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## Touching The Truth: Applying Literary Realist Theory to Jose Rizal's "Noli Me Tangere" (Touch Me Not)

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TOUCHING THE TRUTH: APPLYING LITERARY REALIST THEORY  
TO JOSE RIZAL'S *NOLI ME TANGERE*  
(TOUCH ME NOT)

A Thesis

by

FRANCESCA T. FALQUEZA

Submitted to the Graduate School of the  
University of Texas-Pan American  
In partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

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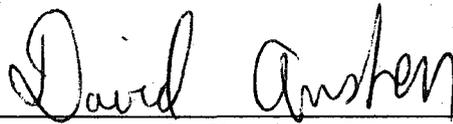
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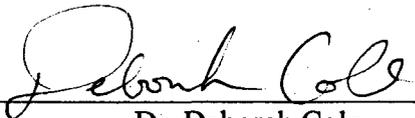
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May 2009

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## ABSTRACT

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When criticized for exaggerating events written in *Noli Me Tangere* (Touch Me Not), Jose Rizal claimed that he was “ready to match every incident in his novel with one from life” (Guerrero 10). This thesis attempts to prove the validity of this statement using literary realist theory. Moreover, the novel’s factual aspect proves to be not as important as its faithful depiction of Filipino life during Spanish rule.

A close reading of the text examines specific incidents within the novel which reveal Rizal’s intent for the novel as well as the message he desired to convey to his people. Further, Rizal’s reason for choosing to write a novel over any other form of literature is investigated.

## DEDICATION

The completion of my Master's degree would not have been possible without the unconditional love and endless support of my family and friends. I would especially like to thank my parents Simplicio and Maria Falqueza for their support throughout my academic career. My mother inspired me to delve into the complexities of my native land's past, and for that I am truly grateful. I would like to thank my sister, Ancilla, for all of her encouragement throughout this long and humbling process. Most of all I would like to thank my boyfriend, George, for his love and patience over the past two years. No one understands me better than you. You are truly my best friend. You inspire me everyday, and I can't express how much you mean to me.

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## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION TO RIZAL

Jose Rizal's *Noli Me Tangere* is revered as the primary literary work that influenced the Filipino Revolution. In 1861 Rizal was born into a middle class family in the Philippine province of Laguna (Fisher 260). His early childhood education was concentrated in the Binan Latin School which he attended while living with his aunt (Craig 9). When he was old enough to attend school in Manila he enrolled at Ateneo Municipal which was at the time the only school where "Filipinos were given the same treatment as Spaniards" (Craig 11). On March 14, 1877, Rizal graduated from Ateneo with a Bachelor of Arts degree, receiving highest honors (Craig 11). The following year he began studying Philosophy at the University of Santo Tomas while simultaneously studying agriculture at Ateneo Municipal. The next two years he went on to Manila University to study medicine, while maintaining a fair interest in art. Rizal moved to Spain in 1882 in order to continue his study of medicine at the Universidad Central de Madrid (Fisher 260). During his stay in Spain, he wrote *Noli me Tangere*. In 1887 Rizal briefly returned to the Philippines but was advised by the governor general to leave after six months due to controversy surrounding the novel (Craig 25). After traveling in Europe and Asia for an extended period of time, Spanish authorities allowed him to return to the Philippines under false pretense. Ultimately, they set him up, accusing him

of writing anti-clerical documents which they planted in his sister's baggage (Craig 33). Rizal was banished to the city of Dapitan where he would remain in exile for four years until his transfer to Fort Santiago prison on November 3, 1896 (Laubach 40). His trial for treason began a month later on December 3, 1896 (Laubach 47). The exact charge against him was "the principle organizer and the living soul of the Filipino insurrection, the founder of societies, periodicals and books dedicated to fermenting and propagating ideas of rebellion" (Laubach 49). Rizal was accused of founding the Liga Filipina which was "an association devoted to the protection of industry, education and agriculture" (Fisher 262). This description itself proves that the organization was not involved in any illegal activity whatsoever. When questioned at his trial, Rizal stated that "the Liga Filipina had no revolutionary purpose at all" (Laubach 49). When accused of leading a radical organization called the Katipunan, Rizal denied all accusations and insisted that the group used his name without his consent. However, his consistent denial of the charges against him would not save his life. On December 29 1896, Rizal was sentenced to death and executed the following day on December 3, 1896.

## CHAPTER II

### INTRODUCTION TO *NOLI ME TANGERE*

While attending medical school in Europe, Rizal wrote and published *Noli Me Tangere*, the novel that some have argued “predicted in minute detail the foundations and course of the 1896 [Filipino] revolution” (Michener 6). The novel is, in fact, a political narrative criticizing the abuse of power by Spanish colonial officials in the Philippines during the late 1800s. When criticized for exaggerating events written in the novel, Rizal stated, “The facts I narrate are all true and actually happened; I can prove them” (Gonzalez, “Filipino” 962). This thesis will not only investigate the validity of that claim but it will also attempt to interpret the rationale behind Rizal’s choice to write a fictional narrative. If all the events in the novel are based on facts, why did he choose to write them as fiction rather than journalism or history? The primary purpose will be to show how the novel was not only a factual depiction of Filipino history during the time it was written, but more importantly an accurate depiction of Filipino life during Spanish rule. I will attempt to answer the question: why a novel instead of a different genre of fiction or a political pamphlet? I propose it is because Rizal felt that a novel was the most effective educational tool over any other form of literature. The literary tradition of the Filipino people was centered on short stories and folklore. Because most Filipinos weren’t as well educated as Rizal, he had to write in a form that all people could relate to. He had to

compose a work that could cross all social boundaries and educate all Filipinos about political injustice they were facing as a nation. The only way to accomplish this was by writing a novel. In order to prove this theory, I will examine Rizal's life writings in order to first establish his purpose for writing *Noli*. Next, we will examine Rizal's personal writings as well as the text in *Noli* in order to prove this theory. There were obvious political reasons for which Rizal could not write the traditional political propaganda that a well-educated group of young men the *ilustrados* (or enlightened ones) were famous for. The *ilustrados* were "...members of an emergent bourgeoisie educated in the universities of the colonial capital of Manila and European cities such as Madrid, Paris and Berlin. They were well-traveled and multi-lingual..." (Rafael 594). Speaking out against the Catholic Church and the Spanish crown was punishable by death. In his attempt to use this genre as a "safe" form of writing, Rizal may have miscalculated its impact on the Spanish clergy.

If he wanted to educate the masses, he would have to write something accessible to all Filipino people. Disguised as a novel, his message of reform would not be as obvious nor would it appear to be as threatening as something written in a political pamphlet. This novel proposed the possibility of a society where all social classes could exist cohesively. In *Under Three Flags* Benedict Anderson keenly observes this stating, "...[Rizal's power] came from his novels—no one else attempted them. What he did in *Noli me Tangere* was to create in the imagination a whole (and contemporary) Philippine 'society'" (Anderson, *Three Flags* 165). Further, we will explore the format of the novel and study its effectiveness in depicting a faithful portrait of Filipino life during the late 1800s. Written in short chapters with eye-catching titles, the novel's format is relatively

unique. There are several characters within the novel which can be considered as equivalents of Rizal himself. The message these characters convey within the novel is also delivered with subtle urgency. All of these elements combined make *Noli* effective as both a political novel and an educational tool.

### CHAPTER III

#### SYNOPSIS *NOLI ME TANGERE*

Before close analysis of a complex literary work such as *Noli*, a brief summary of the plot is essential. *Noli Me Tangere* tells the story of Juan Ibarra, a young man who has just come back to his hometown of Binondo after studying abroad for 7 years. Because Rizal drew from his own life experiences as his inspiration for his writing, it is often believed that Ibarra's character is loosely based on Rizal himself. The fact that Rizal studied abroad for an extended period of time is just one of the many similarities between the two. In the novel, the father of Ibarra's betrothed, Capitan Tiago, is a respected diplomat who welcomes him home by throwing a party in his honor. At the gathering he is confronted by Father Damaso, a friar with who held a grudge against Ibarra's father Don Rafael. During Ibarra's stay in Europe, Father Damaso accused Don Rafael of murdering a Spanish tax collector. The novel makes it clear that Don Rafael was defending a student against the tax collector. When the tax collector attempted to fight back against Don Rafael, the tax collector fell and died from a head injury. Don Rafael was blamed for his death and accused of heresy due to the close ties between the church and the tax collectors. Significantly Rizal's father was also a prestigious landowner who, like Don Rafael, got in trouble with both tax collectors and friars. One biographer notes that "...troubles over taxes, tithes, and rentals hounded the family throughout Rizal's life,

and find their echo in both the *Noli* and the *Fili* [the sequel of *Noli*]" (Guerrero 10). In the novel because of Don Rafael's "sin" against the church, Father Damaso refused to allow his body to be buried in the Catholic cemetery. Instead, the body was thrown into the local river. Despite the injustice against his father, Ibarra is not vengeful against Father Damaso and focuses rather on fulfilling his father's wishes of building a school to better educate his people. Rizal shared this belief that his people could be liberated through education. Throughout the novel, Ibarra struggles with both himself and those who threaten his purpose to inspire a movement for political change.

## CHAPTER IV

### LITERATURE REVIEW: CONFLICTING VIEWS ON *NOLI*

Despite the fact that it was written over one hundred years ago, *Noli* remains the subject of literary argument among scholars. No matter the scholar, the opinions concerning the novel almost always come down to the fundamental question: is the book exaggeration? Vicente Rafael and Vincente Pilapil are two scholars who have made contributions to this argument. In “Nationalism, Imagery, and the Filipino Intelligentsia in the Nineteenth Century,” Rafael argues that the novel is true to life. Basing his argument on the state of Filipino nationalism, Rafael claims that the reason the Filipino culture is structured around a matriarchal model is due to the abuse of power by its former patriarchal leaders; the Spanish friars (595). He focuses specifically on the period between the 1880s to the 1890s. During this period, there was a political following known as the Propaganda Movement which was lead by a group known as the *ilustrados* or the enlightened. These men, including Rizal himself, wrote scholarly works that pushed for equal rights for Filipinos under Spanish law. This included “granting Spanish citizenship to Filipinos” (Rafael 594). However, by the mid-1890s, hopes of equal rights for Filipinos were grim, and the *ilustrados* shifted their focus to Philippine Independence from Spain (Rafael 594). More than anything, the *ilustrados* attributed the political oppression of Filipinos to the abuse of power by Spanish friars in the Catholic Church

(Rafael 595). This coincides with Rizal's similar view in *Noli*, depicting friars as a corrupt and immoral group. Rafael states that both Rizal and other ilustrados were justified in their negative opinion of the friars stating, "They saw the friars as forces of reaction, and with good reason, for the friars regarded Filipinos as inferior to Spaniards, liberalism and learning as threats to the power of the church, and the ilustrados themselves as subversives" (595). He goes on to describe the friars as "agents of exclusion, hoarders of wealth and women, purveyors of religious fetishism, and merchants of ritual practices and devotional paraphernalia" (Rafael 595). Once again, this supports Rizal's main argument in *Noli* that friars are corrupt and morally unjust men. Further, Rafael introduces the idea that ilustrados and friars are "mirror-images" of one another (595). Of course he does not mean this in a literal sense. However, he does suggest that both groups are torn between dual identities. The Filipinos were torn between their native heritage and the Spanish identity that was imposed upon them through colonization. The friars, on the other hand, "were doubled, split between spiritual and material concerns" (Rafael 595). However, moral corruption in the church was not limited to greed. Carnal sins were also an obvious accusation against the church clergy. Rafael reinforces this criticism stating, "Despite their vows of celibacy, they were accused of using the confessional to prey on the gullibility of women and thus monopolize access to their bodies and minds" (595). It was this hypocrisy that truly angered Filipino nationalists. The friars went "beyond their proper roles and traditional boundaries" and became "figures of denial" (Rafael 595). Rafael argues that in hoarding the nation's wealth, power and women, the friars cut off the natives from a potentially prosperous future. As a result, the ilustrados began to desire a nation that would not be

corrupted by the greed of men, but instead be nurtured by the love and care of women. Therefore, Rafael states, "As we've see, Spanish fathers figured the negative moment in the production of ilustrado consciousness. Mothers, however, tended to play a far more ambivalent role in nationalist thinking" (596). Rizal's close relationship with his mother is further explored in the article, reinforcing Rafael's idea of a Filipino matriarchal society. This ant-patriarchal argument further strengthens the argument that friars were a negative presence in Filipino society. Ultimately, he points out that Filipinos chose to run "Mother Philippines" as a matriarchal nation due to the mistakes made by patriarchal figures such as the Spanish friars.

Pilapil offers a strong contrast to Rafael's anti-friar argument. In "The Cause of the Philippine Revolution," Pilapil acts as an advocate for the Spanish friars, claiming that they were victims of native violence. Although he refers to the Propaganda Movement, he says that the anti-Spanish leaflets produced by the ilustrados were misused as ammunition against the Spanish. He argues that the reason many historians (particularly Americans) used the political propaganda to portray the Spanish as oppressive dictators was because of the U.S. interest in taking over the islands (Pilapil, "Revolution" 249). Pilapil disputes that blaming the Philippine Revolution on the corruption of Spanish rule is not logical stating, "The more dramatic thesis that the Spanish government was tyrannical and oppressive and that the Filipino people, no longer able to suffer in silence and obedience, rose against it, leaves many problems unexplained" ("Revolution" 250). Instead he says that the Filipinos had simply outgrown their Spanish rulers. He compares the Filipinos to a grown up son who is rebelling

against his mother (Spain). He supports this by stating, “The homespun analogy of a colony to a grown-up son who finally decided to throw away the shackles of maternal control is the more correct [thesis]” (Pilapil, “Revolution” 250). The Philippines was maturing as a nation, and with that maturity, a political uprising was in the works. Ironically, scholars like Pilapil attribute this national awakening to the presence of the Spanish themselves. This is due to the fact that because the Spanish were better educating the Filipino natives, they in turn were facilitating the knowledge the people needed to liberate themselves. However, abuse of power by the Spanish colonizers cannot be denied. Pilapil supports this stating, “Spain introduced one set of institutions and one set of regulations. Everyone had to obey the same authorities—the representatives of the Spanish crown” (“Revolution” 250). When Spanish conquerors first settled in the Philippine islands, the native tribes distinguished themselves from one another. The arrival of the Spanish brought on a new political system and in many ways, a new way of life. Pilapil emphasizes this point stating, “Instead of the numerous petty barangays [natives] at war with one another, which formerly had been the political state of the archipelago at the arrival of Spaniards, a centralized government was established” (Pilapil, “Revolution” 250). Along with religious reform, the Spanish emphasized and enforced the importance of education. Pilapil writes of the effects of education on the Filipino natives stating, “The education of the natives was a main provision in the colonization system. The effects of education are rather obvious. One cannot educate a person without stimulating his search for other realities” (Pilapil, “Revolution” 251). With their newfound faith and knowledge, Filipinos began to question the state of affairs in their country. In another article entitled “Nineteenth-Century Philippines and the

Friar-Problem”, Piliapil maintains his defense of the Spanish clergy. He continues to portray the Spanish as victims of circumstance calling the Philippine Revolution “both a political and religious fight” (Pilapil, “Friar” 127). He argues that the friars were the ones being attacked by Filipino natives. He supports this stating, “The Spanish friars, representing the Catholic Church as well as their mother country, were placed in a double adverse situation. In the actual course of the fight, they suffered physically from the hostility of the revolutionaries, some were murdered and others were imprisoned” (Pilapil, “Friar” 127). He continues by refuting the accusations of cruel treatment of Filipinos by the Spanish stating, “However, a casual examination of the *Recopilacion de las Leyes de Indias* and the other decrees promulgated with regard to the colonies will bear out the statement that Spanish colonization “was more humane in its treatment of dependent peoples than either French or English systems” (Pilapil 129). Pilapil paints a rather different picture from the one portrayed in Rizal’s novel, portraying the friars as the wounded and the natives as the aggressors. The next chapter will attempt to prove Rizal’s novel is true to life using evidence from both the text and Rizal’s life.

## CHAPTER V

### REALISM IN *NOLI*

A point that Rizal always emphasized about *Noli* was the fact that every event in the novel was true to life. Here we will consider the strength of that argument. Realism was a literary movement that became popular during the late 1800s in Europe. In contrast to Romanticism, realism is argued to be "...the portrayal of life with fidelity. It is thus not concerned with idealization, with rendering things as beautiful when they are not, or in any way presenting them in any guise they are not" (Cuddon 773). That is precisely what Rizal did in *Noli*. Rizal's use of realism is not based solely on the author's commitment to reality. In fact, it is his personification of specific groups or ideas through literary characterization that make realism effective. Ian Watt emphasizes this in *The Rise of the Novel* stating, "If the novel were realistic merely because it saw life from the seamy side, it would only be an inverted romantic; but in fact it surely attempts to portray all varieties of human experience, and not merely suited to one particular literary perspective: the novel's realism does not reside in the kind of life it presents, but in the way it presents it" (Watt 11). Rizal demonstrates this in *Noli* by depicting the lives of people from all facets of Filipino society. Throughout the novel there are characters that represent all social classes, from the altar boy to the aristocrat.

*Noli Me Tangere* is set in the fictional town of San Diego in the Philippines during the late 1800s. During that time the country was in a state of political unrest. Negative political and social conditions are mirrored by the attitude of the characters in the novel. Characters such as Elias the helmsman, Don Anastasio the philosopher, and the altar boys Crispin and Basilio are prime examples of those oppressed by the Spanish. The injustices these characters suffer are reflective of the injustices experienced by Filipino natives in real life. Catholicism had them pondering the question "If all men were of equal intrinsic value before God, why did some have to be subject peoples in the world of men?" (Pilapil, "Revolution" 251). This search for equality is what moved the Filipino revolution. The more educated Filipino natives also began questioning the authority of their foreign rulers. This can be considered the early stages of what would later become the Philippine Revolution in 1896. Some may argue that it was the Spanish that facilitated Philippine independence from Spain, but it was actually Spain's tyrannical rule that made a revolt imperative for the Filipino people. In treating the natives poorly, the Spanish rulers inspired the natives to revolt. Pilapil strengthens this idea stating, "One of the chief shortcomings on both the part of the Spanish government and the Spanish friars was their failure to recognize that they had provided the Filipinos new vistas of thoughts and desires and, therefore, had to satisfy them in some new way" ("Revolution" 251).

With the invention of the printing press, the written word was the most effective tool for Filipino reformers during the up rise of the Philippine Revolution. Jose Rizal's *Noli Me Tangere* was the primary piece of literature that would lead the nation's movement against the Spanish. Written and published in Europe, "the book was

smuggled into the [Philippine] islands and read eagerly and avidly by the people despite and because of its prohibition and condemnation by the Spanish government” (Pilapil, “Revolution” 252). Rizal once spoke of his novel’s purpose saying, “It was to arouse the people from their lethargy, and one who wants to arouse the people does not make use of soft and light calls but of blows and detonations” (Pilapil, “Revolution” 264). The social impact of the novel was his ultimate explosive strike against Spanish rule. His purpose was to inspire a national rebellion by pointing out the obvious injustices against his fellow man. Here we will discuss the specific offenses of Spanish rulers and Rizal’s depictions in his novel.

The primary aspect of Philippine society Rizal attacks in the novel is the state of the Catholic Church under Spanish rule. He specifically attacks the friars who not only guide the religious views of the Filipinos, but act as church dictators. By the late 1800s there were five orders of friars acting as missionaries in the Philippines: Augustinians (Hermit), Franciscans, Dominicans, Jesuits and Recollect Augustinians. These orders had made their way into the islands at different points in time during Spain’s 350-year rule (Pilapil, “Friar” 135). At the beginning of their reign over the Catholic Church, friars were responsible for being both religious leaders and educators. Initially, they were successful in their duties. In fact, church records show impressive advances in education leading up to the early 1800s. Data shows that the Philippines had their first school by 1560 and they had a modern Public Education system set up even before Spain or France (Pilapil, “Friar” 131). However, by the late 1800s, political unrest was evident. Filipino natives began reporting corrupt acts within the Church and they are mainly accusations of immorality amongst friars. Pilapil writes of the three primary areas of complaint against

the friars stating, “The grievances and denunciations made by the propagandists were direct against the friars as friars (their personal qualities and behavior), the friars as constituting the religious corporations (their economic and landed interests), and the friars as Spanish representatives (their political authority)” (“Friar” 137).

Rizal illustrates the first of these problems in the character of Father Damaso, one of the main clergymen in the novel. Damaso is representative of the Spanish clergy as a whole. He acts as Ibarra’s nemesis throughout the novel. Damaso is “depicted as cruel, slyly malicious, arrogant and immoral” (Pilapil, “Friar” 138). His attitude is typical of that of many Spanish friars of the time. In his book, *Inside the Philippine Revolution*, William Chapman describes Damaso stating, “Rich mannered, haughty, and disdainful of the *indios*, Father Damaso ruled his parish like a feudal lord, punishing his flock for the most minor offenses” (Chapman 195). We first see a demonstration of Damaso’s ruthless character at Capitan Tiago’s dinner party in the novel’s opening scene. Damaso is speaking to a young Dominican friar who fails to address him as “Your Reverence” during the conversation. When the Dominican asks him why this is so important, Damaso lashes out at him saying, “That is why many calamities come! The government supports the heretics against the ministers of God!” (Rizal 8). This attitude held by the friars was not uncommon. In fact, many of them used this tactic to lure their faithful followers into believing that if you did not respect the Church’s authority, you were against God. A perfect example of this was seen in the January 1872 when “on account of oppression by their Spanish officers, about two hundred Filipino soldiers and arsenal workers in Cavite mutinied” (Anderson, *Studies* 155). Historical accounts show that the Spanish interpreted the rebellion as one “aimed at the separation of the colony from

Spain” (Anderson, *Studies* 155). In order to make an example to anyone who dared to question the Spanish authorities, three Filipino priests (Burgos, Gomez and Zamora) were publicly executed on February 17 of the same year (Anderson, *Studies* 155). Because native priests were so well loved by the Filipino people, many were shocked by the event. In fact, speculation as to the priests’ innocence was continuous. The fact that the men were Filipino priests and not Spanish friars added to the political controversy of the incident. Ultimately, the general consensus was “the three priests were executed because they were natives who dared to challenge the established powers, and that the authorities wanted to intimidate future agitators for political rights and the secularizations of the parishes” (Anderson, *Studies* 156). The fact that Spanish authorities only implicated Filipino clergy members and not Spanish clergy shows the explicit racial bias of the Spanish. Although Rizal was only eleven years old at the time, he had a personal connection to event. Leon Guerrero writes of this connection in his introduction to *Noli Me Tangere* stating, “...his [Rizal] elder and only brother, a protégé of one of the executed priests, feared he would be implicated in the alleged conspiracy and prudently went home to the provinces” (Guerrero 10). In Rizal’s view, the problem was not the Catholic Church, but the bias with which it was run by Spanish authorities.

In another incident, Damaso rebukes a schoolmaster for speaking Spanish to him instead of the native tongue, Tagalog. “Don’t use borrowed clothing with me. Be content to speak in your own language and don’t spoil Spanish—it is not for the likes of you,” he states with contempt against the teacher. According to Chapman this account of the friars’ society was fairly accurate. He states, “The schoolmaster’s lament was not the exaggeration it might seem today, for the friars from Spain did in fact control parish life

to its last detail. The tenacious soldiers of God had arrived in the footsteps of the *conquistadors*, determined to play their role in the quest for “God, Gold, and Glory” (Chapman 196). Those who criticize Rizal for dramatically stretching the truth in his novel are mistaken according to such accounts. Even Pilapil acknowledges this stating, “...Rizal, like the rest of the propagandists, were depicting definite situations” (Pilapil, “Friar” 138). Although the Spanish friars were obviously responsible for their own corrupt behavior, the fact that this was allowed to occur for as long as it did could be attributed to the lack of supervision from Spain itself. By the end of the 1800s the colony became almost an afterthought of its motherland. Once the appeal of monetary gain ceased to exist, “...we do not find a multitude of Spaniards streaming in, owing to the lack of prospects for material rewards. And that was not all. Throughout the Spanish regime there was a lack of government officials and of an adequate military force” (Pilapil, “Friar” 136). This lack of management from higher authorities allowed friars to run not only the church, but also the government in whatever manner they pleased.

Rizal illustrates this abuse of power in the novel by depicting the mistreatment of the altar boys Crispin and Basilio. The two boys are brothers who, due to their family’s poverty, have taken jobs as altar servers at their local church. Rizal graphically describes the abuse experienced by both boys. The chapter entitled “The Altar Boys” describes in full detail some of the atrocities experienced by altar servers. For example, Crispin, the younger of the two, is accused of stealing from the church collection. He begs his older brother Basilio to pay the money back for him so that the priests will no longer accuse him of being a thief. However, Basilio is torn between helping his brother and earning money for his family saying, “Are you mad, Crispin? Mother will have nothing to eat”

(Rizal, *Noli* 84). Rizal shows that the brothers are earning an unfair wage because the priests keep fining the boys for stealing sums that far outweigh their earnings. For example the boys are earning two pesos a month, but the priests fine Crispin for 32 pesos in the same month. In anguish, Crispin describes the priests' threats saying, "The priest said he would beat me to death if I cannot produce the money" (Rizal, *Noli* 85). The helplessness and sorrow of both boys can be felt as they try to figure out a way to pay back the stolen sum. However, the unfeeling nature of the priests is not changed. Even as the boys plead to be able to leave the church so they can walk home at a decent hour, the *sacristan mayor* refuses this request. Crispin is kept overnight in the church because he fails to pay the sum he has been accused of stealing. Rizal describes the terror experienced by Basilio stating, "He heard the sound of blows on his brother's body against the ladder steps, the scream, the slaps" (*Noli* 86). The novel shows that the terror inflicted upon the Filipino natives was not isolated to adults. Children often suffered from the cruelty of the Spanish rulers, especially altar boys who worked closely with the friars.

More disturbing than the mistreatment the altar boys was the public humiliation of their mother Sisa. When Basilio arrives home without his brother, Sisa is filled with anguish saying, "My good Crispin! Accusing my good Crispin! It is because we are poor, and the poor have to suffer everything" (Rizal, *Noli* 93). She and Basilio decide that the boys will no longer work as altar servers because of the abuse they have to suffer. Basilio emphasizes this point saying, "I earn little, and what I earn is turned into fines" (Rizal, *Noli* 95). The following day, Sisa travels into town to plead for her the release of Crispin. When she arrives, she questions a church cook who tells her that Crispin had

escaped the previous night after “stealing many things” (Rizal, *Noli* 102). The cook goes on to tell her that the priest has reported the Crispin’s crime to the *Guardia Civil*. When Sisa arrives home, two soldiers who question her about the whereabouts of her two sons meet her. She learns that Basilio has escaped from the soldiers. As she approaches them, they ask her, “Are you the mother of the thieves, you?” (Rizal, *Noli* 124). When she defends her sons, the soldiers decide to arrest her saying, “Well then, you will come with us. Your sons will have to show up and give up the money they have stolen.” (Rizal, *Noli* 125). Through this incident, Rizal shows the power of the priests in influencing even the military. He describes how the soldiers are perceived by the natives saying, “The civil guards are not human beings: they are only civil guards, they are deaf to pleas and are accustomed to see tears” (*Noli* 124). When Sisa is being arrested, she is subjected to public humiliation as she is escorted into town by the two guards. Rizal describes this humiliation saying, “Seeing herself marching between the two, she felt she could die of shame...but until now she had considered herself honorable and respected; until now she had regarded with compassion those women shockingly attired who the town called the soldiers’ concubines” (*Noli* 126). This particular incident is especially personal to Rizal because his mother had to suffer the same public humiliation. Guerrero describes this incident stating, “When he was still a schoolboy under the Jesuits his own mother was the victim of a false charge of attempted poisoning, and, like Sisa in his story, was marched to gaol [prison] along the highway in public degradation” (10).

Rizal did not attribute the corruption of the Catholic Church to the immorality of the friars alone. He also criticized devoutly religious natives throughout the novel. In the chapter titled “Souls in Anguish,” Rizal portrays the devoutly religious natives as

hypocrites who only perform religious acts to gain indulgences. In the Catholic faith, indulgences are blessings one can gain through prayer or religious acts that gain pardon in purgatory for those who have departed. They can also gain pardon for oneself in the afterlife. The chapter begins with eight women in the church waiting for the friar Padre Salvi after mass. They are discussing how many indulgences each of them has accumulated over the years and they argue over which strategy is most effective in gaining the most holy indulgences. There is one woman who is particularly proud of her established system for counting indulgences saying, "I do not waste one single holy day! Ever since I joined the confraternity, I have gained 457 plenary indulgences, and 760,598 years of indulgences. I record all my gains because I like to keep my accounts clean. I don't want to deceive or be deceived" (Rizal, *Noli* 98). The women measure one another's faith not by their character, but by how many indulgences each one has gained. One woman even boasts that she can gain indulgences in her sleep (Rizal, *Noli* 98). Ultimately, Rizal shows us that the idea of blessings from God has turned into a ludicrous competition and point system instead of motivation to lead a sincere and holy life. The definitive example of this is when one of the women says that when a dish breaks in her home, she makes her servants recite a prayer for each piece of glass they pick up and she counts each prayer as an indulgence. Clearly Rizal means to show that the natives are not treating the Church with the reverence it deserves.

Some may argue that these aforementioned incidents are exaggerated, but the recorded evidence that supports these accusations adequately refutes these objections. As Guerrero states, "There is an uncanny foresight in the plot of the *Noli*, which should silence those who would dismiss it as implausible and contrived" (14). The fundamental

truth is that we have established is that these events did occur in Rizal's life. No matter the opinion of critics and skeptics, reality is not limited to historical fact. Reality is relative and Rizal presented his reality in a manner that perhaps he felt was truthful to Filipino life.

## CHAPTER VI

### PURPOSE OF *NOLI*

We have established that the novel is true to life, but another question that remains unanswered is why did Rizal write *Noli*? What was his true purpose for the novel? In order to penetrate into the Rizal's psyche and in turn his motivation for writing *Noli*, we must closely examine his personal writings.

It is ideal to begin with the forward to the novel itself. Because it was written as a personal message to his readers, Rizal's intent for the novel can be implied from the forward. In it he brings attention to the "social cancer" that is present in the nation. He states that he wants readers to join him on a journey so that they will be able to clearly see the malignancy of this disease. This journey is into the "real" Philippines. It seems as though he felt that his people needed to view their lives from the outside in order to see the social disease they suffered from everyday. He is also insistent that the remedy for this disease lies within the reader stating, "Desiring thy welfare, which is our own, and seeking the best treatment, I will do with thee what the ancients did with their sick, exposing them on the steps of the temple so that every one who came to invoke the Divinity might offer them a remedy" (Rizal, *Noli* 1). From this statement, it is clear that Rizal desires action on the part of the reader. In exposing his nation's illness to the rest of the world, he expected remedies to come from all sources but it was up to the citizens

to apply the remedy. From this statement, it is also evident that he wants to expose the truth about the Philippines to the rest of the world. By “exposing” the truth about the Philippines, he would also expose the corruption and immorality of the Spanish. He continues to emphasize the truthfulness of the work, which seems to be a very important to him because he wants to the readers’ eyes to be opened with facts not with anything false or contrived. He stresses this point stating, “And to this end, I will strive to reproduce thy condition faithfully, without discriminations; I will raise a part of the veil that covers the evil, sacrificing to truth everything, even vanity itself, since, as thy son, I am conscious that I also suffer from thy defects and weaknesses” (Rizal, *Noli* 1). Ultimately, although he does not specify what type of remedy is necessary, it is obvious that the key to finding it depends on the reader absorbing the text of the novel. However, the forward does bring us one step closer to Rizal’s purpose behind writing *Noli*.

Another crucial piece of Rizal’s writing that points to his motives for writing a political novel is his “Additions to my Defense.” Written on December 26, 1896 from his prison cell in Fort Santiago, Rizal intended for his “Additions” to be a final plea in order to clear his name with Spanish authorities. The document is his defense against the major accusation that he was the central figure behind the Filipino rebellion against the Spanish. In it he addresses each of the Court Martial’s accusations against him. He defends himself against each accusation going over twelve points in his defense. He is insistent that he did not intend to lead a rebellion against the Spanish. In fact, he states that he “counseled against it” and fought to stop it. He also speaks out against the Katipunan stating, “They cruelly abused my name and at the last hour wanted to surprise me” (Rizal, “Defense” 1). He implies that the radicals used his name to inspire a

rebellion against the Spanish, and he was not involved in any aspect of political revolt. This proves that the novel was not intended for a violent uprising as the Spanish accused. Although Rizal called for action in his forward, a rebellious act of political upheaval is clearly not what he had in mind according to this document.

The written evidence of Rizal's campaign for diplomatic reform is extensive. Chaotic rebellion and violence was not an intelligent act in Rizal's opinion. He validates in his "Manifesto to Certain Filipinos (1896)" this stating, "In my writings I have recommended study and the civic virtues, without which no redemption is possible. I have also written (and my words have been repeated by others) that reforms, if they are to bear fruit, must come from above, for reforms that come from below are upheavals both violent and transitory" (Rizal, "Manifesto" 1). Rizal truly felt that violence was not the answer to political reforms within his country.

Concrete answers as to Rizal's purpose for writing *Noli* finally begin to appear in his "Manifesto to Certain Filipinos." Initially, he addresses those individuals who have been associating his name with the rebellion against the Spanish. He states, "From the very beginning, when I first received information of what was being planned, I opposed it, I fought against it, and I made clear that it was absolutely impossible. This is the truth, and they are still alive who can bear witness to my words" (Rizal, "Manifesto" 1). He goes on and clearly declares his intentions for his nation stating. "I desire as much as the next man liberties for our country; I continue to desire them. But I laid down as a prerequisite the education of the people in order that by means of such instruction, and by hard work, they may acquire a personality of their own and so become worthy of such liberties" (Rizal, "Manifesto" 1). This is the key statement that paints a clear picture of

Rizal's true intent. The key word in this statement is "education". The main difference between the ilustrados and Filipino natives was education. As stated earlier, the ilustrados were the men who began calling for political reform in the Philippines. This group of men received the best instruction at some of the most prestigious universities. They had the advantage of being exposed to democratic ideas. Rizal wanted to share this knowledge with his fellow citizens. Rizal felt that the only way all Filipinos could gain the independence they deserved was through their educating them about political injustice by depicting it in a truthful manner. *Noli* would serve as the key text which would facilitate this education.

Thus far we have established that education was a critical theme in most of Rizal's writings. In fact, he devoted an entire poem to the topic in "Education Gives Luster to the Motherland." The first four lines are indicative of his belief that education is the key to improving his country. He writes, "Wise education, vital breath/Inspires an enchanting virtue; / She puts the Country in the lofty seat/Of endless glory, of dazzling glow" (Rizal, "Education" 1). The reason Rizal felt that education was so important is because he felt that the Spanish were not giving Filipinos the type of education they deserved. He felt that they were being limited in the amount of knowledge they could acquire. This was an injustice in itself because Rizal felt that "Through education all people, regardless of race, could be developed and trained to meet the problems confronting mankind" (Fisher 263). Not only did Rizal accuse the Spanish of depriving his people of a proper education, he also felt that they demoralized the Filipino man saying things such as "You belong to an inferior race!" and "You haven't any energy" (Fisher 262). Ultimately, his message rings loud and clear "Teach, educate and enlighten

the *Indio*; rather teach us, educate us, and enlighten us, and indifference, apathy and indolence will disappear” (Chong 253). When he uses the term “Indio” he is referring to the people who were true natives of the Philippine islands.

Rizal first saw the effectiveness of education in Spain while he was studying there. According to Rizal biographer Austin Craig, “At Barcelona, he had seen the monument of General Prim whose motto had been ‘More liberal today than yesterday, more liberal tomorrow than in today’ (20). Prim was a Spanish radical who was opposed to a Spanish republic because he didn’t feel that his people were ready for it (Craig 20). Rizal considered that he could prepare his people for their independence by educating them about their civil liberties. Inspired by this idea, he began the long quest of educating the Filipino people. As Craig states, “...[Rizal] resolved to prepare the Filipinos and the campaign for education that he saw being waged by Spaniards in Spain Rizal thought would be no more unpatriotic or anti-Spanish if carried on by a Filipino for the Philippines” (Craig 20). Although he was later persecuted for this idea, his devotion to educating his people was so strong that he sacrificed his own life in order to accomplish this dream.

## CHAPTER VII

### WHY A NOVEL?: THE LITERARY FORMAT OF *NOLI*

We have established that Rizal's intent in writing *Noli* was to educate the Filipino people about social injustice, we must take a closer look at the text and how it accomplishes this goal through its true depiction of the Filipino struggle for social equality. Rizal utilized the basic elements of fiction. Here we will discuss the novel's plot, theme, characters and conflict. We will also discuss Rizal's distinct literary style and its effectiveness in delivering his message for social reform.

The novel's plot is one of great complexity. The way that events from both the past and the present tie in with one another is a relatively unique technique that Rizal utilizes throughout the novel. For example, Father Damaso's dislike for Ibarra stems from Ibarra's father and his "sins" against the Catholic Church. The plot within *Noli* is complicated due to the fact that Ibarra has come home after an extended stay abroad. Through his eyes, the reader is introduced to the complexities of the society Ibarra returns to. What is interesting is that Rizal uses a non-linear format to present his plot. There are flashbacks in time to his father's death as well as to his childhood romance with Maria Clara. These flashbacks allow the audience to develop a personal connection to Ibarra by familiarizing us with his past and revealing some of his deepest thoughts. However, the plot is not restricted to Ibarra's life. Because the narrator is omnipotent, the audience is

able to explore the world within the novel. All of the characters are interconnected. Although each of the chapters is dedicated to specific characters or events, the reader is able to see how they all relate as the story progresses. That being said, it is clear that the plot takes the reader through every facet of Filipino society. However, as clearly as we can see the differences between the social classes, Rizal also reveals the commonalities which unite them. There is no greater evidence of this than in the relationship between Ibarra and Elias the helmsman.

The men initially meet in the chapter entitled “The Fishing Excursion.” During a fishing trip with Maria Clara and her friends, Elias and Ibarra meet in an interesting plot twist when Ibarra saves Elias’ life. Ibarra rescues Elias from being dragged into a river by a runaway crocodile which Elias has caught for the fishing party. Initially, we note the obvious symbolism in this scene. Elias’ ignorance of the power of the crocodile represents the ignorance of the natives as to the strength of Spanish injustice. It takes an educated man like Ibarra to rescue Elias from the great force of the crocodile. This mirrors Rizal’s own effort to rescue the Filipino natives from Spanish dictators. However, we later learn that the men have more in common with one another than one would assume. Elias points this out later on in the novel when he visits Ibarra to warn him of enemies who are plotting against him. When Ibarra is surprised that he himself has enemies, Elias states, “We all have [enemies], Senor! From the tiniest insect to man, from the poorest to the richest and most powerful! Enmity is the law of life!” (Rizal *Noli* 224). This statement is powerful because Rizal is making a statement about the “enemy” (which can be interpreted as the Spanish) having no prejudice as to which Filipinos they persecute because they see all Filipino natives as inferior. Both the intellectual elite and

the most ignorant are subject to the wrath of Spanish rulers. This is an interesting point because this commonality unites Ibarra to Elias.

The characters Ibarra and Elias seem to represent two facets of Rizal's psyche. Every man is multifaceted, and Rizal seems to illustrate his dual points-of-view through these two characters. Ibarra represents the straight-laced, educated peacemaker who wants to resolve conflict through non-violence. Elias contrasts Ibarra in the sense that he is an uneducated laborer who is completely disillusioned by the injustices of the society he lives in. However, Rizal reconciles these two opposing ideas by linking them to a common cause. During Elias' visit with him, Ibarra begins to understand Elias' point of view despite their economic and social differences. Both men seem to be working for a common good. Elias points this out saying, "...in life it is not the criminals who arouse the hatred of others, but the men who are honest" (Rizal, *Noli* 224). Both men are true to themselves and what they believe in. Rizal seems to be making a statement that the political equality is the right of every man. The only way that the Filipino people can gain the independence they deserve is by uniting as one. The fact that the two men speak to one another in their country's native language (Tagalog) is particularly relevant because the language is the common fiber that links both men to their native land. Spanish was the language of their oppressors. By speaking their native tongue, the men begin to assert their right for both political independence and a national identity. Although this meeting may have been fictional, Rizal shows that the feelings that the Elias and Ibarra portray is true to life. The desire for a unity within the nation was very real to the Filipino natives, and one does not require historical documentation in order to claim that as truth.

Two themes are distinct throughout the novel: the quest for social reform and educational improvement. Social reform is a recurring theme in both Ibarra and Elias' dialogue. The narrator states, "Ibarra thought he understood the persecuted young man [Elias]...he was protesting against force and the superiority of certain classes of society over others." (Rizal, *Noli* 225). Elias feels that man must correct the wrongs of his fellow man in order to improve society. However he also states that man must be careful in correcting another man's wrongs because "if his judgment errs, he has no power to remedy the wrong he has committed" (Rizal, *Noli* 226). Elias is cautious about Ibarra's overconfidence in education.

Rizal's frustrations with society are best portrayed through Ibarra. Finally, in one of Ibarra's monologues at the end of the novel, he verbalizes all of his frustrations with the Spanish saying, "We, during three centuries, have stretched out our hands to them; we have asked them for love, we wanted to call them brothers, and how have they answered us? With insults, and sarcasm, denying us even our own humanity" (Rizal, *Noli* 405). Once again, Rizal remains true to his view of reality. Written with much passion, this speech is Rizal voicing his opinion through the novel's protagonist. This is even more effective in delivering his message for social change because Ibarra is driven to rebel against society stating, "Now I see the horrible cancer that gnaws at this society...these have opened my eyes, they have made me see the wound and compelled me to become a criminal!" In the end, Ibarra is the one who wants to take more drastic measures in reforming the nation stating, "I believe in it as a violent remedy which we resort to when we want to heal a sickness...to heal [the country] the government has to resort to harsh and violent means if you like, but necessary ones" (Rizal *Noli* 325). This advocacy for

violence is surprising coming from Ibarra. However, it portrays a multifaceted human being that can change his philosophy if pushed by the right elements. In twisting Ibarra's psyche, Rizal remains true to life by making Ibarra a more believable character, as opposed to a static figure who remains the same throughout the novel.

Rizal's commitment to education is particularly evident in Tasio the philosopher. During a conversation with Ibarra, Tasio tells Ibarra about his writings stating, "I write in hieroglyphics... the generation that can decipher the characters would be an educated generation; they would understand me and would say, 'Not all slept during the night of our ancestors'" (Rizal *Noli* 165). This emphasizes what Rizal intended for his novel to be. Tasio illustrates the fact that Rizal wanted people to interpret his novel and be able to understand the meaning behind the text. Education was the key to people understanding his writing. However, *Noli* was also a key educational tool. Rizal's message seems to be that in becoming educated, the current generation will give birth to a new generation of educated citizens who will be able to understand the flaws of social injustice. In turn, they will also be grateful that someone enlightened like Rizal had the sense and knowledge necessary to point out the errors of their ancestors. This seems to be the way Rizal wanted his novel to be received, as enlightenment for his people.

Conflict is a particularly important aspect of the novel. The most obvious external conflict is one between Ibarra and Father Damaso. Throughout the novel, Ibarra takes the high road and avoids confrontations with Father Damaso. However, when the two meet at luncheon later in the novel, Ibarra gives in to his violent impulse and strikes Father Damaso. Although the incident goes against Rizal's call for non-violence, the episode can be read as symbolic of a greater meaning. Ibarra's violent blow against

Father Damaso is symbolic Rizal's accusations against the clergy throughout the novel. However, the greater conflict is not within the book. Rizal wanted people to recognize the conflict within their own lives by reflecting on the events within the novel. In *Noli*, Tasio the philosopher compares the great force of the Spaniards with the wind stating, "The wind blows, shakes it, and the stem bends as if to hide its precious burden. If the stem were to maintain itself erect, it would break, the wind would scatter the flowers and the buds would perish. The wind passes away and the stem straightens itself, proud of its treasure" (Rizal 172). In this analogy, the message seems to be that in order to triumph against their oppressors, the Filipinos must not resist with violence. In order to prevail against their oppressors, the native must bend in order for survival. This means becoming more flexible and in doing so, they prevail over their enemies. Once again this analogy reinforces Rizal's cause for non-violence.

Rizal chose to write about issues that were socially relevant at the time. In order to point out the wrongs in his society, he put them in a recognizable format that common man could understand. In fact, Rizal set the precedent for making history a crucial part of Filipino fiction. As Gonzalez points out, "The much-sought relevance of history to fiction has become a special feature of the milieu in which the Filipino novelist works" (962). Rizal wrote his work of fiction to light the fire of inspiration in his people. The fact that it was disguised as fiction was not accidental. "Rizal's target emerged from a personal conviction that reforms were due in the country. His fiction was meant to veil his purpose though thinly. The novel must lead to an epiphany of self-knowledge and the will to reform," Gonzales states (962). The point is that he didn't write *Noli* to fully

disguise his purpose. In his subtlety, he achieved a greater level of obvious truth which ultimately transcended social bounds.

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## BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

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