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Raul J. Bonoan, S.J.

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Rizal's Record at the Ateneo

RAUL J. BONOAN, S.J.

There is a popular belief, grown into myth, that José Rizal was a brilliant student who always topped his classes at the Ateneo Municipal. An inquiry into Rizal's record and progress as an Ateneo student will shed light on this myth, which, like all myths, has some element of truth but falls short of historical accuracy.

The first available source of Rizal's record is the transcript of his academic grades reproduced in Retana's biography of Rizal published in 1907 (see table 1.).¹ Retana obtained the document through the good offices of Fr. Pablo Pastells, S.J., friend of Rizal, former Superior of the Jesuits in the Philippines, and a historian in his own right. Dated 20 August 1905, it bore the seal of the school and the signature of the Rector, who was at that time Fr. José Clos. Studies of Rizal's performance as an Ateneo student have been based almost exclusively on this transcript and his own reminiscences of his student days in his *Memorias de un estudiante de Manila*.²

But there is a second valuable source, preserved in the Ateneo de Manila University Archives, namely, the collection of the commencement programs (*Solemne Distribución de Premios*) at the Ateneo Municipal during the Spanish period. Missing from this collection are the programs for the academic year 1872-73, Rizal's first year at the Ateneo, and for 1877-78, when he took at the Ateneo Municipal additional courses in agriculture and topography while studying metaphysics at the Royal and Pontifical University of Santo Tomas. But copies for the commencement programs for the four intervening years, from 1873 to 1877, are

1. Wenceslao E. Retana, *Vida y escritos del Dr. José Rizal* (Madrid: Victoriano Suarez, 1907), p. 30.

2. *Escritos de Rizal*, vol. 1: *Diarios y memorias* (Manila: Comisión Nacional del Centenario de José Rizal, 1961), pp. 1-29.

Table 1. Rizal's Transcript of Record in Retana.

1871-1872	Aritmética - - - - -	Sobresaliente
1872-1873	Latín, primer curso - - - - -	Sobresaliente
	Castellano - - - - -	Sobresaliente
	Griego - - - - -	Sobresaliente
1873-1874	Latín, segundo curso - - - - -	Sobresaliente
	Castellano - - - - -	Sobresaliente
	Griego - - - - -	Sobresaliente
	Geografía Universal - - - - -	Sobresaliente
1874-1875	Latín, tercer curso - - - - -	Sobresaliente
	Castellano - - - - -	Sobresaliente
	Griego - - - - -	Sobresaliente
	Historia Universal - - - - -	Sobresaliente
	Historia de España y Filipinas - - - - -	Sobresaliente
	Aritmética y Álgebra - - - - -	Sobresaliente
1875-1876	Retórica y Poética - - - - -	Sobresaliente
	Francés - - - - -	Sobresaliente
	Geometría y Trigonometría - - - - -	Sobresaliente
1876-1877	Filosofía, primer curso - - - - -	Sobresaliente
	Mineralogía y Química - - - - -	Sobresaliente
	Filosofía, segundo curso - - - - -	Sobresaliente
	Física - - - - -	Sobresaliente
	Botánica y Zoología - - - - -	Sobresaliente
<i>Bachiller en Artes</i> el 14 de Marzo de 1877 - - - - -		<i>Sobresaliente</i>

extant; Rizal's name with his various awards appears on the pages of these programs. The collection also includes a copy of a 126-page brochure printed in 1871, just one year prior to Rizal's entrance into the Ateneo Municipal. Bearing the title *Exámenes Públicos y Solemne Distribución de Premios*, it gives in detail the subject matter for the final exams, which seem to have been held publicly. Its unique value lies in its rather comprehensive description of the entire curriculum and the content of each subject for both the *primera enseñanza* (primary course) and the *segunda enseñanza* (secondary course). Except possibly for some slight variations, the program of studies in Rizal's time was identical with that described in this brochure. To this writer's knowledge, Rizal's biographers have not made use of these programs. Undoubtedly they constitute a valuable historical source for any account of Rizal's student life — they supplement and correct the

transcript in Retana, giving a more accurate picture of Rizal's performance and progress as a student. (Rizal's awards, as indicated in these programs, through his five years in the Ateneo have been tabulated in table 2.)

Owing to the fire of 1932 which gutted the Ateneo de Manila complex in Intramuros, there remain no other records of Rizal's grades and awards.

TRANSCRIPT OF RECORD IN RETANA

While there is no reason to doubt the authenticity of the transcript published by Retana, its complete accuracy was questioned from the very beginning, by Retana himself.³ There are a few discrepancies between the transcript and the commencement programs.⁴ Owing to the lack of documents on the actual academic policies and procedures at the Ateneo in Rizal's time, it is not possible to give a satisfactory explanation of the discrepancy in every instance. Most problematic of all is the first entry in the transcript, which has Rizal taking arithmetic in 1871-72. It raises questions regarding the year of Rizal's enrollment in the Ateneo Municipal and the length of his stay in this Jesuit institution.

On the basis of the transcript, Retana presumed that Rizal's studies at the Ateneo Municipal began in 1871, which clearly could not have been. In his *Memorias* (which was not available to Retana), Rizal stated that he began his studies at the Ateneo Municipal in 1872 shortly after celebrating his eleventh birthday

3. Retana, *Vida y escritos*, p. 30n. Retana reasoned that inasmuch as two philosophy courses could not have been taught in one year, Rizal must have taken the first course in philosophy in 1875-76, not in 1876-77 as indicated in the transcript. However, the line-up of courses in the commencement programs for 1875-76 and 1876-77, kept in the Ateneo de Manila University Archives, does not support Retana's view.

4. The following are the discrepancies, aside from the first entry in the transcript:

- 1) According to the transcript, in 1873-74 Rizal took Spanish, of which there is no indication in the program;
- 2) According to the program, in 1873-74 Rizal took geometry, for which there is no entry in the transcript;
- 3) According to the transcript he took Greek in 1872-73, 1873-74, and 1874-75; on the other hand, the programs indicate that he took Greek only in 1874-75 and 1875-76;
- 4) According to the transcript he took Spanish in 1874-75 and French in 1875-76, for which two subjects there are no corresponding entries in the programs.

Table 2. Awards of Rizal in the Ateneo Municipal.

1872-73	<i>Primer Año</i> (No extant record. But in his <i>Memorias</i> Rizal stated that he received <i>accesit</i> honors in all his subjects.)		
1873-74	<i>Segundo Año</i> Estudios Generales		
	Comportamiento	2 ^o	accesit
	Aplicación	4 ^o	accesit
	Latín	2 ^o	accesit
	Geografía	5 ^o	accesit
	Geometría	5 ^o	accesit
		<i>Premio</i> merecido por cinco accesit	
1874-75	<i>Tercer Año</i> Estudios Generales		
	Comportamiento	2 ^o	accesit
	Aplicación	4 ^o	accesit
	Análisis y Traducción Latina	1 ^{er}	<i>premio</i>
	Aritmética y Algebra	7 ^o	accesit
	Primer Curso de Griego	3 ^{er}	accesit
	Historia Universal y Particular de España	1 ^{er}	accesit
1875-76	<i>Quarto Año</i> Premio del Internado		
	Comportamiento	1 ^{er}	<i>premio</i>
	Estudios Generales		
	Comportamiento	1 ^{er}	<i>premio</i>
	Aplicación	1 ^{er}	accesit
	Retórica y Poética	1 ^{er}	<i>premio</i>
	Geometría y Trigonometría	1 ^{er}	accesit
	Griego, Segundo Curso	3 ^{er}	accesit
	Estudios de Adorno, Academia de Dibujo		
	Dibujo de Figura y Paisaje		<i>Premio único</i>
1876-77	<i>Quinto Año</i> Premio del Internado		
	Comportamiento	1 ^{er}	<i>premio</i>
	Estudios Generales		
	Comportamiento	1 ^{er}	<i>premio</i>
	Aplicación	1 ^{er}	<i>premio</i>
	Filosofía	1 ^{er}	<i>premio</i>
	Física y Química	3 ^{er}	accesit
	Historia Natural		
	Estudios de Adorno, Academia de Dibujo		
	Dibujo Lineal y de Paisaje		<i>Premio único</i>

(19 June).⁵ The accuracy of this recollection finds support in a letter he wrote to his Austrian friend, Ferdinand Blumentritt.⁶ He told Blumentritt that when he enrolled at the Ateneo he used the surname Rizal rather than Mercado precisely because of the martyrdom of Fathers Gómez, Burgos, and Zamora, which we know took place in February 1872. The involvement of Rizal's elder brother, Paciano, with Fr. Burgos, with whom he had lived as a student in Letrán, had made the name Mercado suspect. Furthermore, in his biography Retana himself quoted Don Manuel Xeres y Burgos, nephew of Father Burgos, as stating that at the Ateneo Rizal was, in the beginning, withdrawn and retiring, joining the other students in conversation only to comment on the execution of the three priests and the disturbing events that followed in its wake.⁷ Hence, it is certain that Rizal could not have entered the Ateneo prior to the "Gomburza" execution; as he correctly stated, he began his schooling in Manila in the fateful year of 1872. The error is not in Rizal's *Memorias* but in the Ateneo transcript.

The error is perhaps indicative of the confusion among the Jesuits themselves regarding the length of Rizal's stay in the Ateneo. A Jesuit pamphlet published in 1897, states that he received his A.B. degree in 1878.⁸ This is obviously wrong; he graduated the year before. In the same work, Rizal is quoted as having said, as he was passing the Ateneo on his way to Bagumbayan to be executed: "I spent seven years there."⁹ This confusion might well have been due to the fact that the *segunda enseñanza*, for which Rizal enrolled, was to take much longer after Rizal had left the Ateneo.

It is clear from the commencement programs in Rizal's time that the *segunda enseñanza*, leading to the degree of Bachelor of

5. Rizal, "Memorias," *Diarios y memorias*, p. 10.

6. Rizal-Blumentritt, n.d., *Epistolario Rizalino*, Teodoro Kalaw, ed., 5 vols. (Manila: Bureau of Printing, 1930-38), 5:468.

7. Retana, *Vida y escritos*, p. 19.

8. *La masonización de Filipinas, Rizal y su obra* (Barcelona: Librería y Tipografía Católica, 1897), p. 6. Retana has attributed the authorship of this anonymously published work to Fr. Pablo Pastells, S.J., Rizal's friend and Jesuit Superior, with whom Rizal as an exile in Dapitan exchanged letters on religious topics. This view is confirmed by Fr. Schumacher's researches into the Jesuit letters kept in the Archives of the Tarragona Province of the Society of Jesus in San Cugat del Vallés, Barcelona, Spain. See John N. Schumacher, *The Propaganda Movement: 1880-85. The Creators of a Filipino Consciousness, the Makers of Revolution* (Manila: The Solidaridad Publishing House, 1973), pp. 30n., 90n.

9. *La masonización de Filipinas*, p. 39.

Arts, was a five-year program. Based on the plan of studies approved for Cuba, the curriculum was prescribed for the Philippines by a government decree dated 20 May 1865.¹⁰ Roughly equivalent to the present-day high school plus two years of college, the secondary course was a preparation for professional education on the University (tertiary) level. The Jesuits were never satisfied with the government curriculum, which they felt was inadequate to meet their own educational objectives. Hence they always sought to adapt it to the methodology, program, and prescriptions of the Jesuit *Ratio Studiorum* (Plan of Studies) and to devise ways and means of expanding the course without appearing to overstep the limits of the law. But it was not until 1882 under the energetic leadership of the newly appointed Rector, Fr. Pablo Ramón, that the decision was made to force the integration of the government curriculum and the requirements of the Jesuit Ratio.¹¹ To the government curriculum, Fr. Ramón added a preparatory year, which in content fulfilled the requirements for the first year in the program of the Ratio. But legally and for the official record, it was not part of the *segunda enseñanza* but constituted the last year of the *primera enseñanza*. Designated as the *clase de primera enseñanza superior y preparatoria para estudios generales*,¹² it was required of all those who wished to take the academic program (*estudios generales*) of the secondary course for a bachelor's degree. Sometime later, to further conform to the Ratio, Fr. Ramón added another year to be taken at the conclusion of the five-year government program.¹³ This additional year, the Jesuits reasoned, was not in violation of the law inasmuch as it was not a strict requirement. They merely urged and persuaded by gentle arguments the students and their parents that they should take this final year by way of enrichment (*ampliación*)

10. *Exámenes Públicos y Solemne Distribución de Premios* (Manila: Amigos del País, 1871), p. 21.

11. Pablo Pastells, S.J., *Misión de la Compañía de Jesús de Filipinas en el siglo XIX*, 3 vols. (Barcelona: Editorial Barcelonesa, 1916-17), 1:324.

12. *Solemne Distribución de Premios merecidos en el curso de 1882 a 1883* (Ateneo de Manila University Archives), p. 31.

13. Pastells, *Misión de la Compañía de Jesús*, 1:423-25. It is not certain when the additional year was actually added to the course. Fr. Pastells gives the impression that this was done in the academic year 1883-84, but the graduation program for 1884 contains no indication of this. The *segunda enseñanza* students must have started taking the extra year after the five-year course some time during Fr. Ramón's rectorship, which ended on 25 August 1885.

and as the crowning point of their secondary education before going on to further studies in the University. Thus, by such clever strokes of Jesuit accommodation, by the mid-eighties the *segunda enseñanza* took five years on paper, but in actual fact was a seven-year program.

However, in Rizal's time, the Jesuits had not the courage to inject such elasticity into the requirements of the law. Apparently, in later years, the Jesuits themselves were not too clear about the subtle formalities of these changes, which accounts for the uncertainty among them regarding the duration of Rizal's studies at the Ateneo. The truth of the matter is: Rizal entered the Ateneo in 1872, graduated with a bachelor's degree five years later in 1877, after which he spent an additional year taking agriculture and topography.

How, then, explain the first entry in Rizal's transcript? León Ma. Guerrero¹⁴ suggests that the Ateneo gave him credit in arithmetic on the basis of the qualifying examinations he had been required to take in Letrán¹⁵ prior to admission to the Ateneo. The difficulty with this explanation is that in his *Memorias* Rizal claimed that he was given the grade of *aprobado*¹⁶ for the Letran tests in arithmetic, Christian doctrine, and reading, whereas the mark recorded in the transcript was *sobresaliente* (excellent).

The 1871 brochure on the curriculum at the Ateneo affords a more plausible explanation. It is stated in the brochure that among the subjects taken in the first year of the *segunda enseñanza* was *Principios y Ejercicios de Aritmética*, which however was identical with the arithmetic course taken in the final year of the primary course (*asignatura igual a la de la clase superior de 1ª enseñanza*).¹⁷ This arithmetic course formed part of the government curriculum, but in the Ateneo set-up was taken in the last year of the primary program prior to formal enrollment

14. León Ma. Guerrero, *The Young Rizal* (Manila: Bardavon Book Company, 1951), p. 100.

15. The place of the exams led Palma to believe that his parents originally wanted to send Rizal to Letrán but later changed their minds. Rafael Palma, *Biografía de Rizal* (Manila: Bureau of Printing, 1949), p. 16. But it would seem that Letrán was farthest from the mind of the Rizals since Paciano had studied there and left behind a not so favorable reputation because of his suspicious connection with the priest-martyr José Burgos. A more plausible explanation is that the exams had to be taken in Letrán because the Dominicans exercised a supervisory role over the Ateneo Municipal.

16. Rizal, "Memorias," *Diarios y memorias*, p. 10.

17. *Exámenes públicos*, p. 27.

in the secondary level. It would seem therefore that those who did not take their primera enseñanza at the Ateneo Municipal or had insufficient mathematical background, were required to take this subject. One such student was Rizal, who took and completed his primera enseñanza in Biñan and received only the grade of aprobado in his arithmetic entrance exam. Thus, *Aritmética* should have been included among the subjects taken in 1872-73; but since he normally would have taken this subject the year before if he had gone to the Ateneo for the primary course, the person preparing the transcript in 1905, erroneously recorded it as having been taken in 1871-72.

Needless to say, the transcript is an impressive one. But the consistent sobresaliente, the highest mark in the grading scale in use in Rizal's time, needs some critical evaluation. It should be noted that in 1877, according to the commencement program, there were 12 graduates who were awarded the degree of Bachelor of Arts, 9 including Rizal, with the grade of sobresaliente, and 3 with the grade of aprobado (see table 3.). The 12 A.B. graduates of 1877 were the remnants of a much larger class, which in Rizal's own recollection constituted a "multitude" (*multitud de niños*

Table 3. List of the A.B. Graduates, 1877.

Canon, Fernando	Sobresaliente
Carrillo, Santiago	Aprobado
Jao-Jocco, Justiniano	Sobresaliente
Jovellanos, Cesario	Sobresaliente
Lete, Enrique	Aprobado
Luna, José	Aprobado
Marzano, Gonzalo	Sobresaliente
Peña, Modesto	Sobresaliente
Resurrección, José	Sobresaliente
Rizal, José	Sobresaliente
Santiago, Moisés	Sobresaliente
Viejo, Pedro	Sobresaliente

NOTE: The names of seven awardees of the previous years do not appear in the graduation list. They are: Carlos Corrales, Manuel García, Joaquín Garrido, Fortunato Jugo, Julián Monzon, Florencio Oliva, and Proceso Ostria.

españoles, mestizos y naturales),¹⁸ among whom he found himself when he first walked into the classroom in June 1872. It is difficult to determine exactly how large the freshman class of 1872-73 was. Enrollment figures, published in 1910 in a commemorative program on the occasion of the Ateneo's golden jubilee, would seem to place the number in the neighborhood of 55. True enough, a crowd for a class, by any standard.¹⁹

The 12 survivors out of a possible initial 55 were a select and highly intelligent group, with 9 receiving sobresaliente. And it is not impossible that the other 8, or a few of them at least, could boast of the same straight sobresaliente record as Rizal through the 5 years at the Ateneo. The conclusion is clear: that the impressive transcript testifies to Rizal's high intellectual ability and exceptional academic achievement, but tells us next to nothing of Rizal's standing in his class. For the details of his scholastic life, we must now turn to the commencement programs and his own *Memorias*, tracing his progress as each year went by.

FIRST YEAR, 1872-73

The truth of the matter is that the Ateneo almost passed up the singular distinction of educating Rizal. Fr. Magin Ferrando, the Father Minister, who appears to have been in charge of admissions, turned Rizal down due to his late application or possibly his frail constitution and short stature.²⁰ But happily, the Jesuit changed his mind at the intervention of Manuel Xeres y Burgos, a recent graduate, Burgos' nephew, and a family friend. Thus, from the beginning, his physical condition and provincial background were perhaps a liability to the 11-year-old boy from Calamba.

Though quite homesick and apprehensive, Rizal began his first year at the Ateneo Municipal with great enthusiasm. No sooner had he taken his seat for the first time before the forbidding

18. Rizal, "Memorias," *Diarios y memorias*, p. 11.

19. See the "Estadística" in Manuel Rávago, *Reseña Histórica de las Fiestas Jubilares del Ateneo de Manila Celebradas con motivo del Quincuagésimo Aniversario de su Fundación*. The total enrollment for the *segunda enseñanza* for 1871-72 was 119, of which 8 graduated at the end of the year; presumably therefore, 111 stayed on for the following year. The total enrollment for 1872-73, when Rizal first enrolled, was 166; the increment of 55 should represent the size of Rizal's freshman class.

20. Rizal, "Memorias," *Diarios y memorias*, pp. 10-11.

figure of Fr. José Bech, than he was introduced in to a familiar Jesuit pedagogic device: the class was divided into two warring "empires," each headed by an "emperor." Being a late enrollee, he was placed at the bottom of his team but in a month's time rose to the top to unseat Gonzalo Marzano, a Spaniard, as emperor, and was overjoyed when for this accomplishment he received his first award — a holy card. At the end of the trimester, he was on the honor roll, winning "a prize with the mark of sobresaliente," presumably for Latin. But resenting the remarks of his professor, he sulked and refused to apply himself to his studies as much as he should and could. "As a consequence", he wrote in his *Memorias*, "at the end of the year, I received an *accesit* in all my subjects and the grade of sobresaliente without winning any prize."²¹

At the end of each academic year, in March, awards were conferred for outstanding performance in the Academic Program (*Estudios Generales*) for the major academic subjects (*asignaturas*) as well as for distinction in conduct (*Comportamiento*) and effort (*Aplicación*). In addition, for the boarders who chose to live in the school under close Jesuit supervision, there were special awards (*Premios de Internado*) for exemplary behavior (*Comportamiento*). There was still a third category of awards — for those enrolled in the elective courses (*Estudios de Adorno*), in music and drawing or design, which were open only to the boarding students. Medals were awarded to students chosen for the first two places (*primer premio, segundo premio*); at times a single prize (*premio único*) was given if only one student was deemed worthy of a medal. After the names of the first two awardees (or name of the single awardee), there follows a list of as many as eight students cited as honorable mention (*accesit*). No medal was given for an *accesit*; but a student who won no first or second place but received *accesits* for all his subjects in the *Estudios Generales* plus conduct and effort was entitled to a medal.

There is no extant copy of the *Solemne Distribución de Premios* for 1872-73. However, Rizal's remarks in his *Memorias* indicate that he received *accesit* honors in all his subjects, including, if my assumption above is correct, arithmetic, but not for conduct and effort. His self-confessed lack of application did not

21. *Ibid.*, p. 12.

sit well with Fr. Bech, and his behavior had not yet caught the eyes of the Jesuits. Hence, he won no medal in his first year at the Ateneo.

While he proudly broke the news of his accesit awards to his mother, he knew his performance had not done justice to his talent. There were a number of reasons for this.

His freshman year was period of difficult adjustment from a peaceful rural setting to a new cosmopolitan, competitive atmosphere. The boarding house where he lived was some distance away from school, in Binondo outside the Walled City across the river. The daily travel was hard on his frail constitution, and the company in the boarding house was not too agreeable. On top of all this, the family was beset with trouble: his mother was unjustly put in prison.

SECOND YEAR, 1873-74

In the beginning of his sophomore year Rizal found a new boarding house near the Ateneo in Intramuros, where the accommodations were more conducive to study. He described this year as uneventful. His mother was still in prison. But he was, on the whole, adjusting well. And the honors he received at the commencement exercises of 1874 showed that his sophomore year was definitely an improvement over the previous one.

He won his first medal, for receiving five accesit citations for conduct, effort, Latin, geometry, and geography (table 4 ranks the awardees in Rizal's year, whose names appear in the *Solemne Distribución de Premios* for 1874). Rizal ranked fifth among his classmates. Outranking him were: Justiniano Jao-Jocco, a former classmate in Biñan; Moisés Santiago, whom Rizal called "matematician and penman";²² Gonzalo Marzano, who being a Spaniard had an edge over Rizal in Spanish and whom Rizal seemed to have a more than ordinary desire to surpass;²³ and Joaquín Garrido, a Spanish mestizo, who in Rizal's judgment was "of poor memory but very talented and hard-working."²⁴ Even at this point his standing showed that his talents and interests were directed toward language and literature rather than the sciences. His highest

22. Ibid., p. 11.

23. Ibid., pp. 11, 13.

24. Ibid., p. 11.

Table 4. Ranking of the Awardees for the *Estudios Generales*, 1873-74

	Comportamiento	Aplicación	Latín	Geografía	Geometría	
Jao-Jocco, Justiniano	<i>premio único</i>	1 ^{er} accesit	1 ^{er} <i>premio</i>	<i>premio único</i>		
Santiago, Moisés		<i>premio único</i>	2 ^o <i>premio</i>	1 ^{er} accesit	1 ^{er} accesit	
Marzano, Gonzalo			4 ^o accesit	3 ^{er} accesit	<i>premio único</i>	
Garrido, Joaquín	1 ^{er} accesit	3 ^{er} accesit	3 ^{er} accesit	4 ^o accesit	4 ^o accesit	<i>premio merecido por cinco accesit</i>
Rizal, José	2 ^o accesit	4 ^o accesit	2 ^o accesit	5 ^o accesit	5 ^o accesit	<i>premio merecido por cinco accesit</i>
Oliva, Florencio		2 ^o accesit	1 ^{er} accesit		2 ^o accesit	
Lete, Enrique				2 ^o accesit	3 ^{er} accesit	
Ostria, Proceso	3 ^{er} accesit					
Luna, José	4 ^o accesit					
García, Manuel		5 ^o accesit				
Peña, Modesto	5 ^o accesit					

academic award, third accesit, was for Latin; his lowest, fifth accesit, was for geography and geometry. In fact, Enrique Lete, brother of Eduardo (future collaborator of Rizal in Spain), while trailing Rizal on over-all performance, ranked higher than Rizal in geography and geometry.

To be sure, Rizal was coming into his own. He found the program of studies intellectually stimulating, and in the summer months of 1874 indulged in a program of voracious reading. His fare: principally novels, among them Dumas' *Count of Monte-cristo*, and a 10-volume world history, or portions thereof, by the Italian Césaire Cantú.

THIRD YEAR, 1874-75

His third year proved even better. At the graduation exercises, he won a medal for winning first place, for the first time, in Latin, and received five accesit citations. Rizal was second only to Moisés Santiago, while Marzano, Garrido, and Jao-Jocco now trailed behind (see table 5). Surprisingly, last year's number one student, Jao-Jocco, dropped to a sorry eighth place, winning only four accesits. Santiago won four medals and an accesit, but was outranked by Rizal in Latin and history. Rizal equalled his honors of the previous year in conduct and effort, second and fourth accesit respectively; while he bettered his performance in Latin, he placed seventh and last in the accesit roll for arithmetic and algebra, two rungs lower than his rank in geometry the year before. But his big disappointment was his losing the history medal to Marzano. "I would have won the medal if some mistakes of mine in Spanish, which I spoke badly, had not provided M. G., a young European, the opportunity of taking advantage of me on this score."²⁵

Notwithstanding his Latin medal, he was unhappy with himself. "I went back to my hometown dissatisfied, although I know that many would have danced for joy for having won less."²⁶ He felt he

25. Ibid., p. 13.

26. Ibid. Rizal's words preceding the above quotation are somewhat puzzling: "... in my studies I received no more than the first prize in Latin, that is to say, one medal, *not as in the previous year*; and so I went back to my hometown dissatisfied..." (Italics mine.) If Rizal meant that in his second year he got more numerous or higher awards, clearly his memory was playing him false. More probably, he wanted to say that the first prize medal for Latin was something new (in fact, his first *primer premio*), but still he was not satisfied.

Table 5. Ranking of the Awardees for the *Estudios Generales*, 1874-75

	Comporta- miento	Aplicación	Análisis y Traducción Latina	Aritmética y Álgebra	Primer Curso de Griego	Historia Uni- versal y Parti- cular de España	
Santiago, Moisés	<i>premio único</i>	<i>premio único</i>	<i>2º premio</i>	<i>5º accedit</i>	<i>premio único</i>		
Rizal, José	<i>2º accedit</i>	<i>4º accedit</i>	<i>1er premio</i>	<i>7º accedit</i>	<i>3º accedit</i>	<i>1er accedit</i>	
Marzano, Gonzalo			<i>3er accedit</i>		<i>5º accedit</i>	<i>premio único</i>	
Monzon, Julian		<i>5º accedit</i>		<i>1er premio</i>			
Garrido, Joaquin		<i>2º accedit</i>	<i>5º accedit</i>	<i>2º premio</i>			
Viejo, Pedro	<i>5º accedit</i>	<i>1er accedit</i>	<i>2º accedit</i>	<i>4º accedit</i>	<i>1er accedit</i>	<i>3er accedit</i>	<i>premio merecido por seis accedit</i>
Jovellanos, Cesarro	<i>1er accedit</i>	<i>3er accedit</i>	<i>4º accedit</i>		<i>4º accedit</i>	<i>2º accedit</i>	
Jao-Jocco, Justiniano	<i>4º accedit</i>		<i>1er accedit</i>	<i>1er accedit</i>	<i>2º accedit</i>		
Peña, Modesto	<i>7º accedit</i>	<i>6º accedit</i>		<i>6º accedit</i>			
Jugo, Fortunato	<i>8º accedit</i>			<i>2º accedit</i>			
Canon, Fernando	<i>6º accedit</i>	<i>8º accedit</i>					
Resurrección, Jose		<i>7º accedit</i>				<i>4º accedit</i>	
Lete, Enrique				<i>3º accedit</i>			

was neglecting his studies; he knew he was not working up to his potential; he could do better. "I was spending little time for my studies. I am approaching my thirteenth birthday, and have yet to prove myself brilliantly before my classmates."²⁷ Perhaps it was the conditions in his current boarding house, the third since he had started at the Ateneo, which impaired his performance. Hence, his family decided to put him as a boarder with the Jesuits for the following year.

FOURTH YEAR, 1875-76

His family would not be disappointed. As a boarder, he learned the value of self-discipline. The time order prescribed for the boarders was a rigid one: it assigned definite hours not only for study and prayer but also for such activities as washing-up and Sunday walks. He formed new friendships among his fellow boarders. At the same time the Jesuits, now watching him at close range, learned to admire and respect the provincial boy for his brilliance of mind, moral integrity, as well as genuine religious piety.²⁸ In turn the young man became attached to them as he increasingly felt their influence. In his new teacher, Francisco de Paula Sánchez, a 26-year-old Jesuit scholastic, not yet a priest, whom he admired as "a model of rectitude, concern and love for the progress of his students,"²⁹ he found a lasting friend and trusted guide. Sánchez was most instrumental in the cultivation of Rizal's literary talents. His spiritual life also developed. He joined the Sodality of Our Lady and became its secretary, later its president; he was also a promoter of the Apostleship of Prayer. Not infrequently, he approached the newly arrived Fr. Pablo Pastells, the Director of the Sodality, for spiritual guidance, the memory of which he was to cherish for the rest of his life.³⁰ Thus the atmosphere had never been more favorable; his *Memorias* furnishes us with a personal assessment of his first year as a boarder: "I can tell you with

27. Ibid.

28. Pastells describes the young Rizal as "a child of outstanding religious sentiments, behavior and dedication to work, who made progress equal to the capacities of his gifted talents." *La masonización de Filipinas*, pp. 21-22.

29. Rizal, "Memorias," *Diarios y memorias*, p. 15.

30. See *Epistolario Rizalino*, Rizal-Pastells, 1 September 1892, 4:37; Pastells-Rizal, 12 October 1892, 4:44; Rizal-Pastells, 9 January 1893, 4:85.

pride, dear reader, that I spent this year better than anyone else, as a student, as a man, and as a Christian.”³¹

At the end of the year he was awarded four medals.³² He placed first in conduct; from fourth accessit the year before, he rose to first accessit in effort (see table 6). This time he passed Marzano for the first prize medal in rhetoric and poetry; Marzano placed second. But Marzano still outranked Rizal in Spanish verse, winning the *premio único*; Fr. Sánchez did not think Rizal worthy of even the second prize, which was given to no one, citing him only as first accessit. In mathematics he bettered his record of the previous year, from a poor seventh accessit to first accessit. In Greek he placed last on the list, third accessit, with the familiar names of Jao-Jocco, Garrido, and Santiago ahead of him. On over-all performance, Rizal must now be rated as first in his class, Marzano second, Jao-Jocco third, and Garrido fourth. In addition, the new boarder received the *primer premio de internado* for outstanding behavior, displacing Modesto Peña and Cesario Jovellanos, last year's first and second placers. There was still a fourth medal, for winning the first place in figure and landscape drawing, a course taught by Don Agustín Saez, the famous painting instructor in Manila.

FIFTH YEAR, 1876-77

In his final year, philosophy and natural sciences opened up for Rizal new horizons in the realm of learning. But the pull of his literary pursuits was so irresistible, that notwithstanding the admonition of his physics and chemistry professor, Fr. José Vilacera, that he cut off “converse with the muses,” he continued in his free hours to “commune with them and cultivate the language of Olympus under the direction of Father Sánchez.”³³ Nonetheless, he saw in his philosophy courses a happy kinship to poetry:

Philosophy — forthrightly, severely inquiring into the why of things — caught my attention even as Poetry had; beautiful as only Poetry could be, it gamboled in the enchanted fields of nature, leaving footprints that conjure up thoughts tender and sublime.³⁴

31. Rizal, “Memorias,” *Diarios y memorias*, p. 15.

32. Ibid. Rizal states that he won “five medals” in 1875-76. But this is clearly a lapse of memory.

33. Ibid., p. 16.

34. Ibid.

Table 6. Ranking of the Awardees for the *Estudios Generales*, 1875-76

	Comportamiento	Aplicación	Retórica y Poética	Geometría y Trigonometría	Griego, 2º Curso	Verso Castellano
Rizal, José	1 ^{er} premio	1 ^{er} accesit	1 ^{er} premio	1 ^{er} accesit	3 ^{er} accesit	1 ^{er} accesit
Marzano, Gonzalo		2º premio				premio único
Jao-Jocco Justiniano	2º accesit	2º accesit	1 ^{er} accesit	5º accesit	premio único	
Garrido, Joaquín		1 ^{er} premio	3 ^{er} accesit		1 ^{er} accesit	
Jugo, Fortunato		4º accesit		1 ^{er} premio		
Santiago, Moisés	2º premio	3 ^{er} accesit		2º premio	2º accesit	
Monzon, Julián		2º premio				
Viejo, Pedro	1 ^{er} accesit	6º accesit	2º accesit	4º accesit		3 ^{er} accesit
Canon, Fernando	5º accesit	5º accesit		2º accesit		2º accesit
Lete, Enrique				3 ^{er} accesit		
Peña, Modesto	3 ^{er} accesit					
Corrales, Carlos	4º accesit					
Jovellanos, Cesario	6º accesit					

Such a romantic view of scholastic philosophy, reputedly cut and dry, helped him earn the first prize medal in this subject. Similarly, physics captured his poetic imagination:

Physics, lifting the curtain that concealed many things, revealed to me the vast stage where the divine drama of nature was played. Motion, heat, light, electricity, colors entertained me in my free hours.³⁵

But Fr. Vilaclara did not quite agree with this poeticization of his course. To be just, he had to give him the mark of sobresaliente. But Rizal was no Filipino Isaac Newton; Vilaclara gave him no higher than third accesit for physics and chemistry.

Natural history (biology), Rizal frankly confessed, he found somewhat distasteful (*algo antipática*).³⁶ It gave him great delight, he wrote, to read descriptions of flowers, birds, animals, crystals; but classifying a thing of beauty such as a flower or bird into colorless genus and species was no way to handle a joy forever.

Shells attracted me so because of their beauty and because I knew I could find them on the shores, where in my innocent imagination, I dreamt myself stepping on them, my feet kissed by the most enchanting nymphs of the seas and the lakes. Often it seemed to me I saw a goddess in a shell which I saw in the laboratory cabinet.³⁷

Such poetic flights of the imagination, concealing perhaps and sublimating the not so innocent thoughts and erotic images haunting the 15-year-old adolescent did not make good science. Thus Rizal received no citation at all for natural history; in fact, this was the first time that he did not win as much as a last accesit in any major subject (see table 7).

If we take into consideration the academic courses alone, philosophy, physics and chemistry, and natural history, Peña (one premio único and two accesits) and Santiago (one primer premio and two accesits) must be judged as having done slightly better than Rizal (one primer premio and one accesit). But the Jesuit professors were passing judgment on the total performance of their students as Christian gentlemen. Beyond a shadow of a doubt, for them, Rizal was number one. They awarded him the first places in conduct and effort. In addition, he was again winner of the first prize medal as the best behaved boarder and recipient of the sole award for figure and line drawing under Saez.

35. Ibid.

36. Ibid.

37. Ibid.

Table 7. Ranking of the Awardees for the *Estudios Generales*, 1876-77

	Comportamiento	Aplicación	Filosofía	Física y Química	Historia Natural
Rizal, José	1 ^{er} premio	1 ^{er} premio	1 ^{er} premio	3 ^{er} accesit	
Santiago, Moisés	2 ^o premio	1 ^{er} accesit	2 ^o premio	1 ^{er} premio	4 ^o accesit
Peña, Modesto	1 ^{er} accesit	2 ^o premio	3 ^{er} accesit	1 ^{er} accesit	premio único
Jao-Jocco, Justiniano	3 ^{er} accesit		1 ^{er} accesit	2 ^o premio	
Jovellanos, Cesario	2 ^o accesit	3 ^{er} accesit	2 ^o accesit		
Canon, Fernando	4 ^o accesit	4 ^o accesit			2 ^o accesit
Marzano, Gonzalo				4 ^o accesit	1 ^{er} accesit
Resurrección, José		2 ^o accesit			
Carrillo, Santiago				2 ^o accesit	
Lete, Enrique					3 ^{er} accesit

His last year in the Ateneo, Rizal stated, was characterized by an upsurge of patriotic sentiments; but this, he would claim years later in a letter to Blumentritt, was in spite of his Jesuit mentors, who did not inculcate in their students the virtue of love of country.³⁸ But for the moment, there was only praise and gratitude for the Ateneo and the Jesuits. His two years as a boarder, he claimed in his *Memorias*, "were the happiest in my life."³⁹ "I owe much to this religious order; almost, almost everything that I am and stand for."⁴⁰ The Jesuits "taught us what was beautiful and the best."⁴¹ It was accomplishment enough to be among the 12 A.B. graduates of 1877; but Rizal was graduating the undisputed first of his class (see table 3). It was a long road that the young Pepe had travelled, from Calamba and the nipa-roofed schoolhouse in Biñan over the aprobado of his entrance tests and through the accesits of his lower years.

I had entered the College still a boy, with little knowledge of the Spanish tongue, my mind hardly developed and almost without refinement in my sentiments. By dint of study, self-examination, constantly pushing forward, and a thousand corrections, I was transformed little by little into a new man, thanks to the beneficent influence of a zealous professor.⁴²

In the morning of Friday, 23 March 1877, after the presentation of a "dialogue" written by himself, José Rizal Mercado, barely 16 years of age, walked up on the stage amid the applause of the crowd and went down with five medals, and the bachelor's diploma in his hand. Notwithstanding, graduation was no source of unmixed joy for Rizal. So attached had he become to his alma mater that he felt sad to leave her. The night before, the boy who, five years back had felt so sick for Calamba, could not sleep well at the thought it would be his last at the Ateneo; and during the ceremonies, he wept.

CONCLUSION

It has been firmly established against the transcript in Retana and amid Jesuit confusion on the matter, that Rizal began his studies in the Ateneo Municipal in 1872 and obtained his A.B.

38. Rizal-Blumentritt, 13 April 1887, *Epistolario Rizalino*, 5:111.

39. Rizal, "Memorias," *Diarios y memorias*, p. 17.

40. Rizal, "Diario de viaje: de Calamba á Barcelona," *Diarios y memorias*, p. 33.

41. Rizal-Blumentritt, 13 April 1887, *Epistolario Rizalino*, 5:111.

42. Rizal, "Memorias," *Diarios y memorias*, p. 17.

degree in 1877. Rizal was an exceptionally bright student, as indicated by the transcript in Retana. But he was not always number one in his class; it was a long, hard climb to the top. Somewhat disadvantaged because of his provincial background, he won no medal in his first year. In his second year he was awarded his first medal for winning five accesit citations, ranking only fifth in his class. In his third year, he rose to second place, winning a first prize medal and five accesits. By the end of his fourth year, as a boarder at the Ateneo, he was first in his class, with four medals to bring home to Calamba. At the end of the course, he received five first prize medals, the first among the 12 A.B. graduates of 1877.

Though surely no earth-shaking piece of research, this study — an expanded footnote to current biographies of our national hero — is not without significance. The actual story of the student from Calamba is far nobler than any myth about him and not so rare as popular belief would have it be. It is the story of many a student convinced of the truth that medals do not come with birth and background, but take shape by “constantly pushing forward” and “a thousand corrections” in the struggle to be a new man.