

THE SOCIO-POLITICAL SYMBOLISM  
OF THE IMPORTANT CHARACTERS IN RIZAL'S  
NOLI ME TANGERE AND EL FILIBUSTERISMO

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By

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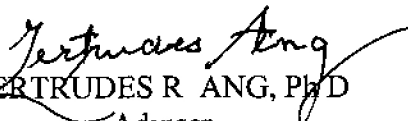
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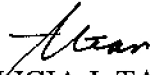
This Thesis entitled "THE SOCIO-POLITICAL SYMBOLISM OF THE IMPORTANT CHARACTERS IN RIZAL'S NOLI ME TANGERE AND EL FILIBUSTERISMO" prepared and submitted by NERISA LOURDES L CAMINS in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of MASTER OF ARTS IN LITERATURE has been examined and is recommended for acceptance and approval for ORAL EXAMINATION

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## ABSTRACT

This thesis “THE SOCIO-POLITICAL SYMBOLISM OF THE IMPORTANT CHARACTERS IN RIZAL’S NOLI ME TANGERE AND EL FILIBUSTERISMO” focuses on character study aimed at discovering what the characters of Rizal’s Noli Me Tangere and El Filibusterismo symbolize within the socio-political context, how effectively the author uses character symbols as instruments for the realization of social and political reforms, what sectors of nineteenth-century Philippine society these characters represent, and whether Rizal who assumes the role of a critic is an artistic creator of character

The interdisciplinary approach is used in this study. The disciplines of literary criticism, sociology, politics, and history are integrated in an effort to make the characters emerge as socio-political manifestations of Rizal’s society. Descriptive analysis and selected excerpts from the novels are employed not only to prove the points the author expounds through his characters but also to reveal the devices of character portrayal used. Rizal’s status as a creator of character is, thus, assessed. The relevance of Rizal’s characters in the context of the socio-political situation becomes evident after a brief comparison of Rizal’s society with our own society.

This study reveals that the important characters of Rizal’s Noli Me Tangere and El Filibusterismo are socio-political symbols of Rizal’s society, that Rizal uses these characters who represent the different sectors of Philippine society as instruments to awaken the Filipino people and to make them realize the importance of taking part either in the peaceful quest for assimilation or in an armed uprising for freedom, that these character types from Rizal’s society are still recognizable in today’s society, that Rizal’s beautiful blending of individual and typical character traits makes him an artistic creator of character.

Based on these findings, the writer concludes that human nature and reactions to socio-political pressures hardly change, that Rizal’s skillful use of all the literary devices for character delineation makes him not just a propagandist but a literary artist as well, and that a novelist “unloads” part of himself on his fictional characters.

The writer, therefore, recommends that teachers use the interdisciplinary approach in the discussion of the Noli Me Tangere and El Filibusterismo, that students contribute to Rizaliana studies by writing critical essays on Rizal’s two novels as they relate to contemporary Philippine society, that teachers and students discuss Rizal’s novels as vehicles for social change, and that Rizaliana researchers conduct a comparative study of the existing translations of the Noli Me Tangere and El Filibusterismo and Rizal’s original scripts of the novels to determine which translation is closest to Rizal’s own scripts and which one has been influenced by the socio-political pressures of today’s society.

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## CHAPTER I

## INTRODUCTION

The Noli Me Tangere and El Filibusterismo constitute Rizal's major contribution to Philippine letters, but seldom are these two novels studied as literary works. Because of the political conditions of Rizal's times, the contemporary reader has become overly concerned with the political reasons for which the novels were written.

A number of critics have accused Rizal of being a propagandist. "Rizal recognized the limitations of a propagandist when he wrote Felix Resurreccion Hidalgo that he was aware of the defects of the Noli Me Tangere from the artistic point of view, but since he had a mission to perform, he had to sacrifice art for propaganda."<sup>1</sup> The period and the society in which Rizal lived did not really offer him much choice. Had he lived in a different era, his two novels would possibly have been written purely for entertainment.

It is, therefore, impossible to study Rizal's novels minus their propagandistic elements. However, an attempt will be made in this thesis to focus the study on the novels as literary works. The writer believes that Rizal was not only a propagandist, he was also a man of letters whose two major novels can be

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<sup>1</sup> Teodora A. Agoncillo, "Rizal and Del Pilar," The Sunday Times Magazine, XV, 3 (August 30, 1959), p. 4

studied as literature. Since one of the tests of a good literary artist is the author's ability to create and develop character, characterization, with emphasis on character symbolism, will be the focal point of this study. Hopefully, this study will contribute towards an assessment of Rizal's place in the Philippine literary hall of fame.

## A BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

### The Historical Background<sup>2</sup>

When Jose Rizal was born, the Philippines had been under Spanish rule for almost three centuries. Rizal was obviously a product of the Spanish regime. It is, therefore, important for us, if we are to understand his writings, to know something of the times in which he lived.

The Filipinos first felt the impact of Spanish power by the middle of the sixteenth century, the Philippines having formally become a colony of Spain in 1571. This brought about the need for a highly centralized government to be headed by a governor-general. As the highest official in the country, the governor-general was given full military, ecclesiastical, and legislative powers to the extent that he used his authority for his own selfish interests and that of his followers. That was the beginning of graft and corruption in the Philippines.

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<sup>2</sup> The following materials were utilized in the preparation of the a) historical and b) literary backgrounds.

Diosdado G. Capino, et al. Rizal's Life, Works, and Writings: Their Impact on our National Identity, (Quezon City: JMC Press, Inc.) pp. 1-17

Gregorio Zaide, Jose Rizal: Life, Works, and Writings (Manila: Verde Book Store, 1961) pp. 77-88, 160-172