The Life of Miguel Ayatumo: A Sixteenth-Century Boholano

Resil B. Mojares


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In Spanish colonial texts of the Philippines, the native stands dis-tanced, peripheral, and dimly visible. Dissolving the remoteness, fore-grounding the native, has been an important project in current Philippine historiography. In this project, however, one contends not merely with the crude and simple exclusions of racial or political bias, but with the historicity of modes of representation. To study these modes may not resurrect the native in full-bodied form but, in enchancing our appreciation for the processes of saying, it will lead us to a clearer sense of the unsaid—even if, for the moment, it must remain so.

There is perhaps no mode of representation more intriguing in this context than human lives. What we conjure today as biographies, autobiographies, or memoirs, promise a direct apprehension of persons, defined in time and space, promising history at a most inti-mately empirical level. Yet, the promise is illusory. Notions of personhood, or of biography ("the inscribing of lives"), are not universal. Lives do not always offer what, to our liking, are lives. We can illustrate this by exploring early examples of the "life" (Spanish, vida) in Spanish colonial literature.

What may be the earliest published "biography of a Filipino" is an account of the life of an early Christian convert in Bohol named Miguel Ayatumo (1593–1609). Entitled Vida de un mancebo Indio, llamado Miguel Ayatumo, natural de Boholío en Filipinas, this 49-page account is appended to a manual on the good Christian life by Jesuit Pedro de Mercado, El Cristiano virtuoso. Mercado, a Spanish creole born in Riobamba, Ecuador, was rector of the Jesuit colegios of Tunja (Colombia), Honda (Colombia), and Quito (Ecuador). He was never in the Philippines (as far as I can determine) and, in his book, he addressed himself to Spaniards. His vida of Ayatumo is an embellished Spanish version of a report in Latin by Jesuit Pedro
Aunonio [Pedro de Auñon], contained in the Anuas of the Society of Jesus for the year 1609. It is Aunonio (1575–1655) who is the witness to the life of the young Ayatumo, Aunonio having served in the Bohol mission around 1603 to 1655.3

I take Mercado’s text as a point of departure in this article.4 My interest lies in what the text opens out to, what it tells us of a particular Boholano at the turn of the seventeenth century and of the historical realities of this time and place. More important, I am interested in the text itself, how it “constructs” a life and what this mode of construction might tell us about the ways in which reality is represented in early biography and history.5 The present article, describes the text, sketches something of its historical context, reflects on the problematics of the text, and offers a few conclusions.

The Text

Fr. Pedro de Mercado’s El Cristiano virtuoso [1673] is an example of a ubiquitous genre in Philippine colonial literature: the manual de urbanidad or “book of conduct.” Derived from European tradition, this encompasses various guidebooks on how to live the good Christian life, which may take the form of a scholarly disquisition on the virtues of a good Christian (usually in the form of “exercises” or ejercicios), a simple inventory of do’s and don’t’s of daily Christian behavior, or an exemplary narrative into which are woven lessons of good manners and right conduct.6

The main text of El Cristiano virtuoso runs to 399 pages and consists of 80 chapters (capítulos) organized into 10 “books” (libros). In a scholastic manner, it begins by defining and classifying the state of virtue into five general categories and then indicating the specific virtues in each category: virtues of thought (e.g., contemplation, prudence, discretion, docility, circumspection, studiousness); virtues of the will (e.g., hope, charity, peace, compassion, beneficence, justice, piety, friendship, gratitude); virtues of the emotions [apetito irascible] (e.g., fortitude, magnanimity, magnificence, confidence, clemency); virtues of the carnal appetites [apetito concupiscible] (e.g., temperance, abstinence, sobriety, patience, perseverance, humility, poverty, silence); and virtues of the body (e.g., modesty, cleanliness, physical penitence).

Each chapter takes up a virtue or a facet of it. The characteristic method is to begin with a definition and citations of authorities (with Latin quotations from the Bible, the Fathers of the Church, and reli-
religious authors), proceeding to an elaboration of the concept through classification, differentiation, or analogy, and then ending with guides or injunctions for application of the virtue (actos) and short illustrative cases from the lives of saints and other ecclesiastical sources. The book has both a learned and practical character, oscillating as it does between bookish disputation and the simple enumeration of practical, everyday actos.

The vida of Miguel Ayatumo comes as an appendix to the book, a kind of summarizing exemplum. Divided into 20 short “chapters,” it begins with the author’s preface (intento y protesta) and then proceeds, in more or less chronological order, to recount the life of Miguel Ayatumo.

The narrative content of the vida is brief. In a place called Boholio (Bohol) is born to pagan parents an exceptionally attractive “Indian” child (niño Indiesito). At the age of seven, he is baptized in the Holy Catholic Faith by Jesuit father Gabriel Sanchez and is named after the Archangel St. Michael (hence his name Miguel). For five years after baptism, he lives with his parents (who have themselves taken the rite of baptism) and so amazes everyone because, even at a tender age, he is filled with fervent piety, fasting, praying as he walks from house to school, and even flagellating his young body.

At the age of 12, Miguel enters the Jesuit boarding school (seminario) where his faith so increases that he becomes a “model of perfection” for all. For four years in the school, Miguel is like an “angel,” performing all his temporal and spiritual duties with utmost zeal and fidelity. He would accompany the Jesuit fathers in their missionizing forays into the surrounding territory, going ahead of them to cut a path through the foliage with his bolo, acting as carrier and cook, and standing guard at night as the priests slept. He spends all his days in prayer and meditation.

At the age of 13, he makes a personal vow of chastity. He applies himself to his studies with such dedication that even in the hours when the other boys are out playing in the fields, he is studying and writing for catechetical use on topics like devotion to Virgin Mary, examining one’s conscience, or making a good confession, all of which he never fails to present to the priests for examination and correction. So focused is Miguel on the Faith that he molds his whole life as a preparation for a Christian death.

On 19 November 1609, Miguel woke up early and went to the sacristy to help prepare for the mass. The mass over, he went to the river to assist six other boys who were there washing clothes. As
he descended the steps leading to the water, he slipped and fell, striking his chest against the prow of a moored boat. Crying out Jesus, Maria, y Joseph and murmuring the names of his titulary saints, the sixteen-year-old Miguel received the last sacraments as he expired. Dressed in a tunic, a fresh palm in his hand, his head adorned with a crown of flowers, he was later buried, to the sorrow of all. Thus ended the brief and blessed life of Miguel Ayatumo, the young Boholano.

The Context

What is striking about this early example of "biography" is how it conveys so little historical information. To begin with, there is, of course, the biographical subject. What can one expect from the biography of someone dead at the age of sixteen? More important, there is the motive behind this reconstruction of a life, and the principles that shape its writing.

The life of Miguel Ayatumo takes place against the background of the early Jesuit missionary efforts in the island of Bohol. The Jesuits opened their mission in Bohol in November 1596 when two priests, Juan de Torres and Gabriel Sanchez (the priests who baptized Miguel), established a mission post in Baclayon and, shortly after, in Loboc. It is in Loboc where our story takes place (Mercado does not feel the need to specify the place, content merely to cite Boholio, which he refers to both as a pueblo and an isla in some indefinite place called Filipinas). An inland market village where the littoral fisherfolk and the upland dwellers met to trade and exchange goods, Loboc (taken from Loboq, i.e., "muddy, turbid waters," the name of the river in the district) was chosen by Fr. Juan de Torres as a church site and nucleus of a pueblo. While this establishment of a Christian pueblo was accomplished with seeming ease, Loboc as a town was still in the process of formation as of 1600. It was a major Jesuit post in Bohol, its inhabitants known for their steadfastness in the new faith.

In 1605, the Jesuits established a boarding school in Loboc, supported by the stipends received by the Bohol missionaries. By April 1606, there were sixteen boys in the school, "all of them from the leading families of the island," under a schoolmaster named Juan Maranga. Maranga was a Leyteño, an alumnus of the Jesuit boarding school in Dulag (Leyte), established in 1595, and after which the
Loboc school was modelled. He was what was called a donado, a lay helper attached to the Jesuit community. 

Available records mention four boys who studied at the seminario (Miguel Ayatumo, Miguel de la Panga, "the son of Dumagan," and "the son of Balios") but it is only Ayatumo whose "life story" was recorded by the Bohol missionaries at some length.

From other sources, we also see more of the social background that Mercado leaves largely unsketched. The boarding school at Loboc (like the one at Dulag) was aimed at educating native boys in good manners and right conduct, in the knowledge of the Catholic faith and the Spanish language, and in other things pertaining to the cultivation of Christian virtue. Boys, mostly under 18, were chosen from among the "ruling families" of the region and educated to the end that they could be teachers and leaders of their people. Their length of stay at the school was not fixed, but usually lasted several years.

This seminario de indios was not only a means for incorporating natives into a Christian order, it was also an instrument for deculturation. On the day of their entrance into the school, new boys made a general confession of their past lives and received Holy Communion as a sign of their entry into a new life. The seminario was a site for "seminating" a class of new persons.

The standard daily regimen had the boys rise at the sound of a bell every morning; perform a short meditation before the Blessed Sacrament in the chapel; go around the town in procession, chanting the catechism, so people could fall in line behind them and follow to the mission church for mass; attend class (held morning and afternoon on weekdays, and which included lessons in reading and writing in Spanish and Visayan); return to the church after the afternoon class to recite the rosary and sing the Salve Regina; engage in approved recreation activities; take supper (with the boys seated at long refectory tables, European fashion, and, in the evening, attend what might be called a workshop or practice session, during which one of the boys gave a catechetical lesson for an exemplary tale, as he would when the time came for him to do mission work. The boys end the day with an examination of conscience and night prayers at the chapel.

Recruiting boys from the leading families, training them, and then having them go out to proselytize was a strategy of mission work already tested by Spanish missionaries in the New World. Speaking of the training of boys in Dulag, a Jesuit father said in 1601: "What
a rich source of manpower this is that Our Lord has opened to the Society, manpower to help us in every phase of our work for souls."  

The drama of conversion is the immediate historical context of the life of Miguel Ayatumo. It is a stirring drama. The early years of Christianization in the Philippines read as something epic and apocalyptic. What can one say of a handful of foreign missionaries striking forth into the heart of darkness, braving death, confronting pagans speaking strange tongues, and then, with what seemed like the workings of the miraculous, converting hundreds and thousands of souls in so short a period of time?

This seems to be the story of Bohol. In 1600, just four years after they first appeared on the island, the Jesuits reported four churches established, four pueblos in the process of formation, and 700 Christians in an island with an estimated population of 9,500. The reports of the missionaries themselves tell a more impressive story: that the inhabitants of the towns of Baclayon and Loboc were converted "in only eight months;" that "more than two thousands souls" in Bohol were baptized in just two months in 1600; that if only there were a few more priests the entire island of Bohol could be converted in no time at all. What is even more striking is the fervor with which the natives took to the new faith: literally begging to be baptized, crowding into the churches (in Loboc, usual attendance at Sunday Mass was 600-700 in a population estimated at 1,000 in 1600), and performing religious acts with an intensity that amazed even the priests themselves.

Fr. Pedro Chirino writes that in 1600-1601 "the flame that Our Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God, came down upon the earth to kindle, yearning that it be turned into a blaze, was fanned with great vigor in the island of Bohol." Fr. Valerio de Ledesma, Jesuit rector in Cebu, visiting Bohol in May-June 1600, reports:

There was so great a hunger and longing to hear the things of God and to learn the doctrine that all night long they never ceased, now one group and now another, to sing and pay homage to God in their home. Morning and evening, in the fields and in church, nothing was to be heard save praises to the Lord.

Perhaps anticipating the wonder (or incredulity) with which the account may be read, Father Ledesma asks: "Who imparted to them so much fire and fervor, these people having been so lukewarm by
inclination?" He answers: "I do not know what I can say . . . other than Digitus Dei est hic [This is the finger of God]."\textsuperscript{12}

In this context, therefore, the story of Miguel Ayatumo is not exceptional. It comes to us as one more instance (albeit more extended than the "cases" with which the missionaries usually illustrated their reports), a kind of microcosm of the larger drama of conversion.

**Problematics: Reduction**

What is new in the story of Miguel Ayatumo? On one hand, not much—if one is looking for "historical information" in the way of a few more dates or a few more names, places or events, or if one is looking for the kind of psychological depth, of rich circumstantiality, which we have come to expect of "biographies." On the other hand, there is much to be found if we confront the problem of the text itself, its mode, its particular, historically determined way of constructing or representing a "life."

*El Cristiano virtuoso* brings together two genres of medieval writing: the *ejercicio* ("book of spiritual exercises") and the *vita* (the key example of which is the *vita sancti*, "saint's life"). Both forms are concerned, whether through prescription or illustration, with the edification of readers in the Christian ideals of "moral perfection."\textsuperscript{13} In Mercado's book, the two are kept separate, but in other (particularly, later) works, the manual of conduct and the life story (whether of a person historical or fictional) are combined.

The introduction of the "narrative" to the essentially static frame of the *ejercicio* problematizes the text since narration tends to break out the disorderliness of historical space and time. In medieval rhetoric, however, *narratio* does not mean "narrative" in the modern sense but, broadly, an "exposition of the facts," in which persons, places, and events are not so much the substance of a social world as counters in an intellectual schema or tropes in a rhetorical plan. In early books of conduct (Mercado's included), the nonnarrative impulse dominates and keeps reality bounded and contained.

The life of Ayatumo is written in the hagiographic mode. Patterned and conventionalized, it is concerned less with biographical reconstruction as with panegyric and edification. It is, in the manner of saints' lives, an epideictic narrative, it aims at persuasion rather than authentication. At the time Mercado was writing, the vita
sancti was already a well-established form that expressed received tradition, in which exemplary lives were offered as paradigms for a community of believers. Thomas Heffernan, in his study of medieval sacred biography, states the aim of the vita sancti thus:

its avowed primary goal is not the presentation and interpretation of the record of the \textit{vita} but rather the celebration of modes of behavior which exist as cultural symbols and not as autonomous \textit{sui generis} acts.\textsuperscript{14}

Ayatumo, however, is not a saint whose life has already been given a canonical form and who can therefore be easily reproduced for the purposes of religious instruction. Neither is he a poetical invention, empty space to be filled with a rhetorician's topoi, a fictional character that can be freely manipulated to illustrate the themes of hagiography. He is a historical person with a life outside the text, overdetermined, with a "surplus of meaning."

How does Mercado deal with the surplus, if at all? Two aspects of this problem are discussed here—in particular, two principles by which the Ayatumo vida is directed and organized.

The first is what I call the principle of \textit{reduction}. (I use the term advisedly: \textit{reduccion}, after all, is a key concept in both the temporal and spiritual colonization of the Philippines. I use it also to remind ourselves that what the Spaniards "reduced" were not just villages and towns but intimate bodies, minds, and "souls."\textsuperscript{15} Reduction involves an ethnocentric bias: it remolds the colonized in the image of the colonizer. It also involves an essentializing process: it reduces phenomena to certain a prioristic essentials both as a way of explaining them and governing them.

In the Mercado text, the author provides just enough information to establish the historical presence of his subject, Miguel Ayatumo—a place (Boholio en Filipinas); a people (a \textit{nacion} fleetingly referred to as Pintados and Bisayenses); a few temporal markers (corresponding to the "high points" in the convert's life: the age at which he was baptized, the age when he entered the seminary, and the date of his death: 16 Noviembre 1609, which, at first glance, seems curiously exact, but may be explained by the fact that his death, after all, is the most important point in his life, everything else being a preparation for it); and then a few more facts (e.g., the name of the priest who baptized him). Everything else remains shadowy: there are references
to Miguel's parents, an uncle, a cousin, the other boys in the school, even a bailana who visited Miguel once when he was ill and was turned away, but they are all unnamed and undescribed, just shadowy figures hovering around the virtuous youth. The text is not moved by an appetite for the circumstantial: that the specific locale is called Loboc is not mentioned, what the seminario or the church or the environs look like does not engage the author's interest, or who exactly these people called the Pintados are is not directly dealt with.

Yet, indeed, why should we expect the author to deal with such questions? In his opening paragraph, Mercado indicates what he considers relevant:

In the Philippine Islands there is a town named Boholio where live some Indios who are called Pintados. Here emerged into the light (as fine gold from the coarse earth) an Indio child of an appearance most pleasing, alive, and bright, it seemed drawn by the Divine Hand. His parents are Indios and when the child was born they were Gentiles and for this reason the child's corporal genealogy did not merit honor or admiration, which the world gives solely to those of illustrious descent, and who, after another spiritual birth, gain the honor of being creatures of heaven.16

Mercado goes on to say that it was only after Miguel was "reborn (renaciendo) by Holy Baptism" that, though of "low lineage," he attained that nobility, honor and esteem accorded those with "the light of the Catholic Faith."

"Corporal genealogy" does not interest the author for it is only with Miguel's "spiritual birth" that he becomes, as it were, "present" to the church and to the author. It is as though the Faith is a circle of light, and whoever or whatever is within it is illumined, and what is without is in darkness. There are fugitive references in the text to the old native religion: native curers and shamans (baylan), the myth of dead ancestors returning in a ship of gold, ancient mortuary practices, the worship of crocodiles, and a god named Raon. Mercado, however, mentions these only in passing. He is largely indifferent to the particulars of such phenomena. They are merely signs and manifestations of sin, anarchy, and error, of what, since Adam and Eve, is already known, the ancient realm of the Devil that, in the light of Faith, will be dispelled as phantasms and illusions.
Reduction is also in the nature of the formation that Miguel undergoes as a Christian. The dominant theme in this formation is one of "renouncing the world" (despreciar el mundo), of turning away from the world in a process of deculturation and denaturation. In the first, Miguel turns away from his own cultural world. He leaves his parents to live with the Jesuits. His devotion to St. Joseph and the Virgin Mary becomes, as it were, symbolic of his joining a new "family." He turns his back on the world of his ancestors. When he hears of idolatrous rites being performed, he exhorts the people (though he is but a child) to forsake these practices; when he is ill and is visited by a bailana, he cries out to her to go away; when an uncle dies and all mourners are loudly weeping (as is the custom), he alone does not weep, placing his trust in his newfound God.

In the second, Miguel turns away from his own body. He goes on extended fasts (even when it is not obligatory), makes a personal vow of chastity, flagellates himself, and engages in other acts of abstinence and self-mortification to extinguish the appetites of the flesh. Believing that curiosity (ocio) is the "origin of all evils," he watchfully stands guard at the "doors" of his body—the eyes (not looking at a woman or a man unless it is necessary), the mouth (refusing to partake of meat on Friday), and the ears (reprimanding a cousin for "bad speech" and asking that the boy be punished). He guards the body itself, dressing himself in a tunic that reaches to his feet when he goes to sleep, afraid that, asleep, he may appear immodest to others.

Reduction guides Mercado's style of presentation. Mercado follows the pattern of saints' lives by roughly breaking down the life of Ayatumo into a three-part development: renunciation, testing, and consummation. The first stage of the narrative consists of Ayatumo's denial of his "pagan" origins. He leaves his parents, enters the seminary, and cuts himself off from the culture of his people. The next stage, the testing of the young man's faith, is shown (if largely undramatized, in the way of much of the narrative) in the tempting of Ayatumo. On one occasion, a bailana attempted to visit the sick Ayatumo and was vigorously turned away. On another, enticements were offered him to marry a young woman, but these were turned down by the virtuous youth. The consummation in the story comes with Ayatumo's death. Though this falls short of the martyrdom with which many saints' lives are climaxed, Mercado invests the event of Ayatumo's death with such correspondences with Christ's own Death that it resonates as a divine consummation.
Mercado parcels Miguel’s life into exemplary acts that illustrate the virtues of a good Christian: fidelity to the rules of the Church, humility, abstinence, self-mortification, zeal, chastity, obedience, poverty, and others. So focused is the text on the catalogue of gestures and deeds that these seem to have a life of their own, disembodied, sliding out of biography into a realm of archetypes. We never really get to see, clearly in our mind, the face of Miguel nor do we hear him speak in his own words. This structuring of the vida derives from the fact that it is, after all, intended to be an illustration of the main text with its scholastic, segmented disquisition on virtues. Yet, it does express the tendency to reduce the complexity and motion of a life into a regulated set of ethical categories and exemplary acts.

Finally, the reductive tendency is expressed in the choice of subject itself. The choice of a sixteen-year-old may have followed established tradition: the “blessed child” who confounds unbelievers is a familiar topos in sacred biography. Yet, it expresses as well certain predispositions concerning natives and converts, predispositions both political (the colonial characterization of native subjects as “children,” niños, who need to be guided by the more rational, mature Europeans) and religious (for natives new to the faith must perform be young.) What faith more transparent is there than that of a child? What, in fact, makes Miguel Ayaturmo so divine is that he does not have a history. He “emerged into the light as fine gold from the coarse earth.” In the final chapter of the vida, Mercado uses a Latin quotation to sum up the life of Miguel Ayaturmo: “I am like a tablet, a stretched canvas on which the Divine Painter paints what He likes.”

Problematics: Figuration

The second principle organizing the Mercado text is the principle of figuration. In it, events in a person’s life—that life itself—are taken as an enactment of something that happened already, “figured” in God’s Plan, and of something simultaneously caught up in the temporality of earthly life and in the timelessness of God’s design. In Christian thought, the thoughts and actions of men must be directed towards prefiguring that which is fulfilled in God.

Imitatio Christi, the imitation of Christ, is the motive that shapes the Christian’s life. This is to be seen in Miguel’s story. He sought
ways of "sculpting into his soul" God's image and asked, on several occasions, for license—in memoria of the Passion—to be hung from a Cross for one whole night, or be bound hand and foot and be beaten and spat at, or to perform the dolorous Stations of the Cross (from the schoolhouse to the church) with himself as Christ stripped to the waist and his companions playing the roles of crier, trumpeter, and verdugo or executioner.

The figural impulse underlies the universalizing and delocalizing strategies of the text. In the manner of the vita sancti, Mercado's account is replete with theological allusions, citations, and quotations, from St. Augustine and St. Bernard to such early churchmen as Titus, the fourth-century bishop of Bostra (Tito Bostrense), and Peter the Venerable, the twelve-century abbot to Cluny (Pedro Cluniacense). Such textual devices serve to direct the reader's attention away from the local to the metaphysical or "universal" plane. Correspondences are drawn between the deeds of Ayatumo and those of Christ, the Virgin Mary, and such figures as St. Raphael, St. Michael, and St. Ignatius. By providing such "background," the author leads the reader toward the apprehension of paradigmatic actions, to see Ayatumo's life as the enactment of a divinely ordained script.

As Miguel orders his life as a reenactment of the life of Christ, so does Mercado represent Miguel's life. This is most clear (and most figural) in the way the text interprets the last days of Miguel. Mercado concludes how, even in death, Miguel imitated Christ: as Christ shared the Last Supper the day before His death, so did Miguel; as Christ died violently, so did Miguel; and as Christ died on a Friday, so did Miguel.

So thoroughly does Miguel become a "Christian" that he disappears as a native. At his grave (so the Aunonio text suggests) the Jesuits inscribe a long honorific inscription in Latin as his epitaph, in which the young Boholano whose native name we do not, with certainty, even know is thus, in Latin, named: MICHAELM AYATUMUM.

Imitation is not a static concept. The drama of a life that seeks to mold itself after an ideal is fraught with the tensions of the tragic. Yet, one already sees in the Mercado text that dogmatic and pedagogic trend that infects a great deal of ecclesiastic literature with sterility by reducing the workings of grace in human life into a set of prescribed ejercicios (exercises) and actos (acts).

It is erroneous to suggest that the whole "Christian-figural" interpretation of human life is reductive. It expresses a religious bias
(which remains to be justified); it also leaves unexamined the oblique assumption that the "native," pre-Christian representation of human life is different (that is, nonfigural, more complex). I leave the latter question for another time and I do not fully engage the former. I argue, however, that the Mercado text restricts the possibilities of the figural mode. This mode is not necessarily nor wholly reductive: it expands the representation of life, giving it a depth of "background" that extends beyond the sensory and the actual, heightening the thoughts and actions of an obscure native on an obscure island by connecting them to the grand events and personages of "universal history." Furthermore, the use of the figural mode in literature (as Erich Auerbach's masterly essay on Dante shows) can heighten reality not only by connecting the local to the universal, the earthly to the divine, it can also invest the local and the earthly with an integrity and intensity of their own.21

This is not the case in the Mercado text. Here the categories and their use have become rather conventional. This is not merely to conclude that Mercado is no Dante (to compare a modest 49-page tract with the Divina Commedia would be grossly misplaced.) It is to point out how a variant of figural writing (of which Mercado is only an example) indexes a limited moral and literary imagination.

The problems in the Mercado text are, to begin with, problems of mode. The vita sancti is governed by an ideology that subordinates the historical and the particular to the ideal and the metaphysical. What the vita seeks to narrate is not so much history as theophany ("the appearance of the inbreaking of the divine in the world"). In effect, the essential subject of the sacred biography is not the individual person but the paradigmatic actions of Christ as these are incarnated again and again in the lives of men.

The ideology shapes conceptions of time, space, event, and personhood. The vita unfolds in cosmic time, in a teleological movement that begins and ends with God. The events it narrates are traces or signs, the speculum which reveals God's omnipresence. The mise en scène of the saint's life is not Boholio or Filipinas but a dark lapsarian world that God summons into light as His grace works in the lives of those He chooses to touch. Personhood in the vita is not (as moderns are wont to see) that highly particular self which history and society shape but the "spiritual substance" which is realized through the love of God, the observance of His precepts, and the aid of divine grace.
The basic strategy of the vita, therefore, is reductive and figurative. It achieves its purposes of proof and persuasion by tracing the tripartite pattern of renunciation, testing, and consummation in the saint's life, by using various rhetorical devices to draw the reader's attention away from the person towards the theological dimension, and by dissolving (as it were) foreground in favor of background.

By virtue of the originality of its subject, the life of Ayatumo retains a certain raw authenticity not to be found in other lives of saints and "books of conduct" in Philippine colonial literature. Nevertheless, Mercado's text shows how the writing of the vita has already been so conventionalized that only fitfully, vaguely, do we glimpse "what the Boholano, and Bohol, must have been like."

Our misgivings draw, in large part, from our own historical position as readers of the text. These are occasioned by initially approaching the text as a modern, empirically-minded student of history and biography and as a reader interested in "learning something about the Philippines in the sixteenth century." We need to acknowledge that it is the bias of the empiricist to ask for "Ayatumo as the man he really was." The past is accessible to us, not only on the basis of extant traces but, more important, according to how (and for what ends) we interrogate it. Furthermore, it is a cultural bias to seek "data" about early life in the Philippines in a book that has no interest in the subject.

An analysis of the Ayatumo text, therefore, is most fruitful when it seeks to explain not merely its contents but its symbolizing structures and what these structures might say about the collective consciousness of those who wrote such texts and those for whom these texts were written. This is not all, however. An inquiry into such texts must be alive as well to how, through time, such symbolizing structures are constituted, broken down, or reformed. One must attend not only to the integrity of a symbolic structure, but to the tensions it harbors, that interplay of dominant, residual, and emergent elements which points to other, alternative ways in which both lives and texts can be generated.

Like other modes of representation, the vita is not static. It is not innocent of history. There are tensions and contradictions in the text that, under the pressure of historical realities, threaten the effectiveness of the form's strategy of comprehending or containing history. It is in these contradictions that one finds other possibilities, the submerged presence of what, in the act of saying, is left unsaid.
Reclaiming History

The sacred biographer grapples with a basic dualism, that of presenting, on one hand, the historical, empirical, and individual (the record of a person's life), and, on the other, the metahistorical, metaphysical, and exemplary (traces of the divine indwelling in human life). As Heffernan points out, the vita sancti moves between praxis (in which life is summed up in a chronological manner) and ethos (the somewhat rigorous and interpretive discussion of character). If the text is "weighted too far towards the supernatural, we lose the man, while if the exemplary is underemphasized, we end up without our saint."22

In medieval saints' lives, as well as in numerous examples of the form in Spanish colonial literature in the Philippines, the balance weighs too heavily towards the metaphysical and the exemplary. An immediate explanation for this, as we have noted, is that these are primarily epideictic texts addressed to a community of believers (in the case of Mercado's book, Spaniards). Their aim is not to discover and document local lives, but to enhance the faith of the faithful by bringing back to them (across time or space) the news that God is everywhere.

This, however, must mean a loss of particulars. A specific problem posed by the Ayatumo text is that we are dealing here not with a specimen from that body of routinized redactions of the lives of distant European saints (which constituted a large part of the printed literature in Spanish colonial Philippines) but an original retelling of the life of a local, historical person who has not been canonically processed as a "saint." The subject of Ayatumo is made further problematic by the fact that he is an indigene from a heathen world. He is one of the "new peoples" crowding into the European imagination in the Age of Exploration and Discovery, whose presence threatens the old conceptions of a "universal history," and must therefore be explained.

This is not only a theological issue, but a political one as well. The project of religious conversion in the Philippines (and in the New World) was also a project of political colonization since the formation of communities of the faithful involved military and civil acts of resettlement, regulation, and control. The shaping of the good Christian was inextricably linked to the creation of the good colonial as well.
The manner in which history is shaped and "contained" in the Ayatumo text works not only in one small text, or in one given form (vita sancti), but in the social history of Philippine colonization as well.23

The problem of the Ayatumo vida does not only say something of changing conceptions of biography but of the variant ways in which "history" is comprehended and recorded. Furthermore, we deal here not just with problems of thinking and writing but with what was done in the history of colonialism. In short, we are faced with a problem not merely philosophical, but one distinctly political. How people imagine and write texts is a political act, and it is so not only in the mind but in the world.

Let me return once more to the drama of conversion in the Philippines. Readers of this drama have been perplexed: How does one explain the seeming ease with which thousands of natives were converted to the Catholic Faith? How does one explain what Chirino calls "the heavenly conflagration" of souls, the intense fervor with which natives embraced a new Faith? Answers have been given to these questions: that what took place was not true conversion, that natives en masse simply followed their chiefs, that the zeal-inflamed missionaries exaggerated, that the old and new faiths were so analogous the "transfer" was quickly facilitated, and that the natives were simply exchanging an old magic for a new one (e.g., drinking Holy Water for healing). Moreover, there was such volatility to the times (such that natives kneeling before a priest, begging for baptism, one day, would, in the next, go on a raid to burn a church or kill a priest) that we need to attend to the specific conditions of a region at a given time (for instance, in Bohol, the role of the Portuguese threat, the so-called "Moro" raids, internecine warfare, epidemics, and the like, in heightening religious susceptibilities).

All these are parts of the context within which we can understand the drama of conversion. Yet, we need to understand as well the texts in which the drama is framed. The missionaries saw themselves as participants in the "plot" of a "universal history," one already ordained and told. They set out not so much to discover the unknown as to actualize that which was already known. It was thus that the drama of Filipino conversion was plotted and framed. The early missionaries carried in their heads, and inscribed with their pens, a kind of modular plot that said as much (and, in cases, more) of their own mental assumptions as of the actualities of the societies they had entered. If today, we find many missionary texts exas-
operatingly thin in the stories we want to hear, it is because these are not the stories they tell.

The missionaries embarked on a perilous journey to a heathen land in order to find the “presence” of God. In this presence, all else is absence. We complain that Spanish histories of the Philippines privilege the Spaniards: they are not histories of the Philippines but chronicles of what the Spaniards did in the Philippines. But why should we expect them to be otherwise? We should not, moreover, interpret in all cases that these texts are conscious acts of political exclusion. In the “meaningful” world of the Other’s texts, we may not be the excluded, we are simply the absent. In this presence, all else is absence.

Yet, it is not as simple as this formulation suggests. The boundaries of presence and absence, in faith as in history, are not fixed and must be negotiated because, in faith as in history, there is always a tension between being and becoming.

To illustrate this by returning to the Ayatumo text. No matter how exemplary the life may be, it remains problematic. Deprived of a history and dead at sixteen, the life of Miguel is emptied of dramatic movement and change. This is ironic since, after all, the story of a young native so possessed by a strange religion that he turns away from his blood-kin and people is the stuff of high drama. We have hints of this tension: Miguel, beset by a child’s fears, wept in his first days in the seminary, and undoubtedly, his going forth among his people, a child-teacher chastising his elders, must have been fraught with tension. Yet Mercado reduces the story into a kind of theological closet drama and Miguel’s struggle with body and soul is parcelled into “acts,” each in high relief, but behind them the grayness of backgrounds. Locked into the posture of Faith, he merely (as it were) acts out the final acts of his fate.

We are confronted, however, not with a statue or a bas relief but by a written text, and not by a tract but a quasi-narrative. And narrative texts are extensive—they tend outwards, they tend to overflow. The narrative has gaps through which other meanings present themselves.

Take the matter of Miguel Ayatumo’s being an indio. This is clearly a problem for Mercado. He is not only apologetic for having to translate from the original Latin to “vulgar Spanish,” he takes pains to explain the choice of an indio as a model and, in the first and last chapters of the vida, he says it is not his intention to raise up this young indio as saint or beato (bienaventurado). He says he only
wishes to inspire his Spanish readers: “If the lowly and contemptible Indios can go to heaven with a good life, shall we, with the nobility of our blood, go to hell?” Throughout his account, he marks out Miguel as exceptional, deculturalized, an indio who is not really an indio: he “emerged into the light like fine gold from coarse earth;” unlike the natives, who are of unbridled appetites, he is given to fasting and abstinence; he is an “angel,” a little St. Michael and St. Raphael; he is an *ave raro* in the land of his people; and, unlike the indios, who are so deficient in “understanding and will,” he performs “mental prayers” (*oracion mental*) with ease and skill.

There is an emergent and unresolved tension here, a straining to fit an “anomaly” into a received pattern. No matter how carefully Mercado marks boundaries, the fact is that indios (whether in Latin America or the Philippines) are breaking out into the light, breaking out of “absence” into “presence” (appearing in history as breathing individual persons with names and faces), such that they must be explained. And the old explanations are put under strain, in time raising questions theological as well as political: How then can you deny them equal rights, deny them the vow of priesthood, deny them freedom, deny them their history?

**Conclusion**

There are radical differences in conceptions of a “life.” Today (blithely unconscious of our own historical contingency) we look for, in a biography, depth of motives, thick circumstantiality, multilayeredness, and dramatic tension. Moreover, we look for “historical background,” for the dialectics between an individual and the social world in which he is embedded.

These elements are undoubtedly in the life of Miguel Ayatumo. Despite his youth, Miguel, after all, is a historical person who inhabits, and contains in himself, a critical juncture in Philippine social and cultural history. Yet, the important point is that this is elided or suppressed in the text. The processes of reduction and figuration shape Miguel’s life, in the world and in the text, according to a religious ideology (which is not called Christianity but rather a historical variety of it) with its conceptions of what make for “fullness” and “perfection” in human life. Where today’s reader looks for the texture and detail, dynamic tension and extension, of the novel or film, Mercado offers a fixed series of medieval friezes. Where the
reader looks for a "life," Mercado presents (in a sense not necessarily pejorative) an "anti-life."

In the historical reading of texts, however, one pays attention not only to what is included but to what is excluded. More important, one attends to how the processes of inclusion and exclusion create problematic texts which, between the said and the unsaid, are themselves a form of saying something about their present and our past.

Texts contain lives, but lives, like God (He who keeps breaking forth in so many unexpected places), will slip from being fully contained. We must not only recognize such slippages, such "surplus of meaning," but attend to the ways they open out into larger histories as well as a deeper faith.

Notes

1. This is an expanded version of a paper presented at the 2nd National Conference on Local & Oral History, held in honor of Marcelino Foronda Jr., at De La Salle University, Manila, 7–8 November 1991. I am grateful to Michael Cullinane for help in acquiring a copy of the Mercado book from the Newberry Library in Chicago. Further, I wish to thank Fr. Jose Arcilla, S.J., Jean-Paul Dumont, William Henry Scott, and Fr. John McSherry, S.V.D., for their reading of the paper. They are not, of course, responsible for the direction the essay has taken or the deficiencies that remain.


3. Spanish Jesuit Pedro Aunonio (also Pedro de Auñon) arrived in the Philippines on 21 June 1603, took his final vows on 5 February 1612, and died in Loboc, Bohol, on 2 July 1655. The report on Ayatumo appears to have been coauthored by Fr. Gregorio Lopez, the Jesuit provincial in the Philippines from 1605 to 1613. De la Costa (1967, 312–17, 609); Colin (1900, 3: 211–14).

4. It may strike some readers as a rather tangential move that I should take up a text by a South American, written in Spanish for Spaniards, printed in Madrid, a book that was not widely read in the Philippines, if at all. The move, however, is not wholly arbitrary. There are clear similarities in the evangelization-and-conversion process in Latin America and the Philippines, in terms of historical time, personnel, mission strategies, and most important, the ideological assumptions that guided the missionaries. Even the objects of conversion (Boholanos and Incas) tended to be collapsed into the single category of infieles and indios. Moreover, the Mercado text is characteristic of a class of works in the Spanish religious literature of the Philippines itself. A Christian vida in the conventional mode, it is a highly portable text that could be "Philippine" as much as it is "South American" (categories that the text itself subverts).
Pedro de Mercado, S.J., was a creole born in Riobamba (an old Inca settlement the Spaniards conquered in 1533), the son of one of the early Spanish conquistadores of the New World. While still a novice, in 1572, he joined the first group of Jesuit missionaries to do mission work in Mexico. Apart from his work as rector of Jesuit colegios in Colombia and Ecuador, he is credited with having authored numerous devotional texts, including Destruccion del idolo (Madrid, 1655), Ocupaciones santas de la Cuaresma (Madrid, 1667), Practica de los ministerios eclesiasticos (Seville, 1676), and Conversacion del pecador con Cristo (Valencia, 1680). Mercado was writing at about the same time that his Jesuit confreres were opening the new mission field of Bohol.


5. This is an exploratory essay and I hope to enlarge on it not only by undertaking a more thoroughgoing examination of both the Mercado and Aunonio-Lopez texts of the life of Ayatumo but by comparing them with other examples of colonial-era biography, such as the vidas of saints and the buhay of the secular romances. An expanded essay also requires that we consider indigenous modes of representing the individual life.

6. On the manual de urbanidad: Mojares (1983, 80-99). Examples of the “book of conduct” include the anonymous Visayan text, Lagda sa pagca maligdon sa tauong Bisaya (1865), first published in 1734; the Boholano La Teresa by Ubeda de la Santisima Trinidad (1852); the Tagalog Pagsusulatan nang dalawang binibini na si Urbana at si Feliza by de Castro, first published in 1864; and various colonial schoolbooks on urbanidad.

7. Colin (1900); de la Costa (1967); Chirino (1969); and Rosales (1971).

8. Maranga is the first Filipino donado mentioned in Jesuit records and the Dulag school is “the first seminario de indios or boarding school for natives to be established” in the Philippines by the Jesuits (De la Costa 1967, 159, 312). Neither Maranga nor Dulag is mentioned in the Mercado text.

9. It is only with the Claveria decree of 1849 that surnames became a general practice among Filipinos. In the case of our Boholano, what may have been his original name (Ayatumo) became his surname after he was given a Christian name (Miguel). A historian of Bohol, Jes B. Tirol, offers two reflections on the etymology of Ayatumo: (1) Ay ato mo, “What is ours is yours” (referring to Miguel’s parents giving him to the Jesuits), and (2) Ayat + omo, “Challenge” + “bee’s wax” (i.e., “One who cannot even harm a bee’s wax,” to refer—whether or not in ridicule—to Miguel’s pacific nature). (J.B. Tirol, letter to the author, 3 June 1992).


13. A well-known example of the ejercicio is Rodriguez (1861). English edition: Rodriguez (1929). This work by Rodriguez (1526-1616) was, for a long time, obligatory reading for religious novices. I thank Fr. Ardilla for referring me to this work.


15. See Rafael (1988).


17. The suppression of curiosity (ociosidad) is a dominant theme in religious manuals of conduct, books of spiritual exercise, guides to confession, sermons, and exem-
pla in the religious literature of colonial Philippines. This theme is also given extended treatment in the main text of Mercado ([1673], libros IX and X).


19. I draw the concept from Erich Auerbach: "Figural interpretation establishes a connection between two events or persons in such a way that the first signifies not only itself but also the second, while the second involves or fulfills the first." See Auerbach (1953, 73, et passim).


23. To carry this line of thought a few steps further: One can compare the Ayatumo vida with such colonial "books of conduct" as the Leyte-Samar Lagda (1734), the Boholano La Teresa (1852), the Tagalog Urbana at Feliza (1864), and the Tagalog Si Tandang Basio Macunat (1885), and see the shift away from the concerns of early fire-and-brimstone conversion toward the leisurely codification of "manners" (as the imperative turns to the conserving of orderly Christian communities), toward militant apologetics (in the face of rising religious and political apostasies), and toward the fuller delineation of the social world (as indios become more and more "present" in history). With such shifts, the modalities of the texts themselves change.

24. Mercado ([1673], capitulo I).

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