

# philippine studies

Ateneo de Manila University • Loyola Heights, Quezon City • 1108 Philippines

---

## Rizal and Poltergeists in Dapitan

Jose S. Arcilla, S.J.

*Philippine Studies* vol. 49, no. 1 (2001): 94–112

Copyright © Ateneo de Manila University

---

Philippine Studies is published by the Ateneo de Manila University. Contents may not be copied or sent via email or other means to multiple sites and posted to a listserv without the copyright holder's written permission. Users may download and print articles for individual, noncommercial use only. However, unless prior permission has been obtained, you may not download an entire issue of a journal, or download multiple copies of articles.

Please contact the publisher for any further use of this work at [philstudies@admu.edu.ph](mailto:philstudies@admu.edu.ph).

<http://www.philippinestudies.net>  
Fri June 27 13:30:20 2008

## Rizal and Poltergeists in Dapitan

*Jose S. Arcilla, S.J.*

At noon of 26 June 1892, the mailboat from Hongkong docked in Manila. Aboard were Rizal and his sister, Lucia. He had been away from the Philippines for the last ten years, except for a brief visit of six months from August 1887 to January 1888 to Calamba, after his novel, *Noli me tangere*, came off a Berlin press. The book stirred his friends, but it also won for him a number of enemies. And when he arrived in Calamba, a suffocating atmosphere enveloped him, forcing him to leave the Philippines a second time. But that visit, he wrote, was like reading a true book about his country.

He had already written a few articles before the novel, but *Noli me tangere* had earned for him the unmitigated hostility of many in the Spanish community of Manila.<sup>1</sup> Daily, as soon as copies of the book reached Manila, the superiors of the religious orders and the Archbishop of Manila kept after the Governor General to bring its author to court. The treasurer of the Dominicans denounced him to the city mayor, for "holding meetings night and day on a hill" outside Calamba. Rizal admitted that he did take early morning walks around town, but always with the lieutenant of the Guardia civil who understood Tagalog and other people out to enjoy the fresh morning breeze.<sup>2</sup>

In this brief visit home, he had had a private audience with the Governor General who asked for a copy of Rizal's book. The latter had already given away the last copies he had, but he promised to try to ask back a copy he had given to the Jesuits and bring it to the Governor General. The Jesuits, of course, refused to part with their copy. It was after this brief encounter with the Governor that Rizal decided to leave the country.

This unfriendly, even hostile atmosphere had given him no peace. Many of his relatives and friends feared for his life, the priests did not want to hear about him any longer, and government officials had

hoped he would betake himself to some distance away. Several friends were probably soon to be exiled to the Marianas or Balabac in southern Palawan because of him. And so, "*nach Europa*" (to Europe), he wrote.

He was sick with fever, but he had no choice. He managed to go, however, because of some influential figures: Taviel de Andrada, the "body guard" assigned to him, but who quickly became his friend; the Governor General, the Director of the Civil Administration, and the Civil Governor of Manila. These men, he wrote to his "true friend" Blumentritt, were open-minded and sympathetic to him. Otherwise, he would already be languishing in the *calabozo* (dungeon).<sup>3</sup>

By the end of May 1889, he was in London, annotating Morga's *Sucesos de las Islas Filipinas* preserved in the British Museum. After his first novel, he realized that the Filipinos needed to know their past to "better judge the present." By republishing with notes and his personal views of Morga's history of the Philippines, he hoped to "awaken among his countrymen an awareness of a past erased from their memory, and correct lies and calumnies" (Rizal 1889).

He soon moved to France where he published this work. In due time he finished another novel, *El filibusterismo*.<sup>4</sup> It was not a vindictive book, he explained, but one that sought the well-being of the suffering, and to promote human justice, especially for the still unsophisticated and politically naïve Tagalogs.<sup>5</sup> He would have poured into its pages "all his knowledge, all his thoughts, all his feelings, but there was not enough space." And with its publication, he looked forward with confidence and resignation to his future fate.<sup>6</sup>

The publication of the two novels fulfilled Rizal's purpose in going to Europe. His secret departure for Europe in 1882 had everyone guessing why. His father felt rather badly about it, but said nothing, refused to eat, and took to his bed, crying at night despite efforts to console him. Afraid lest he fall sick, Paciano, Rizal's older brother, explained everything in confidence to him. Only then was Don Francisco appeased, and he recovered his former self, most probably approving the action his younger son had taken. And writing to his younger brother, Paciano reminded him that he had gone to Europe, not to improve himself in the career he was pursuing, but "in other more useful things, or what comes to the same thing, that to which you have the greater inclination."<sup>7</sup> Hindsight tells us that this greater inclination was writing and publishing his three books. Naturally, having done what he had intended, Rizal felt it was time to return home.

By 1891, then, Rizal was through with Spain. He had had a falling out with Marcelo del Pilar, and was becoming more and more disillusioned with the Filipino expatriates in Madrid who, he criticized, spent their money and time in gambling (see Schumacher 1997). Even then, in Europe or in his country, he wanted to continue working for his country, besides urging others to do the same. He would continue writing for the good of the Philippines, and he assured Plaridel that "if the Filipinos end up totally eclipsing me, it will be because they shall have worked more than I, served more than I. This I wish at the moment."<sup>8</sup>

His attitude is perhaps best reflected in a letter he wrote to Blumentritt before he left Europe:

About my family? Deep pain engulfs me whenever I think about it, such that, were my faith in God less, I would have committed some stupidity. I have no regrets having undertaken this campaign. Were I starting life, I would do the same as I have done. I am certain I shall do it. It was my *Pflicht* (fate, duty). God could ask me later why I had not fought evil and injustice I witnessed.<sup>9</sup>

He explained to Blumentritt that, since the Spaniards refused to treat the Filipinos as brothers, neither would the latter beg for it. They wanted justice, not pity, not sympathy. They needed "*Bildung, Bildung, und Bildung*" (enlightenment, enlightenment, and enlightenment).<sup>10</sup> This, Rizal believed, was impossible, unless in his graphic words, "the medicine must be close to the patient."<sup>11</sup> He believed, therefore, that he had to go home, though almost to a man his friends in Europe dissuaded him from it. Blumentritt urged him not to take the risks of returning, for away from the Philippines, his country could profit from his mind and freedom (*Kopf und Freiheit*).<sup>12</sup> But to Mariano Ponce he wrote in part:

I want to return to the Philippines. It may be imprudent and rash. What does it matter? The Filipinos are too prudent, and that is how our country goes. Since I believe that we are not going well along the road of prudence, I shall look for another. Who knows if indeed it is not a special country, which needs special rules to govern?<sup>13</sup>

By this time, Rizal had barely enough funds to support his continued stay in Europe. The Propaganda Committee in Manila had promised to send him a monthly pension, and he received 300 pesos from them for February to April; but nothing for the succeeding five months, May to September. They had "promised," he wrote Jose Ma.

Basa in Hongkong, and he did receive their promises, and nothing more. And he added:

I am tired believing in our countrymen. It seems all have conspired together to embitter my life. They block my return with the promise of a pension. After sending it to me for one month, they have no longer remembered me.<sup>14</sup>

Money was not the only reason why Rizal wanted to leave Europe. In 1891, the Dominicans who owned the land his father leased, ejected his immediate family and other relatives from Calamba and their exile weighed heavily on his conscience. They had appealed to the Supreme Court in Spain, but it supported the lower court in Manila.<sup>15</sup> He was certain the government had been harsh to them because of him. And he felt he had to do something to spare them from further suffering. He would go back Manila, or maybe to Hongkong. Here, his medical practice would earn him his keep, and once his financial situation was assured, he could dedicate himself more fully to his country's welfare "*con más bríos y más efectos hasta ahora*" (with more energy and greater success than hitherto).<sup>16</sup>

On 20 November 1891, Rizal arrived in Hongkong, where he was once more happy as in his younger days. In due time, his family joined him, except one or two married sisters who remained in the Philippines. About ten days later, he was writing to his sister, Maria, that their father in Hongkong was regaining his health, putting on weight and color on his cheeks.<sup>17</sup> And to Blumentritt, he explained how his older brother had begun translating his first novel into Tagalog.<sup>18</sup> He himself had thought of a third book, a novel in the strict sense of the word. It would emphasize Filipino life, Filipino customs, and with hardly any political issues. Only two Spaniards, a lieutenant of the Guardia Civil and the parish priest, would grace its pages. Rizal planned it to be witty, humorous, satirical, a story that would "scourge and laugh, laugh in the midst of tears and weep bitterly." Writing it would give him respite from his medical tasks. And he began to write it in Tagalog for the readers who most needed it, but would not understand it if written in Spanish.

He immediately gave it up. Though a born writer and thinker, he found it extremely hard to express his thoughts in his native idiom! He had had no practice in writing in Tagalog and he was forced to invent neologisms.<sup>19</sup>

A Calambeño unable to express himself in Tagalog? A number of his short letters were in Tagalog, but writing a novel in this tongue

was different. He needed more than just a rich vocabulary, and he had not really steeped himself in a literature that mirrored Tagalog culture. In his youth, he had imbibed the Greco-Roman classics, Virgil, Cicero, and other authors who had shown him a "new path" to take (Jacinto 1949).

Had the future national hero lost touch? His letter clearly shows he had not esconced himself in an ivory tower, and his family had constantly filled him in on the tragic events in Calamba which gave him the creeps. He had more than enough material for a book. In fact, one of his dreams for the Philippines was to build a house on a hill, enrich it with books, and dedicate himself to the pursuit of letters. Almost innately, he was a man of letters. "I shall read and write history," he wrote Blumentritt.<sup>20</sup>

And yet his pen failed to fashion a Tagalog novel. When he first sailed away secretly in 1882, he joined a conversation with passengers, who all condemned the Manila government they were leaving behind. Back in his cabin, he wrote in his diary, "I came to discover for the first time in my life that everyone in the Philippines was living to suck the indio's blood" (Rizal 1961, 38).

That is the key: "I came to discover." He had always been sheltered from harsh reality, and the country he had known was the limited geographical space between Calamba and Manila. Like Ibarra in the *Noli*, he had spent his youth among the Jesuits and grew up in Europe. All he knew came from books and only "what men have been able to bring to light. What remains behind in the shadows, what writers failed to write about, I do not know" (*Noli*, ch 50). Rizal had reached a blank wall, wanting but unable to write for a people for whom he was willing to die, whom he always wanted to serve with the pen, and even with his life.

Rizal's stay in Hongkong was an idyllic reunion with his family, but it was not meant to last. He had hoped to be free of political compromises, but friends refused to leave him alone. Significantly, Blumentritt pleaded with him not to mesh up with revolutionary plans. By themselves alone, the Austrians warned, plotters never succeed, unless they enjoyed support from external adventurers, or an internal turmoil distracted the home government. Unless they had at least the probability of success, would Rizal want to burden his conscience with innocent blood uselessly shed?<sup>21</sup>

But as long as his people suffered from official injustice or neglect, Rizal was ill at ease. He even wanted to become an English citizen,

migrate to North Borneo with the Calamba exiles, and start for them an agricultural community—a new Calamba—away from Spanish colonial maladministration. He had already gone there to look for a site, but he dropped the idea. The Manila government had frowned upon it, correctly noting that the Philippines was also in need of hands to develop its agricultural resources.<sup>22</sup> And apparently he was not serious about it.

What concerned him most, however, was the attitude of the Filipinos. He had written the *Noli* precisely to alert them to their condition and push them to do something about it, for perhaps the government would institute reforms. But, would his countrymen be ready for these official initiatives? He strongly doubted it. Years earlier, he had already complained that the Filipinos were unformed mud, not bricks, and one could not build a house with it.<sup>23</sup> Or in a poetic vein, though talented, the Filipinos still needed awakening, guidance through the dark night, and like “shy flowers,” needed watering before they could fully bloom.<sup>24</sup>

This concern lies behind the rules of the *Liga filipina* he agreed to compose while in Hongkong. As its motto indicated, the league aimed at uniting the Filipinos into a live, compact, homogeneous group. Its members would commit themselves to mutually help one another and fend off every manner of injustice and violence. More importantly, they would promote education, agriculture, and commerce, besides the study and support of reforms in the country.<sup>25</sup>

But the Philippines kept calling. By 20 June 1892, six months after he had arrived there, he had made up his mind to return to the Philippines. Twice he had asked Governor General Eulogio Despujol (1891–1893) to allow him to return, but no answer came. Finally, just before he boarded the mail boat for Manila, he wrote another letter to the highest Philippine official:

My purpose in this letter is to inform Your Excellency that aboard this mail boat I am coming to my country and place myself under your orders, first, and then settle some personal affairs. Friends and strangers have tried to dissuade me from taking this step. . . . For some time my old parents, my relatives, friends, and even individual persons unknown to me, have been unkindly persecuted, they say, because of me. I now present myself to direct all these attacks to my person, answer the charges they may want to impute against me, in order to end this question, bitter to the innocent, and unfortunate for Your Excellency's administration, which is concerned about its reputation for justice.<sup>26</sup>

And to his parents, he wrote a rather poignant, almost fatalistic letter to ease their anxiety and explain his decision:

The love I have always shown to you was what prompted me to make this decision, which only the future will show is sensible or not. The results determine success, but, favorable or not, it will always be said that my duty has led me on. If I die in its fulfillment, so be it.

I know I have caused you much to suffer, but I do not regret what I have done, and were I to start now, I would do the same thing I did, for it is my duty. I gladly depart to face the danger, not to expiate my faults—on this question I do not believe I have any—but to crown my work and testify by example what I have always preached.

A man must die for his duty and his convictions. I hold on to all my ideas regarding the state and my country's future, and I will gladly die for it and, even more, to win justice and peace for you.

I risk my life to save so many innocent people, so many nephews, so many children of friends and of those who are not friends who suffer because of me. Who am I? One man, alone, almost without a family, sufficiently disillusioned with life. I have suffered so many disappointments, the future is dark. . . .

If fate is hostile, let everyone know that I shall die happy, thinking that with death I shall have succeeded in ending all their bitterness.<sup>27</sup>

In almost the same words, Rizal wrote another letter to his countrymen. He knew that returning to the Philippines was a great risk, but he had long considered it and not rashly decided on it. He could not continue living, he said, "knowing that many suffer and are persecuted unjustly for my sake, seeing my brothers and so many families persecuted like criminals."<sup>28</sup>

The government was, of course, alerted and when he arrived, a customs inspector in ordinary clothes, met Rizal "accidentally," and offered to accompany him to his hotel, actually to know where he was lodged. It was a Sunday, and that night he briefly greeted the Governor General in the latter's office. He was asked to return the next morning, and received an invitation to a lengthier conference on Wednesday. Monday and Tuesday he was free and boarded the train to Bulacan and Tarlac. He met many friends, besides treating several patients who approached him. He then returned to Manila for his meeting with the Governor General.

Meantime, information reached the latter that, among the baggage of passengers from Hongkong was a sheaf of printed leaflets "inside



a bundle or parcel of four pillows belonging to his sister."<sup>29</sup> The governor felt betrayed. He had not only welcomed Rizal, despite the latter's known disaffection towards Spain, but he had also granted an indult to his closest relatives. But Despujol suppressed his initial impulse to penalize Rizal immediately and decided to pretend ignorance in order to "better uncover the real intentions and designs he was harboring on returning to Manila."<sup>30</sup>

In their meetings, the Governor General refused Rizal's request for an indult for all the people exiled from Calamba, since it was a legal case already settled by the courts under the previous Governor. When asked, Rizal mentioned two reforms he hoped would be introduced in the Philippines. First, the secularization of all the parishes in the Philippines, even under peninsular priests, and a total ban against the friars from exercising any authority over the primary schools. This, in his view, was the "only way to promote the intellectual growth and progress" of the Filipinos. If granted, Rizal added that he would not mind if the friars remained in the country or held on to their wealth, as long as they lived in community, observing their community rules.

Second, Rizal asked for Philippine representation in the Spanish legislature, just like Cuba and Puerto Rico. It was the first step, he argued, that would allow the Filipinos to suggest to the law-making bodies in Spain the reforms needed in the Philippines.<sup>31</sup>

Significantly, in his reports to the Governor General, Ricardo Carnicero, the Commandant in Dapitan, mentioned identical demands from the exiled Rizal. The two had become friendly, and had frequent exchanges of views.

Finally, Rizal explained to the Governor General that the Filipinos were not *filibusteros*.<sup>32</sup> The concept itself was hardly known among them. He himself had never wanted or even thought of separation from Spain until the incidents of Calamba. His relatives and close friends, he added, were "persecuted on pretext of being the main instigators" not to pay the land rent; but actually "because of the ties that bound them to him and in vengeance for his writings against the religious orders." This convinced him that life would be impossible under the "indestructible power of the friars even in the official spheres in the Philippines, and he began to lose hope in his country's future if united to the Spanish Crown."<sup>33</sup>

This forced the Governor General to bluntly ask what opinion Rizal wanted the former to have of him, or how he could believe him, since, after all the favors granted to his family, Rizal had shown "no

*delicadeza*, acted traitorously with premeditation by bringing in his baggage clandestine leaflets which were attacks, not only against the religious orders, but injurious statements against the Pope, which amounted to attacks against the Catholic religion itself. The proposed anti-patriotic goals, which no one can deny seek to destroy the simple heart of the Indio." With a straight face, Rizal denied the allegation.<sup>34</sup> But Despujol retorted that no one among the customs officials, in fact nobody, of the government officials had known he was arriving. It was, therefore, impossible, that even those who wished him ill could have planted the leaflets. Then Rizal pointed out that the pillows belonged to his sister, and the Governor urged him, "for the sake of his honor," not to implicate his sister. And there and then, he ordered his Adjutant to take Rizal in a carriage to Fort Santiago and kept in solitary confinement in a room readied for him, until a boat would take him to his exile in Dapitan.

Rizal's exile was actually a preventive, prudential measure, Despujol explained in a report to the Overseas Ministry in Madrid. When the future national hero had asked leave to return, the Governor closely studied how the nationalist propaganda for reforms was affecting the Philippines, or the probability of a bloody revolution. And when Rizal arrived, he secretly directed the provincial governors around Manila to check if any of his friends would come to Manila to welcome him. No one did. And simultaneously they raided about sixty houses of suspected persons in three or four important towns, confiscated books, newspapers, leaflets, and any evidence of an anti-government activity. No one knew Rizal was detained, but next morning, 7 July 1892, the government published the decree exiling Rizal to Dapitan.

Significantly, Despujol admitted his one-year residence in the Philippines was not sufficient for him to make final judgments about the colony. But evidence impounded from the houses of known propagandists or sympathizers of reform proved two things. First, the printed and handwritten materials his men had confiscated were mainly Rizal's works, with a few pamphlets attacking the religious orders, but not religion itself. Most denounced administrative abuses, with appeals to Spain for justice. But in none of them, "absolutely in none," the Governor emphasized, "is there, despite their clandestine nature, clearly an open attack against the integrity of the fatherland, much less are the people incited to rebel."

Second, from the depositions of the owners of the houses, Despujol

concluded that Madrid and Hongkong were the bases of operation of the anti-Spanish propaganda, the first where a newspaper, *La Solidaridad*, was published, the second the center of diffusion and smuggling of propaganda material into the Philippines.<sup>35</sup> Insufficiently financed, there was no conclusive proof that the activity had "hostile aims against the integrity of the fatherland or was in any form illegal." On the other hand, in Despujol's mind, it was not impossible that "in this way a few were earning their keep—no matter how modestly—at the expense of a few gullible ones" (1892).

The propagandists, Despujol continued, were clearly under Masonic influence, although at the moment, there was no clear proof that, outside of agitating for reforms, they were anti-patriotic. But, "losing all hope of obtaining reforms from Spain, the movement could progress towards a separatist ideal, and to obtain them, they would launch their revolutionary or separatist plans." For the moment, however, it was only an anti-friar "Platonic or leaflet [*hojalativa*] propaganda." In the full exercise of powers the law gave him he had decreed Rizal's exile even at the risk of committing an error of judgment, in order to officially weaken the latter's influence among his friends.

Later in Dapitan, Rizal revealed to Carnicero that he had actually not regretted the Governor's rigor because the country was "hoping great reforms from the latter, and this pleased him more than ordinarily." He had friends in Spain, but did not appeal to them, because of the favors his family had received from the Governor General and "above all, lest he place obstacles against the important reforms the latter may introduce."<sup>36</sup>

Rizal arrived in Dapitan at 7:00 in the evening of 17 July 1892. The shore of Dapitan looked "quite gloomy" and did not impress him at all. With the light of a lantern they followed a grass-covered road to the town, where they met the District Commanding Officer, Captain Ricardo Carnicero, at the spacious *casa real*.<sup>37</sup> For the moment, Rizal felt at peace, except that he missed his family.

Wenceslao E. Retana wrote that the Jesuits would have given Rizal lodging in the parish house in Dapitan had he submitted to three conditions they were imposing.<sup>38</sup> He politely refused, and he stayed in the *casa real*, with the unexpected result that he became Carnicero's good friend.

As in Hongkong, people refused to leave the exiled man in peace. Enemies sought to implicate him in subversive plots, and friends kept hoping he would support their plans for a revolution. One of the most

intriguing incidents was the furtive arrival of a certain "Pablo Mercado," who apparently had been bribed by the parish priest of Cagayan de Misamis (today Cagayan de Oro City) to obtain evidence against Rizal. He went to Dapitan and managed to meet Rizal, who immediately denounced him to the local authorities. Caught red-handed, he admitted he was using a false name, had been assured by the priest in Cagayan that nothing would happen to him (Retana 1960, 319-22).

Rizal's friends in Europe were chagrined, quite mystified that the colonial government in Manila should have sentenced him to, in Despujol's word, a penalty the Filipinos "dreaded most." But a month later, Rizal in Dapitan wrote to Blumentritt that he was not unhappy, for his family had obtained their freedom with his exile.<sup>39</sup> A year and a half later, he thanked Blumentritt for standing by him, the "only one" who remembered and kept writing to him. And he added in emotional lines, "it is over, the moth's wing, burned in a brilliant flame, lies on the ground dreaming of the sun's rays, of the pure and unruffled air of other regions." But he felt that in the future something good could come out of his present misfortune, for the "flower is born of putrefied fertilizer and I believe someday I shall have its seed."<sup>40</sup>

Not too well known, perhaps, is the epistolary debate he carried on with the Jesuit Superior in Manila, Fr. Pablo Pastells, regarding Catholic dogma and faith.<sup>41</sup> The latter had come to the Philippines in 1875, and spent a year at the Ateneo municipal, where Rizal was still studying. In his first year in the Philippines, the new missionary studied Visayan for his future missionary career, was the Sub-Prefect of the Ateneo dormitory and also Director of the Solidarity of the Blessed Virgin Mary (today, Christian Life Community). In this dual role, the Jesuit came to know the future national hero, and must have been his constant spiritual adviser and confessor. More than twenty years later, when Rizal went on exile to Dapitan, Fr. Pastells was the Superior of the Jesuits in the Philippines. The school year had just started, but the latter did not hesitate to pluck out of the classroom Rizal's favorite teacher, Fr. Francisco de Paula Sanchez, and assign him to Dapitan, with the hope that the latter might be able to win back to the Church their former brilliant student.

The plan failed, for Rizal remained cool to the idea of recanting the new views he was holding. The following year, 1893, Fr. Pastells left for Spain to recover his broken health, while Fr. Sanchez was reassigned to the northeastern Mindanao, from where he subsequently

wrote several reports on fauna and flora of Surigao, besides earlier ones on pre-hispanic Dapitan.<sup>42</sup>

Stories are well known about how Rizal in exile behaved very properly, how he refused to escape from his exile. His mother and some sisters went down to stay with him for a few months. Externally, he regularly went to church in Dapitan, and maintained cordial relations with the Jesuits there. With Fr. Sanchez's help, he laid out a relief map of Mindanao in the square of Dapitan. With Bro. Costa's help, he planned a water system to pipe drinking water into the town. And once, he designed an altar for the church for the Holy Week solemn rites.

Slowly, however, Dapitan began to gall. Despujol had already finished his term and a new Governor General, Ramon Blanco, had taken his place in Manila. Almost in desperation, Rizal wrote the latter that, unlike other criminals, he had neither been charged nor informed of his crime, and worse, that his case had been left unresolved. Either, he requested, he be tried and if found guilty, have "the weight of the law fall on me, not unlimited penalties that kill organisms actions; but if I am innocent, give me my freedom."<sup>43</sup> Unfortunately, the Manila government did not see fit to honor Rizal's request. Not much later, he confided to his Austrian friend that he despaired of ever being released. His exile was especially bitter because he believed he was innocent and did not deserve the treatment.<sup>44</sup>

Then in March 1895, Fr. Antonio Obach, the Jesuit missionary priest in Dapitan, explained to his Superior in Manila that Rizal had called off his plan to marry Josephine Bracken. The Jesuit admitted he felt relieved at this turn of events, for had the marriage gone through, it would have cost him "*casamuc y no poco trabajo*" (trouble and no little work).<sup>45</sup>

A month previously, in mid-February, there had arrived in Dapitan a blind old American, sick to death, and accompanied by a young Portuguese maid and a young English lady.<sup>46</sup> The latter immediately won Rizal's heart, they came to know each other and planned marriage, to the delight of the old man who had bequeathed \$8,000 to Josephine. But because she was a stranger, the priest needed the proper authorization from the Bishop of Cebu, who would most likely demand from Rizal a public retraction of the errors in his writings. Although apparently Rizal was willing to declare himself a Roman Catholic and retract his errors, for he wrote a draft petition for his marriage to be sent to the Bishop, he refused to admit he had done

any wrong. He claimed instead that his writings had effected much good since they had led to "significant reforms among the friars."

Meantime, perhaps despairing of regaining his health, the sick old man tried to commit suicide, but was saved when Rizal got hold of the razor, while nicking his own finger.<sup>47</sup> Observing how the old man was treating Josephine rather insultingly [*del modo más soez*], Rizal advised her to separate from him lest his sickness contaminate her. Rather than abandon her adoptive father, Josephine decided to call off the marriage and sailed back to Manila with the old man.

A month later Josephine returned to Dápitán to sell some furniture. Trinidad, Rizal's sister, arrived aboard the same boat. Antonio Lopez, a nephew who was studying at the Ateneo, also came. During the trip, the three exchanged not a single word, and on arrival, there were "tears and recriminations," with the result that Trinidad took the same boat back to Manila. Josephine had also made it known she was leaving even without selling all her goods. Apparently she remained, for not much later, both she and Rizal informed Fr. Obach that the American consul had assured her that the Manila government was not minded to release Rizal, but would instead deport him to Spain. Rizal felt this additional blow since, he told the priest, "his parents were already on in years."<sup>48</sup>

At this time Rizal reported to Fr. Obach an unusual happening. For three nights from 19–21 April 1895, Rizal wrote, strange inexplicable things had been occurring in "this little roundhouse." On the night of 21 April, breaking cups and the "unusually bright lamp" had awakened Josephine, and she concluded that her father had just died. Rizal advised her to talk to it, but the third time she asked the question, "In God's name, I ask you what you want," cups, teapots, saucers, etc. rained on her. Rizal and the boys also saw the phenomenon. Rizal himself had tried to talk with the phenomenon, but he received no answer. In his note to Fr. Obach, then, he asked what could be done, and "could he come maybe, sprinkle the clinic and exorcise it with holy water?" Significantly, he added, "If her father had indeed died in Manila the previous day, what more incisive proof is there for the existence of the soul?"

The Jesuit priest came, blessed the clinic and left, after warning against spiritism. Josephine answered she had never even witnessed such things, and Rizal added she had always been a Roman Catholic. The priest indicated that many claimed there were many Catholics, but were such only in name and never practiced their religion. In the end,

he suggested that before sleeping, she "pray on her knees the Our Father and recite the Creed, make the sign of the cross, sprinkle the room with holy water and have no fear." Nothing happened afterwards, and by 4 May, no one mentioned any other "visits from beyond the grave."

About three months later, Fr. Obach reported rumors, which Rizal himself confirmed, that some intrigue was brewing between the District Commandant and the people of Dapitan. Details are not too clear, but a letter from the Governor General permitted Rizal to settle and start a community in Ponot, not far from the town, and even promised to help the project.

Then, in a note dated 28 July 1895, Fr. Obach reported how Rizal had opened his heart to him. Rizal, he said, wanted to stop fighting with the friars, and was longing for a peaceful life. When told he had to make a retraction of his errors, Rizal agreed, but, as before, added his own conditions. First, Rizal wanted that the sentence of exile be lifted. Second, what they had confiscated from his family, or its equivalent should be returned to them. Third, they should give the amount of 50,000 pesos so that he could establish a business for his own support.

The first condition seemed easy, Fr. Obach assured Rizal. But the priest said he could not say anything about the second, although he promised to submit the appropriate request to the authorities. Beyond knowing that the Rizals had owned two houses of strong materials and two *camarins*, he said he knew nothing more. But he did not think that the government would give Rizal the amount of money the latter was requesting, even as a loan, payable later, to set up a cement factory later. And significantly, Fr. Obach concluded, "I am convinced Rizal is now tired and wants to retract, but is held back by self-love. Once he takes the first step, I believe he would completely break with everything and be a good Christian. May God our Lord show him great mercy and bring him back to His service." Josephine Bracken had already left Dapitan and was rumored that she would go to Singapore and then to Australia where her true father was living.

Fr. Obach must have been concerned about Rizal's retraction, for the next day he wrote a rather intriguing note to his Jesuit Superior, besides asking for a formula of retraction. And when he also reported that when he had asked Rizal for more details about their confiscated properties, Rizal refused to drag the Dominicans into the case, for "they could have him more tied up and he would be beholden to

them. On the other hand," the Jesuit continued, "one who retracts recognizes his errors and therefore humbles himself . . . I believe we ought to take advantage of this first step he has taken of his own will." And a month later, Rizal asked Fr. Obach to write to the Jesuit Superior in Manila that he was "formally retracting all the errors he could have committed in his writings against the Roman, Catholic, and Apostolic Church." This retraction the Superior could make public in the manner he should decide, on condition that they grant him 5,000 pesos. He had nothing with which to live decently and with that amount, he could go anywhere and live with his parents.<sup>49</sup>

To Fr. Obach, this condition killed whatever plans the national hero had of returning to the Faith of his childhood. Then, after waiting for months, Rizal received news that had been accepted to serve as a medical officer for the Spanish army in Cuba.<sup>50</sup> He left Dapitan at noon of 31 July 1896. His boat stopped at Dumaguete, Cebu, Iloilo, Capiz, and Romblon, before it arrived in Manila on 6 August. By this time, the monthly mail for Europe had already sailed away, and Rizal had to wait for the next boat the following month.

The story is well known that while awaiting passage to Europe, he was held *incomunicado*, before they transferred him to the cruiser "Castilla" idling off Cavite. About two weeks later, Bonifacio's *Katipunan* was discovered, and there was no other option left for its members but to strike. As is well known, Rizal had refused to support Bonifacio's uprising, and when it did occur, he had absolutely nothing to do with it. Although he had arrived in Manila, he had remained a prisoner aboard a Spanish cruiser. But he must have known something had occurred, for on 2 September 1896, the day before he left for Spain, he entered the following lines in his diary: "God grant that there be no further disturbance tonight. Miserable countrymen who throw themselves so senselessly to death (*Memorias* 1953, 56).

Rizal, however, did not reach Cuba. He was imprisoned immediately on landing at Barcelona and just as quickly shipped back to the Philippines. Two days after sailing away from Barcelona, an infantry officer told him that various newspapers in Madrid had singled him out as the cause of the disorders in the Philippines, and the Spaniards believed the report. Next day, 9 October, Rizal wrote in his diary:

I believe that God is giving me something good, allowing me to return to the Philippines, to enable me to undo so many accusations. Either they recognize my innocence, and treat me with justice, or they condemn me to death. Then, I expiate my alleged crime in society's eyes.



Society will forgive me and later, without any doubt, they will do me justice and I shall be one martyr more. Anyway, instead of dying in a strange land, on in Managua, I shall die in my country. I believe that what is happening is the best that could happen to me. May God's will be done. (68)

These are not the thoughts of an atheist. Even if Rizal had stopped observing external Catholic practices, he remained a believer in God. His later retraction was not, as in Greek drama, a *deus ex machina*. Rather, it had been in his mind for at least the last two years of his life.

## Notes

1. He sent a copy of the novel to Ferdinand Blumentritt and wrote in an accompanying letter that it was his "first book, although I have written many things before and received some awards in contests. It is the first impartial and bold book on the life of the Tagalogs. The Filipinos will find in it the history of the last 100 years. . . . The government and the friars will probably attack it, but I trust in the God of truth and people who are familiar with our sufferings" (Jose Rizal to Ferdinand Blumentritt, Berlin, 21 May 1887: *Epistolario Rizalino* (ER) V, 1:93–94 [Rizal 1930–38]). Blumentritt praised the work in no uncertain terms: "*mit Herzblut geschrieben und spricht deshalb auch zum Herzen*" (written with the blood of the heart and so speaks also to the heart) (Blumentritt to Rizal, Leitmeritz, 27 March 1887 [ER 1:256]).

2. Rizal to Blumentritt, Hongkong, 16 February 1888 (ER 1:227–32).

3. Rizal to Blumentritt, Berlin, 21 March 1887 (ER 5, 1:93–94).

4. After reading the novel, Blumentritt wrote Rizal enthusiastically that it would be "*ein Blitzstrahl*" (lightning flash) that would strike down the enemies (Blumentritt to Rizal, Leitmeritz, 20 June 1891 [ER 3: 196]). Juan Luna was also eloquent in his praise: Rizal continues to "touch the Philippine wounds in your first novel describing the situation of our poor Philippines, and thousands and thousands of unfortunates are pictured in your ideas. Any way, you are the creator of our novel, the one who will elevate freedom of thought, which is the first of all freedoms, if not the only one a man can enjoy" (Luna to Rizal, Paris, 23 September 1891 [ER 3:231–32]).

5. Rizal to Blumentritt, Biarritz, 29 March 1891 (ER 5, 2:583).

6. Rizal to Blumentritt, Ghent, 22 September 1891 (ER 5:603–4).

7. Paciano Mercado to his younger brother, Jose, Manila, 26 May 1882 (ER 1:19–20). Rizal developed his literary tastes and abilities while studying at the Ateneo municipal. In his youthful diary, he records how he shed tears when one of his Jesuit teachers advised him to put away the muses and concentrate on the physical sciences. When he graduated in 1877, his mother had hoped he would stop studying, lest he end up in the gallows—a rather prophetic foreboding. But Rizal began medical studies at the university, although he was initially undecided what career to pursue after obtaining the Arts degree. He had wanted to seek the advice of the Jesuit Rector of the Ateneo, but the latter was away visiting the Jesuit missions in Mindanao. Rizal could not wait any longer and enrolled at the University of Santo Tomas when the school year began the following June. In Spain, while continuing medical studies, he continued to foster

his interest in literary studies. And yet, Rizal wrote that his father had forgiven him and would be happy to have him back at home only in April 1887 (ER 5, 1:117). See, among other things Villaroel (1984).

8. Rizal to Marcelo H. del Pilar, London, January 1889 (ER 2:97).
9. Rizal to Blumentritt, Biarritz, 29 March 1891 (ER 5, 2:580–81).
10. Rizal to Blumentritt, Biarritz, 22 November 1889 (ER 2:242).
11. Fragments of a letter Rizal wrote in Tagalog, undated, unknown address (ER 3:250).
12. Blumentritt to Rizal, Leitmeritz, 26 April 1891 (ER 3:188).
13. Rizal to Mariano Ponce, Brussels, 16 July 1890 (ER 3:82).
14. Rizal to Basa, Ghent, 9 July 1891 (ER 3:200–1).
15. See the documentation provided by the Dominicans in this case in Arcilla (1970, 577–633).
16. Rizal to Deodato Arellano, Brussels, 1 May 1891 (ER 3:191–92).
17. Rizal to his sister Maria, Hongkong, 9 December 1891 (ER 3:266).
18. Rizal to Blumentritt, Hongkong, 31 January 1892 (ER 5, 2:630).
19. Op.cit, 631.
20. Rizal to Blumentritt, Brussels, 31 May 1890 (ER 5, 2:546–47).
21. Blumentritt to Rizal, Leitmeritz, 30 January 1892 (ER 3:288–89).
22. Rizal in Hongkong wrote the Governor General in Manila about these plans, but received no direct answer (ER 3:270–71, 305–7, 348–49).
23. Rizal to Mariano Ponce, London, 27 June 1888 (ER 2:20).
24. The theme of his famous poem, “A la Juventud Filipina: Crece tímida flor” (Bloom, shy flower).
25. This motto was VIO: “*Unus instar omnium*” (one for all). For the text of these rules, see Retana (1960, 236–41).
26. Rizal to Gov. Eulogio Despujol, Hongkong, 21 July 1892 (ER 3:348–49).
27. Rizal to his parents, Hongkong, 20 June 1892 (ER 3:346–47).
28. Rizal to his countrymen, Hongkong, 20 June 1892 (ER 3:347–48).
29. Report to Governor General Eulogio Despujol to the Overseas Minister, Manila, 14 November 1892: Archivo Historico Nacional (Madrid), Ultramar, legajo 2308.
30. Significantly, in his brief diary of his return to Manila, Rizal wrote merely: “On Wednesday, he asked if I persisted in my desire to return to Hongkong, and I said yes. After some exchange, he said that I had brought some proclamations in my baggage. I said I did not. He asked whose pillows and mats they could be, and I said my sister’s. For this reason, he said that he was sending me to Fort Santiago (ER 4:2).
31. Writing to the Governor General, Ricardo Carnicero, commandant in Dapitan, described how he had frequent conversations with Rizal. Asked what reforms he wanted for the Philippines, Rizal answered: (1) Philippine representation in the Spanish Cortes. (2) Secularization of the parishes and less friar influence in the country. (3) Moral integrity in all administrative officials. (4) Promotion of education that would be free from friar control. (5) Appointment to government positions of both peninsulars and Philippine-born applicants. See answered Ricardo Carnicero to Governor General Eulogio Despujol, Dapitan, 30 August 1892 (ER 4:29–30).
32. While writing his first novel, Rizal explained to Blumentritt that the word “*filibustero*” was unknown among the Filipinos. He had heard it for the first time during the public executions after the Cavite mutiny of 1871, when he was only eleven years old, but he recalled vividly the terror it caused them. His father had forbidden

them to mention the words "Cavite," "Burgos . . ." (Rizal to Blumentritt, Paris, 27 March 1877 [ER 5, 1: 101-3]). The incident is recorded in *Noli me tangere*, ch. 60.

33. Loc. cit.

34. In a report to the Governor General, cited in note 31 above, Carnicero wrote that Rizal was convinced the pamphlets had been planted. The latter claimed he would have known if his sister had brought them to Manila. It was a senseless thing to do, Rizal claimed, and his sister was not a fool. But he had not been allowed to speak to her, however, while awaiting deportation. During the eight days he was under detention, no charge had been made against him, nor was he interrogated in any way, as he had hoped to acquit himself in something that had most disgusted the Governor General (ER 4:28-29).

35. According to Despujol, these people were surprised, rather naïve, and even spontaneously revealed in great detail secrets that lead one to believe they had not concealed anything about the bases of operations in Hongkong and Madrid, as well as the instruments used to propagate their ideas.

36. Carnicero to Despujol (ER 4:29)

37. Rizal's diary covering his brief stay in Manila and his arrival at Dapitan (ER 4:3-4).

38. The conditions were: (1) public recantation of anti-religious errors in his writings; (2) make the traditional Ignatian Spiritual Exercises and a general sacramental confession; (3) live an exemplary life expected of a loyal Spanish subject and good Catholic.

39. Rizal to Blumentritt, Dapitan, 16 August 1892 (ER 5, 2:648).

40. Rizal to Blumentritt, Dapitan, 19 December 1893 (ER 5, 2:650-52).

41. See Bonoan 1994. Fr. Pablo Pastells was born in Figueras, Gerona, Spain, on 3 June 1846, entered the Society of Jesus in August 1866, and came to the Philippines in 1875. After a year at the Ateneo de Manila, where, besides acting as the secretary of the Mission Superior, he was the spiritual father of the young Ateneo students (he was the confessor of the future hero, Jose Rizal), he was assigned to the missions along the Pacific littoral of Mindanao. He was the first resident priest in Caraga, and founded many new settlements that subsequently grew into civil towns. He was named Philippine Jesuit Mission Superior in 1888, but ill health forced his return to Spain in 1893. On recovery, he was named secretary of the Provincial Superior of Aragon, and subsequently assistant to the famous historian, Antonio Astrain, S.J., in the latter's seven-volume history of the Spanish Assistancy. Fr. Pastells himself published several volumes on Jesuit history, besides editing with notes Francisco Combes's history of Mindanao and Jolo. He collaborated with Wenceslao E. Retana in other publications of important works. Fr. Pastells died in Tortosa, Spain, on 16 August 1932. See Sedo (1933); Arcilla (1971, 639-724).

42. See Cullum 1960:334-36; Bernad 1986. Various letters to the Mission Superior in the pertinent *cuadernos* or volumes of *Cartas de los Padres de la Mision de la Compañia de Jesus en Fililpinas* (1875-1895).

43. Rizal to the Governor General, Dapitan, 13 February 1894 (ER 4:193-94).

44. Rizal to Blumentritt, Dapitan, 15 January 1895 (ER 5, 2:670).

45. Antonio Obach to the Mission Superior, Dapitan, 11 March 1895: Arxiu Historic de la Compañia de Jesus de Catalunya (Sant Cugat del Valles, Barcelona) "FILCAR," Cartes inedites, E.II, a-20.

46. In Obach's words, "ciego de resultas de la asquerosa enfermedad que lo tiene a las puertas de la muerte (mal gallego)" (ibid.).

47. Retana (1960, 339–40) dramatizes the episode.
48. Obach to the Mission Superior, Dapitan, 4 May 1895 (Arxiu Historica, Cartas inedites, E-II, a-20).
49. It is thus quite clear that Rizal had been thinking retracting long before he actually did just a few hours before his execution.
50. Rizal credits Blumentritt with having suggested the possibility of serving as a medical officer in the Spanish army in Cuba. He immediately filed his application, but because he had received no immediate answer, he began to build a wooden house and a clinic in Dapitan. Then on 30 July 1896, he received word that his offer to serve in Cuba had been accepted. He immediately boarded the boat that brought the notification when it sailed back to Manila (ER 4:292).

## References

- Arcilla, Jose S. 1970. Documents concerning the Calamba deportations in 1891. *Philippine Studies* 18: 577–633.
- Bernad, Miguel A. 1986. *Rizal and Spain. An essay in biographical context*. Manila: National Book Store.
- Bonoan, Raul J. 1994. *The Rizal-Pastells correspondence*. Quezon City: Ateneo de Manila Press.
- Cullum, Leo A. 1960. Francisco de Paul Sanchez, 1849–1895. *Philippine Studies* 8: 334–361.
- Memorias y Apuntas. 1953. *Documentos Rizalinos regalados poer el pueblo espanol al pueblo Filipino*. Manila: Bureau of Printing.
- Rizal, Jose. 1930–38. *Epistolario Rizalino*. 5 volumes. Edited by T. Kalaw. Manila: Bureau of Printing.
- . [P. Jacinto, pseud.] 1949. *Memorias de un estudiante de Manila*. Manila: Cacho Hnos.
- . 1961. *Diarios y memorias*. Manila: Comision Nacional del Centenario de Jose Rizal.
- Retana, Wenceslao E. 1960. *Vida y escritos del Dr. Jose Rizal*. Manila: R. Martinez & Sons.
- Schumacher, John N. 1997. *The Propaganda Movement 1880–1895*. Quezon City: Ateneo de Manila University Press.