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## The Prophet of Two Revolutions

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## The Prophet of Two Revolutions

Victor V. Sumsky

The end of the millennium is marked, as should have been expected, by a forecasting boom. The “challenges of the 21st century” are a table talk theme. Books advertised as “maps for successful navigation of the future” occupy top positions in the charts. Predicting what tomorrow holds in store for the human race is a lucrative business. At a moment like this it may be wise to remember that genuine foresight is a mysterious and secretive creature, often hiding in the depths of seemingly “non-prophetic” texts and revealing itself only when the prophecy comes true. It is also natural to turn to those confirmed by history as authentic visionaries. A centennial of the martyrdom of one of them, José Rizal Mercado y Alonso, was commemorated only a few years ago.

It is hardly possible in a word to explain this Filipino who was executed on 30 December 1896, by firing squad in Manila. The scope of Rizal’s interests and talents, the sum of knowledge acquired by him is impressive by any standards. A romantic poet and a realistic novelist, a highly qualified ophthalmologist, a scientist and an artist, a linguist in complete command of seven languages and with some knowledge of a dozen more, an adroit sportsman, a passionate traveler and, certainly, a politician—all this is just one man whose life terminated violently at the age of thirty-five.

Enthusiastic Rizalistas would inevitably add that their idol displayed a wonderful capacity to read the future. Anticipating many turns of his own fate, he was equally sensitive as a political scriptwriter. During the period 1889 to 1890, *La Solidaridad*, a newspaper of Filipino expatriates in Barcelona and later Madrid, published one of his most celebrated works. The essay, entitled “Filipinas dentro de cien años” (The Philippines in a Hundred Years), is Rizal’s warning that without urgent reforms his country could expect a bloody up-

heaval resulting in a secession from Spain. Further, he predicted that, after breaking ties with the mother country, the Philippines would become dependent on another, mightier colonial master—most probably the United States.

Undoubtedly, “*Filipinas dentro de cien años*” is a striking example of its author’s clarity of vision. Only Rizal’s impression that he was looking far into the future was exaggerated: the epoch-making events he predicted became a fact in the decade after the publication of his piece, proving if not a short-term, then at least a middle-term forecast. Nevertheless, it is clear today that the whole of the 20th century passed in the Philippines under the sign of Rizal’s conjectures about the future of his nation.

### Rizal’s Two Novels

Anybody considering Rizal’s legacy is dealing, first and foremost, with his two novels—*Noli Me Tangere* (Social Cancer, 1887) and *El Filibusterismo* (The Rebellion, 1891). These books made him a subversive in the eyes of colonialists and a “cult figure” among compatriots. As a sign of intimate friendship with Rizal’s creations Filipino readers have nicknamed them “Noli” and “Fili.” An undisputed proof of the nation’s spiritual and political awakening, the two novels are, for all practical purposes, the sacred books of Filipino nationalism. Their contents are well known to high school students, not to speak of mature and socially active adults. Adherents of contrasting political views look to both volumes for arguments to support their positions, and inevitably find them. In short, since their first publication *Noli* and *Fili* have been the communal possession of the Filipino peoples.

The key figure in the story that Rizal tells is a young man named Juan Crisostomo Ibarra. After years of studies in Spain he returns to the Philippines as an admirer of Western civilization and a believer in social progress. He dreams of marrying Maria Clara, the girl who waits for him in Manila. Another objective is to build a “model school” in his hometown of San Diego. Ibarra is confident that the authorities will bless this project.

From the moment the home-comer touches Filipino soil he finds himself in conflict with the Catholic friars—members of those religious orders who form the backbone of the Spanish colonial state. Their omnipotence is the curse of the Philippines, the “social cancer” tormenting this unfortunate land. For these clergy the ignorance of the

indios is a guarantee of their submissiveness, and every educated person provokes their ire. Since Ibarra's father bravely opposed the friars in the absence of the son only to die in a confrontation, the newcomer becomes a special target. Discovering the truth only upon his return home, Ibarra learns about many other cases of the friars' high-handedness. Nevertheless, he still hopes that Mother Spain will take care of the Philippines, tame the obscurants and promote the reforms.

In the meantime, the friars are starting an intrigue against him. They ruin his engagement with Maria Clara, imitate a mutiny in San Diego and manufacture evidence to prove that this young man is the instigator of riots. Captured and jailed, he escapes by sheer chance, and leaves the country. His intended bride is forced to enter a nunnery. Thirteen years pass before the fugitive—now posing as an American jeweler called Simoun—comes home again. Longing to release Maria Clara, he seeks not only a reunion with her. His political aim is to bring down the Spanish regime and free the Philippines from the foreign yoke. The efforts in that direction are depicted in the second novel.

One thing that complicates Simoun-Ibarra's mission is the shortage of brave, decisive individuals among the Filipinos. Centuries of oppression have reduced them to slavish, fearsome obedience. In order to enrage the natives and transform them into rebels, Simoun strives to provoke their mistreatment by the rulers. A confidante of the Spanish governor general, the jeweler constantly reminds him that *indios* should not be given the least concession. At the same time he strikes a "joint-action agreement" with the *tulisanes* (that is, outlaws operating in the countryside). Combining propaganda with blackmail, he recruits supporters among the students of Manila; draws a rich Chinese trader into the subversive network; smuggles weapons inside the country, and so on. However, all these hectic activities do not bear fruit. Two attempts to raise a rebellion in the capital fail utterly, one of them because Simoun is overcome at a critically important moment by the news of Maria Clara's sudden death.

Badly wounded, Simoun escapes to the countryside. There he finds shelter in the house of Padre Florentino, a native priest. Once it becomes known that Simoun's arrest is only a matter of hours, he takes poison and confesses to his host. The latter, sympathizing with the aims of the rebel, is opposed to armed struggle as a means. In the words of Padre Florentino,

the sword now counts for very little in the destinies of our times; but I do say that we must win our freedom by deserving it, by improving the mind and enhancing the destiny of the individual, loving what is just, what is good, what is great, to the point of dying for it. When a people reaches these heights, God provides a weapon, and the idols and the tyrants fall like a house of cards, and freedom shines in the first dawn (Rizal 1996a, 251)

Effectively it is a verdict on Simoun's plans and deeds.

Both of Rizal's books are full of digressions from this major story line. There are numerous statements of philosophical and moralistic nature; inserted, largely self-contained short stories, in which "supporting actors" take the stage; scenes from everyday town and country life, nearly anthropological descriptions of Filipino customs, etc. The structure of the narrative and the general spirit of adventure prompts comparisons with *Le Compte de Monte Christo*, while Simoun's vengeful monologues, especially during the three night-time encounters with student Basilio, sound as if inspired by Dostoevsky's *The Possessed* (which was not the case). Tonalities change in a very wide scope, from tender lyricism to passionate anger. Periodic, often abrupt alterations in style and mood sharpen that sense of contrast which, according to some experts, has much to do with Filipino concepts of beauty. Clearly, Rizal's novels are works of many layers, reading like an encyclopedia of Filipino life and mind. This explains some of their popularity at home and abroad, but cannot be the only explanation.

Igor Podberesky, a Russian biographer of Rizal and a perceptive explorer of his works, defines *Noli* as a "diagnostic novel" and *Fili* as a "prognostic" one (1982, 138-62, 209-25). In other words, the first book exposes the vices of the clergy and the whole colonial regime, while the second outlines the consequences which will follow if the colonialists persist in their flaws and misdeeds. Comparing the second novel to the first and pointing to the obvious shift "from reform to revolution" in the mood of the author, Podberesky notes that, parting with many reformist illusions, Rizal is not rejecting the ideals of reform as such. Anticipating a revolution, he does not praise its advance and is not supporting it wholeheartedly.

It may be added that, along with the revolution, Rizal forecasts its defeat, both political and moral. He almost wants to give the Spaniards one last chance to correct themselves. However, he feels that even in that case, new explosions of justified popular anger will rock

the Philippines. Significantly, this supposition is expressed by a supporter of peaceful change and a confessor of a dying rebel:

"God will forgive you, Mr. . . . Simoun. . . . He has frustrated your plans, one after the other, even the best. . . . Let us obey His will and give Him thanks."

"In your opinion," Simoun replied in a faltering voice, "it would be His will that these islands . . ."

"Should continue in their present, miserable condition?" the priest finished when he saw that Simoun hesitated. "Sir, I do not know, I cannot read the mind of the Inscrutable. But I know that He has not forsaken those peoples that at times of decision have placed themselves in His hands and made Him the judge of their oppression; I know that his arm has never been wanting when, with justice trampled under foot and all other resources at the end, the oppressed have taken up the sword and fought for their homes, wives, children, and those inalienable rights that, in the language of the German poet, shine above us unbreakable and untouchable like the eternal stars. No, God is justice and He cannot abandon His own cause, the cause of freedom without which no justice is possible." (Rizal 1996a, 249)

Rizal's novels may be interpreted as a bold artistic experiment, staged to measure the depths of the "reform or revolution" dilemma. Producing and evaluating arguments in favor and against each of them, the writer focuses on collisions of intellectual and moral principles which accompany this choice. A rationalist in him knows for sure that Spain is incapable of radically improving its policies in the islands and instituting the long-desired reforms. On the other hand, the bloody revolution which will be inevitable if the reforms are denied is not acceptable to him for ethical reasons. In the final analysis, Rizal is not so much an agitator for either peaceful or violent change as a witness to the drama of choice between reform and revolution, a student of this desperately confusing situation.

The discoveries he made in the cause of these studies can be truly appreciated only in the retrospective of the past century. After Rizal's death his nation faced the choice between reform and revolution more than once. Each time neither a consequent, productive reform, nor a victorious revolution was taking place. To prevent a bloody uprising "from below," some "tranquilizing" measures would be applied "from above," blunting social pains for a while but leaving the sources of sickness basically intact. As a result, after periods of relative and deceptive calm the fateful dilemma would reemerge in a most relentless

way, looking in its new "incarnations" more frightening and difficult to solve than before.

Further on we shall concentrate on those aspects of Rizal's personality and creativity, which not only exposed him to the "reform or revolution" dilemma, but eventually led him beyond it, towards one of his most important prophecies. One way to approach this subject is to analyze relationships between Rizal and the city. And this requires that we begin with urban themes and images in *Noli* and *Fili*.

### Rizal's Manila: A Stage and an Actor in the Play

Along with a set of common characters, the two novels have a common scene. This is Manila—Simoun-Ibarra's base, from which he travels to the provinces only to appear in the capital again and again. In fact, the city of Manila is both a stage and an actor in this play, so strong and lasting is its impact on Rizal's heroes. In return, they tend to project on the city their own thoughts and feelings. These, plus a multitude of other factors (like time of the day, type of transportation and direction of movement, presence in a particular urban area with its unique atmosphere, etc.) result in drastic changes of the urban landscape as seen by the protagonists. To illustrate this, it may be worthwhile to compare two passages from *Noli*. In the first one Ibarra, having just arrived from Spain and being hurt by remarks of Padre Damaso at the party they attend, steps into the twilight of Manila:

Passing him were carriages like flashes of lightning, snail-paced calesas for hire, passersby of different nationalities. With the measured steps of one whose mind was somewhere else, or of one who had nothing else to do, the young man started on his way towards the Binondo plaza, looking around him as if trying to recall a memory. They were the same streets, with the same houses painted white and blue, the white-washed walls painted in fresco in bad imitation of granite. The church tower still displayed its clock with the translucent face; the same Chinese stores with their dirty old curtains and iron grills, one of which, as a boy, he had twisted one night, following the example of the ill-bred brats of Manila. It had not been straightened.

"Everything moves slowly," he murmured as he turned to Sacristia Street.

The ice cream vendors were shouting: "*Sorbetes!*" *Huepes* or small torches still lighted the stalls of Chinese vendors and the women selling food and fruits.

"It is surprising!" he exclaimed. "It is the same Chinese of seven years ago, and the same old women. I could say this evening that I have dreamt for seven years of Europe; and Holy God! the stone in the pavement is still out of place, just as when I left it!" In fact, the stone lay still detached from its foundation in the pavement which formed the junction of San Jacinto and Sacristia streets."

Poor Ibarra is deeply shocked by "this wonder of urban stability in the country of the unstable" (21-22).

But next day, after his happy rendezvous with Maria Clara, the city suddenly stops to look stiff and alien:

Ibarra's carriage traversed part of Manila's busiest suburb. Whatever it was that had made him sad the night before, by daylight made him smile despite himself.

The bustle he saw everywhere, so many carriages coming and going swiftly by; the *carromatas*, the *calesas*; the Europeans, the Chinese, natives, each one in their particular attire; the fruit vendors, brokers, shirtless porters; the food stalls, lodging houses, restaurants, shops; even the bullcarts drawn by the impassive and indifferent carabao which seemed absorbed in dragging heavy loads while philosophizing—all the noise, movement, even the sun itself, a particular odor, the motley colors, awakened in his memory a world of sleeping remembrances (49).

This ride through the city is also a spontaneous journey into childhood, simultaneously idyllic and sobering (Ibarra remembered, among other things, the old times when streets in Manila were unpaved and "a chain gang of prisoners with shaved heads" was brought to tamp them down). Noises from the nearby tobacco factory evoke associations with a quarter in Madrid famous for "its riots by cigarette-girls." The view of the ocean beyond Intramuros—the Spanish fortress and the historical nucleus of the Filipino capital—awakens memories of Europe with its material and cultural treasures. This whole chapter is an admission that the city is boundless and infinitely versatile (49-53). Every urbanite is in touch with a city of his own, and no one can see it twice under the same angle. To start a dialogue with the city is to address countless interlocutors, including oneself.

Perhaps this habit of emotional and intellectual interaction with the city has something to do with Simoun-Ibarra's ability to mingle with all sorts of people—from the governor-general to the village head,

from provincial matrons to Chinese traders? Characteristically, his unique communication talents and acceptance in all social strata are combined with a detailed knowledge of Manila's urban space:

they left the highway and entered a maze of alleys and pathways winding along a number of buildings; now they skipped from stone to stone to cross muddy puddles, now they bent down to slide under fences badly made and in even worse repair. Placido (one of the students assisting Simoun—VS.) was puzzled to find the rich jeweller so familiar with such places. (Rizal 1996a, 125)

Incessantly moving in various directions along the "province-capital-abroad" and "the upper social strata-the lower social strata" routes, Simoun-Ibarra is a city-like person. In the second novel the city of Manila is the only counterpart (except for Padre Florentino) whom the chief protagonist treats as his equal. From this counterpart he receives a grave warning:

In a room in his house facing the Pasig Simoun stood at an open window and stared across the river at the Walled City with its roofs of galvanized iron glittering in the moonlight, and its church towers dismal, graceless and oppressive in the night's serenity...

"Within a few days," he said to himself, "this accursed city, the refuge of senseless arrogance and of the impious exploitation of the ignorant and the unfortunate, is burning at its four corners, . . . violence rises in the suburbs and drives through terror-stricken streets my vengeful mobs, bred by folly and greed . . . and before that moon is full it will light the Philippines, scoured clean of their loathsome garbage!"

Simoun abruptly cut himself short. The voice of his conscience asked if he himself were not part of that filth, perhaps the most active poison, in the accursed city. (127)

In spite of all attempts, Simoun the urbanite fails to burn this city down. Death catches up with him far away from the capital, the moment he is pulled out of his preferred environment.

### **Puente de España**

Although at times Rizal depicts city life as a funny fuss (see, for instance, the chapter on "The Kiapo Fair" in *Fili*), he does not see it as essentially chaotic and senseless. With remarkable precision he identifies the landmarks of intra-city movement, points to "growth spots" and trends in development of certain areas.

In both novels the most frequently mentioned urban toponym is *Puente de España*—the Bridge of Spain. Inaugurated in 1875, it served as an increasingly important link between the business and residential districts on the northern bank of Pasig and those centers of religious and secular power located, along with institutions of higher education, on the southern bank. According to the available statistical data, in 1885 up to 6000 horse-drawn vehicles were passing daily through *Puente de España*, compared to only 950 going through *Calle Real*, the main street of *Intramuros* (Corpuz 1989, 51, 53). On his part, Rizal confirms that once in a while the situation around this bridge would be akin to “a traffic jam”:

The carriages were heading towards *Del Rosario Street* but had to go slowly, with frequent halts because of the traffic from the Bridge of Spain. (Rizal 1996a, 223)

The name of *Escolta*, that street where *Simoun-Ibarra* resides during his second coming to Manila, shows up on the pages of *Fili* almost as often as that of *Puente de España*. Wishing to support the reputation of a rich man and stay in the middle of events, *Simoun* makes no mistake about the location of his house. In the 1880s *Escolta* took over from *Calle Del Rosario* and *Calle San Fernando* as the hub of commercial activity, becoming the most prestigious street in the trading quarters of *Binondo*. The fires, which ruined some of the street in 1881 and 1885, did not discourage the businessmen. On the contrary, they were rebuilding their offices and shops in a more glamorous, more distinctly European way (Corpuz 1989, 52–53).

One of the advantages of *Escolta* was its proximity to the *Pasig*—at that time a major trading and transportation artery connecting Manila and its environs with the hinterland of Luzon. This special importance of the river to the city is also reflected by Rizal. His heroes are very river-oriented: they sail over the *Pasig* on board the steamer, undertake boat trips for leisure, jump into the water while escaping from chases, etc.

Finally, Rizal’s novels register a relative diminution in the importance of *Intramuros* to the late colonial capital. Those vibrant areas which the author, considering their position vis-à-vis the fortress, still calls suburbs (*Binondo*, *Quiapo*, *Tondo*), attract him much more than the *Walled City*. The latter to him (or, to be precise, to *Ibarra* who certainly speaks here for the author) is a relic, as ridiculous with its fortifications as “an anemic young woman in a dress from her

grandmother's best times" (Rizal 1996b, 51). If Intramuros is still alive, it is primarily because of mischievous, boisterous, not terribly diligent students. After all, the Walled City is home to the best colleges of Manila and its university—to San Juan de Letran and Santo Tomas directed by the Dominicans, along with the Ateneo run by the Jesuits. Unfortunately, lectures by the Dominican friars hardly enlighten the Filipino youth, provoking a string of bitter comments in the *Fili*.

But even harboring no sympathies towards the subject, Rizal stays true to reality and mindful of details. Remember that quotation about the Walled City's "roofs of galvanized iron glittering in the moonlight"? During the mighty earthquake of 1880 practically all the tile roofs of the buildings in Intramuros collapsed. Since that time the governmental decree, banning roof tiles and prescribing only zinc or iron for roofing, was strictly observed (Corpuz 1989, 52).

### **Metropolitan Provincialism**

Just like Simoun-Ibarra, Rizal spends much of his time moving in various directions (and not always on his own will) along the 'province-capital-abroad' route. At home not only in Calamba and Manila, but also in Madrid and Barcelona, London and Paris, Berlin and Heidelberg, he is a cosmopolitan in the best sense of the word. Knowing only too well what the Filipino province is like, he gives Manila its due as a capital city. But, being a Citizen of the World, he can't help but detect strong elements of backwardness and provincialism in the middle of the Filipino metropolis.

A whole class of characters in *Noli* and *Fili* represents that peculiar phenomenon which may be defined as metropolitan provincialism. Full-time servants of the colonial administration or its loyal supporters, they see themselves as outstanding statesmen, managers and thinkers. Among the more colorful figures of that type are Don Custodio—a seemingly hyperactive yet permanently idle bureaucrat; Ybañez, alias Ben Zayb—a tireless graphomaniac in the guise of a journalist; Padre Camorra, awarded with the nickname of "friar-gunner" for his barracks-like mannerisms. These three and the likes of them form a whole gallery of realistically painted yet fully grotesque images, ominously comical because of the "contrast between great pretensions and scant wits," to borrow the author's own formula (Rizal 1996a, 176).

Clinging to the high priests of metropolitan provincialism are their native followers—well-to-do (or presenting themselves as well-to-do) *mestizos* and *indios* with their pitiful attempts to imitate full-blooded Peninsulares.

A dramatic rise of metropolitan provincialist mood is triggered by the performances of Parisian operetta in Manila, as described in Fili. Petty clerks posing as society lions demonstrate their command of French with the help of idioms from a phrase-book. The artistic life of Paris is competently discussed by those who had never been there. While one friar forbids his flock to see the sinful show, the other one, putting on civilian clothes and false moustaches, penetrates the theater “as some sort of religious secret police” (150). Officers are pursuing pretty actresses, and the question whether “a genuine Parisian can-can” will be performed this time, is on everyone’s minds.

According to one opinion, the theater episode is a somewhat artificial insertion, not fitting well with the major story line of Fili (Podberezsky 1982, 220–21). In my view, this is debatable—for the simple reason that this episode, understood as the high point of metropolitan provincialism, sheds its specific light on several other events.

One is the first unsuccessful attempt of a rebellion, which coincides with the start of the premier operetta show. Ignoring the basics of secrecy, Simoun passes his last instructions to the accomplices right in the midst of a theater crowd. As a result, his plans are revealed to a casual passer-by. Once this detail is mentioned, it becomes more than a little difficult to take the future revolution seriously (Rizal 1996a, 140–41).

Meanwhile a group of students supporting the formation of the Spanish Academy in Manila meets at the show, and gets the news that the authorities had vetoed their project. To commemorate its death, they assemble in a restaurant for a banquet and a couple of sarcastic toasts. Rumors about this gathering result in an accusation that these scoffers stand behind the riot. Arrested but quickly released with the help of influential relatives, most of the young men say good-bye to quasi-reformist dreams. One leaves the country, the other gets involved in business, the third gets married, while the fourth simply sinks in idleness (170–77, 213).

Thus, mocking the beau monde of Manila for its provincialism and operetta-like mentality, Rizal takes a step further. Establishing linkages between “the theater episode” on the one side, and the stories of the abortive rebellion and the Spanish Academy project on the other, he

quietly, as if speaking in a low voice, addresses the same reproaches to local reformists and revolutionaries alike.

### **The Shrimp and Uncle Kiko**

Two other memorable figures enter and leave the stage in the theater episode. One is known as The Shrimp. His companion is Uncle Kiko. Both are making a living by putting up posters for the shows.

#### **The Shrimp**

was tall, thin, and walked slowly, dragging a stiff leg behind him. He wore a ragged coffee-colored jacket and a grimy pair of check trousers that clung to his thin bony legs; a bowler hat so shattered that it had a rakish air covered his huge head, except for a few strands of hair, of a dirty gray that was almost blonde, long and curling at the ends like a poet's locks. . . . He was a curious character: born of a distinguished family, he lived like a tramp, a beggar; Spanish by blood, he mocked the prestige of his race with his rags; he passed for a sort of a reporter, and indeed he turned up, his gray eyes rather protruding, cold and thoughtful, whenever anything happened that might be news. How he lived was a mystery to most; nobody knew where he took his meals or had his bed; perhaps, like Diogenes, he lived in a tub. (137)

The appearance of his friend "made a perfect contrast" to The Shrimp:

short, almost dwarfish, he covered his head with a top hat that on him looked like a huge hairy caterpillar; he was lost in an enormous frock coat that was much too wide and long for him, but found himself at the end in a pair of trousers so short that they scarcely covered his calves: his torso was thus grandfather to his legs. His shoes were like gunboats; indeed they were a pair of sailor's boots that cried out against the top hat on his head with the stark protest of a nunnery beside a carnival. Where The Shrimp was red-faced, he was dark; the former, the Spaniard, had not a hair on his face; he, a native, had moustaches and a goatee, long, white and sparse. This man with the lively look . . . was perhaps the only native who could with impunity go on foot in frock coat and top hat, just as his friend was the first Spaniard to make fun of the prestige of his race. (137)

The technique of grotesque portrayal is used here to present a certain type of city dwellers. In sociological terms, these are lumpen-proletarians, or lumpens for short—people with faded ethnic identities and half-forgotten pasts, with no permanent occupation or anything

like a status in society. Looking like each other in all these senses, they strangely do not lack originality. The fact that these characters are catching the eye of a refined *ilustrado* is indirect proof of their growing numbers, of the quickening pace of city life, of its adaptation demands becoming more severe and complex.

Not constrained by family ties and social obligations, lumpens are remarkably mobile. Instantly popping up wherever something unusual is taking place, they refuse to mind their business because they have got none. As described by Rizal, these outsiders are surprisingly smart and observant: taken for a reporter, The Shrimp (who "knew every face in the city") is also a superb analyst of local rumors and intrigues (140).

However, the same absence of roots which adds to the mobility of lumpens prevents them from responsible thinking and acting. More often than not their behavior is motivated by pure and pointless curiosity. A passer-by who hears the plotters talk near the theater is no one else but The Shrimp. Realizing what is going on, he asks himself: "But what is it to me?" Neither the possibility of joining the rebels, nor the prospect of informing the authorities appeals to him. Having made his conclusions, he dispassionately spits on the pavement and disappears, phantom-like, from the pages of the book. (141)

In the author's view, this infinite indifference is one of the worst faults of lumpen-proletarianism. Even so, Rizalian lumpens are anything but one-dimensional, and in that sense fully belong to the city.

### A City-Like Person

One can grasp so many sides of the urban reality only by getting ever closer to the city, by becoming a city-like person. It is time to pay attention to those fundamental qualities which attest to Rizal's thorough urbanity and, beyond any doubt, heavily influence his political stand.

First and foremost, he is a Man of the Renaissance, consciously developing himself as such. Seeking perfection for its own sake, he also wants to prove the abilities of his race to the world. A comparison with the great city, infinitely diverse and always discovering new reasons to be, is almost suggesting itself here.

Artistic sensitivity happily combines in Rizal with rationalist attitudes and thirst for action. Exiled in 1892 to Mindanao, to the God-forsaken town of Dapitan, he earns his living as a clinician, treating

scores of eye-patients from the rest of the archipelago and abroad; uses his fees and the prize won in a Manila lottery to purchase land; imports farm machinery from America; cultivates coconut, hemp, sugarcane—in short, becomes a successful entrepreneur. Not satisfied with this, Rizal initiates public works. He remodels the plaza of Dapitan; constructs a reservoir to give the town a water system; undertakes efforts to drain the nearby marshes in order to rid the place of endemic malaria; invents a machine that can manufacture 6000 bricks a day for his aqueduct (see Quijano de Manila 1996, 22). He does all this without interrupting his scientific studies, his correspondence with foreign colleagues, at the time of poetic inspiration and intensive literary work. As a matter of fact, he uses the four years of exile to create around himself that urban environment which is so essential for him.

Rizal is a city-like person not only in a sense of being happily versatile. Aren't his inner conflicts and the rare ambivalence of his political position somewhat akin to the customary self-contradictions of the city? His tireless activities in Dapitan will seem all the more striking to those who know that this man often succumbed to Hamletian doubts about his own role in the nationalist movement. More than once he would switch from passionate wish to lead the liberation struggle to almost complete withdrawal from it. Anticipating the coming separation from Spain, he still cannot part with assimilationist aspirations. His sense of the poor reformist potential of the mother country does not result in an apology of a revolution to liberate his homeland.

Obviously, in politics, just as in art and literature, Rizal abhors finality, irreversibility, straightforwardness.

### **Dandyism and its Limits**

Rizal as we see him in late nineteenth century photographs is a gentleman, whose whole appearance is a declaration of intent to stick to the latest European fashions. Certainly, there is something distinctly urban in a taste for elegant costume and an ability to wear it well. But are these traits worth mentioning here? Does the theme of Rizalian dandyism deserve more than a passing remark? Hopefully, yes. It is only important to remember that a real dandy is not just a dressed up socialite.

Born in eighteenth century England, dandyism turned out to be a rather complicated phenomenon. In terms of clothes and manner of

dressing it was a challenge to Paris and the French, an open refusal to recognize them as the arbiters of fashion (and, therefore, a specific attempt of national self-assertion). Apart from that, dandyism presumed a certain type of public behavior. A dandy is somebody who emphasizes his personal freedom by acting and speaking in a politely scandalous way. Saying aloud and straight into people's faces provocative, hurting things, he protects himself from reproaches by stylish dress and formalistic observance of decorum. "Unseparable from individualism and at the same time always dependent on the audience, dandyism permanently swings between rebellious pretensions and all sorts of compromises with the society," notes Y. M. Lotman (1994, 133).

Obviously present in Rizal's behavior, all these themes and undercurrents are reinterpreted by him as a representative of colonial society. One of his ultimate aims is to disprove the opinion that the *indios* will never rise to the cultural level of the white man. As an argument to the contrary he presents himself, whose brilliant mind and education combine with refined manners and impeccable dress. Whichever way you look at him, he seems to be irreproachable. National self-assertion is achieved here not through rejection of alien cultural elements, but by means of their sophisticated absorption. Characteristically, an element of polite scandal is also there: Rizal knows too well that his "live argument," while completely irresistible, will deeply shock some people.

Still more important is the fact that the spirit of dandyism permeates Rizal's literary work. One may point here to the combination of challenge and politeness in Ibarra's public behavior, or to the malicious respect with which Rizal often speaks about the clergy, the colonial bureaucracy and the way they govern the Philippines. Last but not least, the spirit of protest coexists in both *Noli* and *Fili* with the writer's search for compromise with the authorities.

Once in a while Rizal's heroes would utter something totally unacceptable by the standards of their time—like student Isagani who, in a debate with a Dominican friar, blames Spain for lack of talent as an educator of the Filipinos (Rizal 1996a, 182–90). Still, sharp formulas plus the logic of conclusions and the inner nobility of the speaker add to the impression of irrefutability of such statements.

On the whole, intellectual boldness and inclinations "to think about the unthinkable" are very typical of Rizal. Probably, these traits were formed not without the influence of his Ateneo tutors (for whom he retained respect even after the break with official Catholicism—just

like his beloved Voltaire, another rebellious pupil of the Jesuits). These mental experiments run somewhat parallel to the ones he conducts as a natural scientist.

Intellectual boldness develops in him to a point where he is not afraid to question his own views. Seeking bits of rationality in concepts which are alien to him, he treasures every grain of truth extracted from them and is prepared to radically alter his position. Going through the monologue in which Simoun declares a death sentence on the concept of Hispanized Philippines, it is nearly impossible to believe that the writer was a non-compromising adherent of Hispanization just a while ago:

You pool your efforts thinking to unite your country with Spain with rosy garlands, and in reality you forge iron chains. You ask parity of rights, the Spanish way of life, and you do not realize that what you are asking is death, the destruction of your national identity, the disappearance of your homeland, the ratification of tyranny. What is to become of you? A people without a soul, a nation without freedom; everything in you will be borrowed, even your very defects. . . . Now you ask for the teaching of Spanish, an aspiration that would be ridiculous if it did no entail such deplorable consequences . . . as long as a people keeps its own language, it keeps a pledge of liberty, just as a man is free as long as he can think for himself. Language is a people's way of thinking. (38-39)

Coming to the conclusion that separation from Spain is unavoidable, Rizal bravely unfolds in Fili the scenario of violent anti-colonial revolution—and reaches those limits where his intellectual boldness becomes incompatible with his noble spirit. His whole being of an urbanite stands against the final justification of revolutionary violence. Isn't it remarkable that, giving instructions on how to conduct the rebellion ("entrench yourselves and stand ready to come to our aid, executing not only those actively engaged in counter-action, but all males who refuse to take up arms for us. . . . The race must be regenerated! Cowards can only breed slaves, and there is no point in destroying only to rebuild with rotten materials. . . . Twenty thousand miseries less, and millions more saved at the source from miserable lives"), Simoun adopts the language of "provincialist revolutionaries," like those depicted by Dostoyevsky in *The Possessed* or Chairman Mao and Company? Having glorified violence, the most urbane of Rizal's heroes "loses face" as an urbanite once and for all (220).

Thus, there is a certain link between the broadly interpreted dandyism of Rizal, on the one hand, and the specifics of his views on reform and revolution on the other. More than that, in all probability these views would never have been that complex if Rizal had not been a dandy. Why? Because intellectual boldness permanently provokes a search for strong arguments both in favor of and against reform and revolution. But the more fruitful this search is, the more difficult becomes the choice.

### The Prophet

Every major city is not just a unit of organized space but a powerful stream of times, always undergoing and generating change. To live, to act, to move inside it is tantamount to perceiving the landmarks of the past as part of one's own time; seeing in front of oneself an extremely graphic image of the present; participating in the daily recreation of the city, thus moving with it into the future.

In a sense the city and the times are two names of one subject which preoccupies Rizal as a writer. Depicting a sequence of events inside a city or in its 'fields of gravity', painting the portraits of city-dwellers, he paints the portrait of an era with the same strokes of his brush.

Manila, which he saw as a city of mental ferment and imminent popular protest, gave him a feeling of a coming end to Spanish domination. Having felt his time as a time of change, Rizal grasped the nature of the time of change itself. Among other things, he understood that social renewal is not necessarily a shift for the better. This understanding is reflected in constantly reemerging descriptions of joyless, spiritually and emotionally impoverished festivities. In *Noli* a tale of a joyless fiesta and related events occupy up to one fourth of the novel (while in *Fili* one comes across similar material in the chapters entitled "A Rig-Driver's Christmas Eve" and "Happy Christmas!"). Bringing people together in a strictly formalistic way, these weird, unfortunate festivities point to even worse things ahead. They serve as warnings that a better future, of which a "normal" festival is a symbol, may turn to be a mirage, and chaos a frightening reality.

Was it possible to be ahead of one's own times without perceiving them so well?

Specifying in what sense Rizal was ahead of his times, let's turn once more to the final conversation between Simoun and Padre

Florentino. Appealing to the conscience of his dying guest, the priest exclaims:

You believed that what crime and iniquity had strained and deformed, more crime and iniquity could cleanse and redeem. This was error. Hate only creates monsters; crime, criminals; only love can work wonders, only virtue can redeem. If our country is some day to be free, it will not be through vice and crime, it will not be through the corruption of its sons, some deceived, others bribed; redemption presupposes virtue; virtue, sacrifice, and sacrifice, love! (250)

Aimed against violence in a revolution, this statement, like all other pronouncements of Padre Florentino, is not anti-revolutionary in substance. As mentioned earlier, he actually confirms that new revolutions are justified and inevitable. Without saying it openly, Rizal suggests by the logic and tonality of his text that a person, torn between peaceful reform and bloody revolution and wanting to keep his hands clean, may seek the path of non-violent revolution.

Is this just an accidental reticence? Hardly so. A political realist, Rizal should have understood too well that the idea of non-violent revolution will not and cannot be demanded instantly.

At the very end of the second novel, throwing the chest with Simoun's treasures into the ocean, Padre Florentino solemnly proclaims:

When men should need you for a purpose holy and sublime, God will know how to raise you from the bottom of the seas. Until then you will do no evil there, you will not thwart justice or incite greed! (253)

Simoun's most precious treasure is nothing but the revolutionary idea which he abused. By doing what he did, Padre Florentino symbolically withdraws it from social circulation as something dangerous and seductive. But his act is also an attempt to preserve the revolutionary idea itself from desecration by violence, to save it from hopeless discredit, to keep it for those who will sooner or later rise to the new understanding of this idea.

In the summer of 1896 Rizal, still in Dapitan, refused an offer to lead an armed anti-colonial uprising. Nevertheless, when the revolution had broken out, the Spaniards sentenced him to death as its spiritual father.

On 16 February 1986, at the spot where Rizal was shot—in the very heart of modern Manila, in a memorial park bearing his name—

Corazon Aquino called the Filipinos to start a civil disobedience campaign against the Marcos regime. Ten days later a troubled Third World megacity was celebrating, contrary to all expectations, a victory in a non-violent revolution.

How and why it became the unbelievable reality of Manila is a different story. Here it is enough to stress that the city, non-violence and revolution came together in the personality and writings of Jose Rizal almost a century before that.

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