



The Association for
Asian Studies

Review: [untitled]

Author(s): Vincent Kelly Pollard

Reviewed work(s):

Jose Rizal by Marilou Diaz-Abaya

Source: *The Journal of Asian Studies*, Vol. 58, No. 4 (Nov., 1999), pp. 1203-1204

Published by: Association for Asian Studies

Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/2658576>

Accessed: 23/09/2009 23:09

Your use of the JSTOR archive indicates your acceptance of JSTOR's Terms and Conditions of Use, available at <http://www.jstor.org/page/info/about/policies/terms.jsp>. JSTOR's Terms and Conditions of Use provides, in part, that unless you have obtained prior permission, you may not download an entire issue of a journal or multiple copies of articles, and you may use content in the JSTOR archive only for your personal, non-commercial use.

Please contact the publisher regarding any further use of this work. Publisher contact information may be obtained at <http://www.jstor.org/action/showPublisher?publisherCode=afas>.

Each copy of any part of a JSTOR transmission must contain the same copyright notice that appears on the screen or printed page of such transmission.

JSTOR is a not-for-profit organization founded in 1995 to build trusted digital archives for scholarship. We work with the scholarly community to preserve their work and the materials they rely upon, and to build a common research platform that promotes the discovery and use of these resources. For more information about JSTOR, please contact support@jstor.org.



Association for Asian Studies is collaborating with JSTOR to digitize, preserve and extend access to *The Journal of Asian Studies*.

<http://www.jstor.org>

these views. The book is merely a reassembly of travel writings, focused on monuments and structural habitats. The descriptive content of these writings is indeed interesting to anthropologists of architecture such as Waterson in assessing foreign impressions of local relations between architectural spaces and human activity. But as an art historian, I began to wonder at the art historical purpose of these texts. Many of the accounts say more about literature than they do about buildings. Waterson herself hints at this concern in the introduction where she states her reasons for selecting certain texts over another. Loti's encounter with Angkor, for example, is chosen over Henri Mouhot's because "the dry and factual descriptions [of Mouhot] do not convey the feeling of being there as vividly as Loti's prose" (p. xxii). As I understand it, then, these passages were chosen for their literary appeal. And indeed they make for an interesting read. Before the popularization of photography and the availability of color images, the only way to convey the beauty and majesty of foreign sites was to use lyrical prose. Yet, it would be too simple to dismiss these texts as obsolete and mere relics of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century thought. In reading these descriptions about buildings and their surroundings one is struck by the personality behind the writing. These are first-person narratives and in many ways extremely candid critiques of taste and judgment. I was very amused by the Englishman Geoffrey Gorer's opinion of Bangkok, for example. "It is very difficult to take Bangkok quite seriously; it is the most hokum place I have ever seen, never having been to California . . . The Siamese have considerable technical skill, but absolutely no taste" (p. 135). In my opinion, this book serves more than an anthropology of architecture, a history of European encounters with Southeast Asia, or an anthology of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century writings. It is a very detailed, unselfconscious account of aesthetic taste and a living proof of art historical writing informed by cultural biases and prejudices; methods that always convey more about the observer than the observed.

NORA A. TAYLOR
Arizona State University

VIDEO

Jose Rizal. Directed by MARILOU DIAZ-ABAYA. Manila: GMA Films, 1998.
 178 minutes.

Writing subversive novels critical of unjust rulers occasionally costs an author dearly. One such writer was Filipino nationalist hero Dr. Jose Rizal (1861–96). The movie *Jose Rizal* tells his story. Students of comparative Asian nationalism and literature familiar with Rizal's novels *Social Cancer* and *The Subversive* recognize him as a worthy contemporary of Asian nationalists Rabindranath Tagore and Sun Yat-sen.

However, writing a screenplay about an influential nineteenth-century reformist political leader burdens its audience by denying them sufficient background. Much of *Jose Rizal* flashes back from the final weeks of his life to earlier years. Audiences may strain to understand the more subtle flashbacks: scenes alternate between Rizal's public life and literary conflict between two characters in his novels debating peaceful

reform and violent revolution. Today's movie-goers more likely will compare *Jose Rizal* not with characters in his political novels of the 1890s but with epic films like *Gandhi* (1982) and *Malcolm X* (1992).

An intellectually gifted critic of Spanish colonialism in the Philippines, the linguist, physician, and engineer Jose Rizal grew up in a wealthy *ilustrado* (so-called "enlightened") family that suffered at the hands of land-grabbing Spanish friars (priests). The experience sensitized the aristocratic Rizal to the plight of his co-Filipinos at the hands of the foreigners. In the film, this theme needs more emphasis, especially for non-Filipino audiences. Additional examples of how the Spanish friars hypocritically oppressed the Filipino people with rape, land theft, unbearable taxes, and racist arrogance might more credibly have shown how Filipinos were goaded into revolutionary struggle.

Rizal's erudite, biting criticisms of Spanish colonial racism merited the hatred of Spain's local religious flunkies. His advocacy of critical thinking skills in the education of youth, a theme also underdeveloped in the film, endeared him to Filipino nationalists.

Rizal's sense of humor emerges refreshingly and repeatedly in a film that does not divert the camera from his less attractive vanity and infidelities. Evident, too, is Rizal's tendency to go it alone when he could not prevail in *La Liga Filipina*, "the Filipino League," a group he cofounded as a medical student in Spain. And despite sharply criticizing Spanish colonialism, Rizal was disappointed when his offer to volunteer as a medic in the Spanish army in Cuba (during the Cuban Revolution!) was refused.

Led by the *Kataastaasang Kagalangalang Katipunan ng mga Anak ng Bayan* (Highest and Most Honorable Society of the Country's Offspring), the Philippine Revolution erupted on August 23, 1896. Although Jose Rizal seemed out of step with the times by arguing that revolution was premature, the revolutionaries claimed him as one of their own. Their embrace gave the Spanish a pretext to arrest him on charges of rebellion and sedition. His novels were adduced as evidence. Rizal's naivete is revealed as he gradually realizes that he will "have to defend his whole life." Convicted in a mock trial, the young Rizal was executed by firing squad after dawn on December 30, 1898. Military tribunal and execution scenes are developed with great feeling.

A moving rendition of Rizal's execution-eve poem "My Final Farewell" cautions against exaggerating differences between Rizal and armed Filipino revolutionaries. In death, Rizal became a religious icon—often shown seated with Christ and the Twelve Apostles. Despite American colonial endorsement of Rizal in the school system, Rizal's self-sacrificing behavior contrasted with many of his elite contemporaries—only too eager to collaborate with the Spanish or, after the U.S. Navy arrived, the Americans. Even after the Philippine Revolution was defeated by the U.S., Rizal's life and execution sparked peasant uprisings against wealthy landlords and their government in Manila.

Effective cinematography and Cesar Montano's virtuoso performance as Dr. Jose Rizal match superb acting by Jaime Fabregas, Joel Torre, Gardo Versoza, Gloria Diaz, and Monique Wilson. But did male screenwriters Ricky Lee, Jun Lana, and Peter Ong Lim underplay women's roles? Most dialogue in this subtitled film is in Tagalog or Spanish. Recently curated by the Hawaii International Film Festival, *Jose Rizal* is worth viewing.

VINCENT KELLY POLLARD
East-West Center and
University of Hawaii