

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 tângere* (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-

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 tângere* y *El Filibusterismo* del escritor filipino José Rizal. En la correspondiente página web del Instituto² 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/vidayescritosdeounamgoog/page/498/mode/2up?q=unamuno>

2 <https://cultura.cervantes.es/espanya/es/Caja-de-las-Letras:-José-Rizal-in-memoriám/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 tângere* 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-memoriám/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 *España 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)