Leben und Tod" (José Rizal's Struggle for Life and Death, 2nd ed., 2025). The texts, written on various occasions, trace Rizal's life story, question the formation of legends that solidified his status as a 'national hero', and discuss certain facets of his literary creativity and journalistic resistance against Spanish colonial rule. Harth's readings explore the world literary traces in Rizal's writings and emphasise the Asian intellectual's cosmopolitan views.

Dietrich Harth was awarded the *Ferdinand Blumentritt Medal for outstanding achievements and personal commitment in the field of Philippines and Southeast Asia research*, sponsored by the Austro-Philippine Society in Vienna.

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