



The first Spaniard to write about Philippine drama, Vicente Barrantes, affirmed that all Tagalog theater was definitely derived from Spanish theater, and that there had been none of it before Spanish contact (Barrantes 1890).

A later, more careful scholar, Wenceslao Retana, noted that Barrantes's proof consisted of arguments rather than of documents. Retana therefore sifted carefully through all extant accounts, but finally himself came to the conclusion that there was no proof that the Tagalogs had any *representacion escénica* before 1571, the year of the founding of Manila (Retana 1909).

Indigenous Drama

When one remembers that the Spaniards had come from a country that reached its Siglo de Oro of drama in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, and that produced Lope de Vega and Calderon de la Barca at that time, then we realize that the drama they were looking for must have been that which they knew from back home: the scripted, staged, costumed Spanish comedias and *autos sacramentales* — and which they were of course unlikely to find among the Filipinos who were chanting epics, enacting rituals, and celebrating victories with their own kinds of songs, dances and mimetic action.

If, however, one defines drama as it was in its beginnings in the Western world — as “action” or “deed” involving mimesis or mimicry — then one realizes that what the Spaniards dismissed as “pagan” and even “obscene,” but which to their credit they occasionally recorded and described was, unrecognized by them, indigenous Philippine drama.

Rituals and Ceremonies

The many rituals that punctuated the daily life of the Filipino — birth, the assuming of a name, reaching of manhood or womanhood (marked by circumcision or by menarche), courtship and marriage, planting and harvest, illness, battle, victory over enemies, the assumption of office of a new chieftain, death — were mostly marked by some mimetic action. In these rituals, the petitioner offered sacrifice symbolic of himself to seek the favor of the hidden powers — the supreme being (Bathalang Maykapal to the Tagalogs); the *anitos* and other spiritual forces such as the sun, the moon, *tala* (morning star), or *bahag-hari* (rainbow) — even certain powerful beasts such as the crocodile, and certain trees, rocks, and birds. The high priest or priestess, called *baylan*, *babaylan*, *catalonan* among other names, was at times mediator and intercessor, and at times the figure of power, and therefore the representative of the spirit whose favor was being sought.

The very first native ritual recorded and reported to the Western world was that documented by Pigafetta in his *Primo viaggio intorno al mondo* (1525) and witnessed by Magellan and his men. In it two priestesses brought in offerings of food, made obeisance to the sun, then chanted, danced, and sacrificed a pig. After Pigafetta, various friars — Colin, Plasencia, Chirino, and many others — incorporated into their reports to religious superiors in Spain detailed accounts of rituals for marriage, for going to war, for birth and death, for planting and harvest, for illness and victory — for all the important landmarks in tribal life, all the touchstones of survival as a tribal community. These reports were later reinforced by those of the European travelers who roamed all over the archipelago in the nineteenth century — Germans, Frenchmen, Englishmen — a fact which proves that some four centuries of Christianization had not erased the Filipinos' belief in the power and meaning of their rituals, some of which survive to this day among the non-Christian and the Muslim Filipinos and even, in Christian transformation, among the Christian Filipinos.

Songs and Dances

In 1663, Francisco Colin, S.J. wrote that the natives had songs that they retain in their memory and repeat when they go on the sea, sung to the time of their rowing, and in their merrymaking, feasts, and

funerals, and even in their work . . . In those songs are recounted the fabulous genealogies and vain deeds of their gods (1663, 69).

Dances he witnessed too: "warlike and passionate, but ... [with] steps and measured changes, and interposed ... [with] some elevations that really enrapture and surprise" (Colin 1663, 67-68).

Songs and dances were usually part of ritual; and when outside of ritual, often had mimetic elements of their own. Another Jesuit, Francisco Ignacio Alcina (1668, 31-33) records that the Leyte-Samar Visayans had at least six song types. The *ambahan*, a seven-syllable verse of unrhymed couplets, each expressing a complete statement, was sung by a soloist, with a crowd singing the chorus. The *bikal* was a verbal joust in song with two girls or two boys facing each other across a room and, in satirical dialogue, finding fault with each other for the purpose of arousing laughter. The audience goaded either participant with "great merriment and much applause." In the *balak*, courting was accomplished in metaphors, and done either verbally or by means of instruments — the young man playing the *kudyapi* and the maiden the *korlong* — with the communication perfectly understood. The *siday* was sung by ambulant groups of singers who were paid for their services, and the *parahaya* were dirges sung by women during wakes (Alcina 1668, 31-33).

One notes that at least some of these songs involved not just words and music but verbal exchange and mimetic action.

Many dances are quite directly imitative, especially of occupational activities: hunting wild boar among the Igorots, orange picking or mudfish catching for the Tausogs, finding a beehive and getting stung by angry bees for the Negritos. Others imitate the movements of animals: fish, ducklings, ricebirds. Still others illustrate native lifeways, as the Maranaw *kapi-malong-malong* shows all the possible ways a *malong* is worn. And finally those that are part of ritual emphasize — symbolically or metaphorically — the reason for the ritual, as in war dances and wedding dances.

The dramatized song and the dance-drama are certainly among the earliest forms of Philippine drama.

Customs

Other nonritualistic or nonceremonial customs of the early Filipinos also qualify as drama not only because of mimetic action, but also because in some cases an element of “pretend” has entered the practice or game.

The games played at wakes for the dead are an example. Ancient Filipinos honored the dead who lay in state by singing, feasting, and drinking with the relatives of the deceased during the *lamayan*. In some regions, the body was not interred till all the rice and animals of the deceased had been eaten by the guests.

During this wake, the mourners kept the bereaved company while enlivening the evening, staying awake, and driving away harmful spirits with poetical contests in jest or riddle such as the *duplo*, *bulaklakan*, *karagatan*, *panyo palaran*, and *kulasisi sing hari*.

In the *duplo*, for example, one game is called a *kaharian*, and a *hari* or king and his *piskal* are in charge. The king starts the game by tossing an accusation (for example, “You stole the roses from my garden”) at one of the *bilyakos* (male participants) or *bilyakas* (female participants), who then either defends him/herself—in dodecasyllabic quatrains full of metaphors, allusions, riddles, lines from the metrical romances, etc.; or is defended by someone else; or accuses another in turn. The game consists in keeping the verse flying, until a player is caught without an acceptable answer. He or she is then pronounced guilty and punished by being slapped on the hand with a *palmatoryo* (a leather slipper) or by being ordered to say a *dalit* or prayer in memory of the departed.

The *duplo* is drama in that the participants imagine themselves in a hypothetical situation, within which they play their parts, improvise their lines, and exchange these in a spirit of pretense and play.

Another custom with dramatic elements is the *pamanhikan*, or the process of asking for a girl’s hand in marriage. In some regions, this is still done in verse, with a representative speaking for the groom’s family and someone answering (and making demands) for the bride’s family.

The indigenous drama of the Filipino, therefore, was described and recorded by the Spaniards, but not recognized as such since it did not have the stages, costumes, scripts, and conventions that they had

learned to expect from their own tradition. In fact however, this drama — the various imitations of life done in ritual, dance, or even play — was community-based drama at its purest. There was no division between the performer and the audience, since everyone in the audience was once, or would sometime be, a performer. No explanation was ever needed for any of the presentations, for they were part of communal life and had meaning for everyone. They were created by the people for their needs and presented for very direct purposes — to bring about a particular good, to teach a definite role to the young, to consolidate the community in its common goals. In context, it was drama of a very high order.

Theater in the Spanish Colonial Period

The Spanish conquest of the Philippines included, besides the assumed aim of subjugation, the conversion of the Filipino heathen to Christianity and thereby their Hispanization. The missionaries who accompanied and followed the very first Spanish soldiers converted the natives to Catholicism as well as to the conquistadors way of life.

During much of the colonial period, Spanish culture was introduced through Nueva Espana (Mexico), from where the Philippines was ruled by Spain through the Ministro de Ultramar. Soldiers of Adelantado Miguel Lopez de Legazpi in the late sixteenth century are believed to have been the ones who brought over from Mexico the metrical romances of chivalry and of the lives of saints and martyrs, which were popular in their day and which, in indigenized form, became the native *awit* and *corrido*. The friars, on the other hand, in their zeal to Christianize the natives, used many methods of communicating their message, including the drama or dramatization, a pedagogical tool long used by the Jesuits in their teaching.

Comedia

The first dramatizations were various *declamaciones graves*, *loas*, and *coloquios* — verse recitations, religious in content, taught by the friars to their Filipino students for such significant and festive occasions as the arrival of church notables, the feasts of saints, or the inauguration of churches or schools. The first “representación enteramente teatral,” notes Retana (1909) as he cites Colin, was a *comedia* written in 1598

by Vicente Puche, a Jesuit, aboard a ship enroute to Cebu. Half of the first draft was blown into the sea, and Puche had to rewrite the play before the ship docked.

This first recorded full-length play (in Spanish dramaturgy, a *comedia* is a play in verse in three acts or *jornadas*), in "Latin and Romance" was then taught to elementary school children of Cebu, who presented it to honor the first bishop-designate of Cebu, Fray Pedro de Agurto. For the occasion, the elementary school the Jesuits were running in Cebu was elevated to a *colegio*, although it taught only reading, writing, and catechism.

In 1601, at the inauguration of the Colegio de San Jose, Fr. Juan de la Concepcion records that *función teatral* marked the occasion, and included *oraciones Españoles* which, Retana notes, eventually bore such legitimate heirs as the Philippine loas.

The first play in the vernacular written by a Spaniard was on the martyrdom of Santa Barbara. Presented in Bohol in 1609 by a cast of Visayans, it had a great impact on the audience who, terrified by the tortures suffered by the martyr's father in contrast to her own happy ascent to heaven, exclaimed: "This, then, will be our fate (eternal fire) if we abandon the true faith." They then scorned their *bailanes* and gave up their idols, amulets, and "superstitious objects" to the Jesuits, who promptly burned them.

Notice of the beatification of Ignatius Loyola was received in Manila on 20 June 1611, and a part of the celebrations included a "razonamiento a lo pastoril y vizcaino" done by twelve boys, *criollos* all, and a "breve coloquio en lengua tagala" by the *indio* students. The latter had three dances as *entremeses* or intermissions.

Retana notes other evidence of the Spanish colonizers teaching the Filipinos how to stage presentations, sometimes in Spanish, sometimes in the native tongue. In 1619, on the occasion of the arrival in Manila of the papal bull regarding the Immaculate Conception, a *comedia* on the beauty of Rachel, another on the martyrs of Japan, still another on the Immaculate Conception, another on the sale of Joseph, and finally one on the Prince of Transylvania, were staged. In 1623, when Philip IV became king, there were bullfights, *juegos de cañas*, and theatrical spectacles.

Finally comes the most famous *comedia* of all, the one in 1637 celebrating an actual victory of Cristianos over Moros. All this time,

while Christianization proceeded apace in certain areas, Muslim Filipinos continued to resist the Spaniards, who sent expeditions to conquer them: forces headed by Spanish officers but manned by Filipino soldiers. These forces were frequently defeated, a fact carefully deemphasized in the records available to most Filipinos. When a victory was gained, it was celebrated with the pealing of church bells, the singing of the *Te Deum*, special masses of thanksgiving, and grand honors and ceremonies.

One such celebration occurred when Sebastian Hurtado de Corcuera, governor general of the Philippines since 1635, finally defeated the skillful Muslim leader Kudarat, whom the Spaniards called Cachil Corralat, near the Pulangui river in Maguindanao. Corcuera did this by storming and taking Corralat's hilltop stronghold, and driving him into the interior of the island. By gubernatorial order, his victorious return was celebrated with an artillery salute from Bagongbayan, the pealing of bells, the singing of a *villancico*, and the reciting (and acceptance) of a congratulatory poem. This was in May.

In June, in the port of Cavite, some boys acted out this victory by playing at "moros y cristianos," with flags and wooden swords. The "fighting" became so intense that the boy who played Corralat fell off the *muralla* and had to take five stitches in his head. The boys' game may or may not have inspired the play that was later conceived, and was significant, according to Retana, because in it "one sees, for the first time in the Philippines, the idea of moros y cristianos practiced in a theatrical mode."

On 5 July of the same year, Father Hierónimo Perez's play, *gran comedia de la toma del Pueblo de Corralat, y conquista del Cerro*, was performed in church, with the governor, the audiencia, the archbishop, and the *principalia* of the city of Manila in attendance.

This play has often been called the first moro-moro ever performed in the Philippines. However, a careful distinction should now be made. As Retana says, it was definitely the first comedia on a Philippine subject ever to be written or performed in the islands. It had genuine Philippine Moros and Christians. However, it was in Spanish, and surely in the Spanish form. Therefore, it was a comedia and not a native *komedya*, which is the other name for what came to be known as the moro-moro. Moreover, this play had Filipinos (Muslims and Christians) as characters — while, as Retana also notes, in Philippine

literature (dramatic literature, as well as the *awit* and *corrido*), the Moro was not the Malay Mohammedan of Mindanao and Jolo, but

always, invariably, the arrogant moro, the seducer, he of the long thick beard of imported literature, the moro of Spanish literature; in other words, the unknown moro, never the moro who for whole centuries attacked as often as he could the coasts of the Visayas and Luzon [a reference to the Muslim pirates] (Retana 1909, 34-35).

In short, Father Perez's *gran comedia* was significant because it had an actual historical event as its subject matter, and was thus an early venture into the use of Philippine material for drama. It was, however, a *comedia* in Spanish, and not a *moro-moro*, nor even the ancestor of *moro-moros*, except, in some measure, in form.

The Komedya

Where did the native *komedya* or *moro-moro* come from? Possibly from the *moros y cristianos*, a dance which the Mexican Indians had been dancing since 1530, and which included tales about Charlemagne and the twelve peers of France. Certainly some of the *komedyas*, and this is obvious even only from their titles, come directly from the metrical romances, the *awit* and *corrido*, which were the popular and secular reading matter available to the folk, for example, *Don Juan Tinoso*, *Doce Pares de Francia*, *Príncipe Atamante*, *Príncipe Baldovino*, *Príncipe Reynaldo*, and the like.

The pattern for the vernacular *komedya* — and it was written in almost all vernaculars and called *linambay* in Cebu, *kumidya* or *kuraldal* in Pampanga, *hadi-hadi* in Leyte, and *moros-moros* in Hiligaynon — was verse, in six-, seven-, eight-, or more generally twelve-syllable lines, usually in quatrains, and in enough *partes*, *bahagi*, *jornadas*, or *actos* to fill three to five hours for three to five or seven or thirty days. Like their fellow Asians — the Japanese, the Chinese, the Indonesians — the Filipinos' sense of time for drama is definitely non-Western, their pace leisurely, their enjoyment unhurried.

The basic plot may have various codas and variations, but has the following general formula: a Christian princess falls in love with a Muslim prince, and/or a Muslim princess with a Christian prince. This is of course opposed by their royal parents for various possible reasons, aside from the obvious one of religion. War is declared

between the two camps, for this or for some other related or unrelated reason.

Various travelers and Spanish officials in the seventeenth, eighteenth, and nineteenth centuries provide “snapshot” accounts of this theater, and its armed warriors, the cavaliers of two camps haranguing each other in battle and in verse, and meeting in single combat or in a general melee, all of it ending with princes vanquished and the princess won. Often, victories and/or miracles persuade the non-Christians to be baptized as Christians, and thus the loves are able to culminate in marriages.

These marathon performances occurred during town or barrio fiestas, on improvised platforms erected in fields or vacant lots, and could last for days or weeks, depending on the whims — and the budgets — of the committees or townspeople in charge. The audience brought their food, their benches, their babies, and ate as they watched their favorite scenes: the *batalya* (battle), when performers in a dazzling array of helmets, armor, capes, tassels, daggers, spears, and swords shook the timbers of the stage with their fencing (which used the movements of *arnis*); the *palasintahan* or love scenes, in which love (as instantaneous as in courtly days) was declared and accepted in many lyrical, dodecasyllabic rhyming quatrains; the comic scenes where the *pusong* (clown or clowns) made jokes, poked fun at personages on or off stage, drank wine and ate food carried around in knapsacks, or fought mock battles; the scenes of magic and enchantment called *mahiya*, where ingenious “special effects” enabled flowers to bloom, waterfalls to suddenly spurt, graves to open, birds to fly, enchantresses to appear and disappear; the scenes of danger, when a prince did battle with some denizen of the wild — lion, bear, giant, bandit — encountered in the forest, or — graver danger — with a princess disguised as a man, with whom he instantly fell in love once her identity was revealed; and the scenes of pathos, such as that of a king deposed, a queen spurned, a princess exiled by a cruel father.

By the time the Augustinian Fray Joaquin Martinez de Zuñiga arrived in the late eighteenth century, he noted that the native komedya tended to “satisfy the sight rather than the sense of hearing,” which was quite natural for outdoor staging in a time without microphones. “If the so-called comedia or show,” he wrote, “does not have three or four kings, many princes and princesses and many actors, if it does

not have such wonderful feats and artifices as eagles that appear, lions, bears, and other animals that are fierce enough to swallow a man; if there are no apparitions or miracles, then that comedia [is].. .no good" (Zuñiga 1893).

Zuñiga's account of a comedia has a Christian princess falling in love with a Muslim prince, and the Christian king arranging a *torneo* (tournament) so that the victor could win his daughters hand. The Muslim prince, who befriends the Christian camp, displays valor and prowess. However, he cannot marry the princess because of his religion. If, Zuniga explains, a Muslim princess fell in love with a Christian prince, there would be a problem, because the prince would never renounce his faith. He would then find himself in a dire situation. A *gigante* puts obstacles in his way; he fights lions and bears and is held up by highwaymen. But the religious image which his mother gave him before her death always saves him. The prince is imprisoned. If the Muslim princess frees him, it might cost him his life. The solution? He leads a war and becomes the victor. Or the Muslim princess embraces Christianity, while the prince is tragically killed. Sometimes, he is miraculously resuscitated.

The vernacular *komedya* eventually came to be performed in every part of the islands — except the Muslim areas — in almost every vernacular, and at almost every fiesta, where it was the principal attraction. It was the pivotal point for such social structures as that of the *comité de festejos* and/or the *hermano/hermana mayor*, who saw to the funding of the production so that the people could view it for free. It eventually came to be written not only by the town or barrio folk poet, but by such polished poets as Huseng Sisiw and Francisco Baltazar. It certainly was the major entertainment form of at least the second half of the Spanish era.

It was also certainly a form that propagated a formula of fantasy and escape, with its kingdoms of Persia and Albanya, Turquia and Francia, its princes and princesses the likes of which the Philippine landscape would never see, whose problems only involved the unraveling of entangled loves, and never such pressing local problems as colonization, poverty, and exploitation. It also propagated in a visually spectacular and repetitious — therefore effective — fashion the message that the Muslim or Moro was to be scorned (unless, of course, he turned Christian, an unlikely happening in actual life) even

if he was a fellow Filipino, and that Christianity always won the day. Thus, although the komedya was at least nominally secular drama, it was loaded with religious and colonial messages that, when absorbed by the enchanted and unsuspecting audience, eventually redounded to the benefit of the Spanish conqueror.

Religious Drama

The Jesuits, long known to use drama as part of their pedagogy, were the earliest to use religious dramatic and semidramatic forms — the *declamaciones graves*, the *loa*, the *coloquio*, the *auto sacramental* — to serve as audiovisual reinforcement in their teaching of religion. Aside from the play on the martyrdom of Santa Barbara already mentioned, and the various dramas presented to mark significant occasions in the growing Philippine church, many a creative priest found ways of arousing interest in church rituals by dramatizing, for example, portions of the Passion of Christ during Lent, Saint Helena's search for the true Cross in May, and Joseph and Mary's search for an inn on Christmas eve. These dramas and dramatizations, probably meant to attract the people to church as well as to impress on them the meaning of the feast, were the germ and the basis of Philippine religious drama.

These dramatic observances have been classified by Nicanor Tiongson as

1. Based on the liturgy,
2. Derived from the liturgy (additions and embellishments), and
3. Based not on the liturgy but on the liturgical calendar (Tiongson 1977).

The *Siete Palabras*, for example, the dramatization of the seven last words on Good Friday, is based on the liturgy. The *osana* — procession, singing, throwing of flowers — on Palm Sunday is an embellishment on the liturgy; and the *santakrusan*, which has no liturgical base, finds its origin in the church calendar, in which a day in May is assigned to the celebration of the finding of the Holy Cross.

These religious dramatic observances could also be classified according to length:

1. The short dramatizations such as the *salubong* and the *panunuluyan*, and

2. The full-length (and longer than full-length) dramas such as the *sinakulo* (eight days long, from Palm Sunday to Easter Sunday) and the *tibag* (the *komedya*-style play on the search for and finding of the cross).

Among the most widespread practices in the islands is that of the *salubong* held early in the morning of Easter Sunday, in which the *carrozas* of the Mater Dolorosa and the Risen Christ wend their separate ways through the town, each leading a procession, one of female figures of the Passion, the other of male figures. They meet at a prearranged spot, where a structure called a *galilea* has been readied. From this, a child representing an angel is lowered, to remove the Virgin's mourning veil, and to sing "Regina Coeli, Laetare" (Queen of Heaven, Rejoice), since her Son has risen from the dead.

Different towns with different budgets and imaginative directors have evolved different practices. It is said that in the San Roque district in Cavite City, the cherub used to be lowered from a tall building by a rope around her waist, but today a mechanical doll is used for the job. In other places, intricate pulley arrangements raise and lower giant flowers or heart-shaped structures (*puso*) that enclose the "angel"; or a single pulley may pull up a child's high chair — with the child in it. Still other places are said to use doves to lift the veil.

The *sinakulo*, best known of the full-length dramas, is still an annual institution in towns in Pampanga, Cavite, Bulacan, Rizal, and some other provinces of Luzon. It is believed to have originated around the eighteenth century, since the earliest *pasyon*, that of Gaspar Aquino de Belen, was written in 1704; and it is logical to assume that from chanting the *pasyon* aloud, some towns progressed to assigning parts, then to adding costumes, and finally to having the parts acted out in costume.

Most *sinakulos*, however, are heavily based on the *Pasyon Henezis* (1814), since this provides much dramatic material, starting as it does with the creation of Adam and Eve, and ending with the coronation of the Blessed Virgin in heaven, as many full-length *sinakulos* do. Other sources dipped into by folk poets in search of material have been: other *pasyon*, like the *Pasyon Kandaba*; *Martir sa Golgota*, the translation of a Spanish fictionalized account of the life of Christ, from which are taken such colorful and beloved apocryphal

characters as Samuel Belibet and Boanerhes, suitor to Mary Magdalene; various awit and short stories.

The opposing forces in the *sinakulo* are the forces of good, represented by the *banal*, the holy ones (Jesus and Mary, slow of speech and movement, hands folded and eyes downcast in meekness and resignation); and the forces of evil, represented by the *Hudyo* (Jews), the rough, sharp-tongued soldiers, and the power-holders — Herod, Pilate, Annas, and Caiaphas — who sent Christ to his death.

The religious dramas, performed year after year by townspeople, were supported initially by the church, and eventually by the community at large, who contributed money or goods for the presentation; who wrote scripts, called rehearsals, made props and the stage; and offered time, devotion, and *panata* (vows to perform) to the project. Although at present they may well be more of folk spectacles and community projects than religious observances, it is undeniable that they are part of the rural lifestyle, and reflective of — and influential on — the people's world view.

In his book on religious drama in Malolos, Bulacan, Nicanor Tiongson points out that the meek, uncomplaining, all-accepting Christ held up by the *sinakulos* as a role model could well have contributed to the noncombativeness, subservience, and resignation of the Filipino who was a perfect colonial for so many years. Reynaldo Ileto, however, argues in his *Pasyon and Revolution* that the *pasyon* gave the Filipino an inner strength belied by a meek exterior.

Tiongson further points out that today, when the religious culture has changed, and the agricultural rhythm of life that allowed time for religious drama is changing to the eight-to-five life-style required by beginning industrialization, the *sinakulo* and other religious dramas are dying out. If the Filipino is to preserve this drama, he will have to make it meaningful to the audience of today in their changed consciousness and circumstances.

Theater in the American Colonial Period

By the nineteenth century, the Western variety of theater, that is, scripted, costumed, and staged plays, were a prominent reality in the Philippines. What Retana calls the Teatro Tagalo (or Ilocano, or Pampango, for that matter) consisted mainly of the *komedya* and, at

the appropriate times, of religious dramas and dramatizations. By this time, however, komedyas were being written by such writers as the poet Jose de la Cruz, called Huseng Sisiw, and his even more famous pupil, Francisco Baltazar, or Balagtas, whose extant komedya, *Orosman at Zafira*, shows what heights of polish and style the komedya text had reached.

Still more inputs from Spain were being received in the drama scene. Not only were theaters being built to house vernacular komedyas and Spanish comedias; groups of amateurs were staging plays, Spaniards both from Spain and island-born were writing plays in Spanish, and troupes from Spain were coming in to perform and inject new influences into the local theater.

In a study on the theaters of Manila (1846-1896), Cristina Buenaventura conjectures that the first Manila theaters were built in the 1820s or 1830s, since there is proof that the Teatro de Tondo was in operation before 1829, the year Huseng Sisiw died. Before this date, there were of course the makeshift theaters, the cockpits, the open-air temporary and occasional stages. From then on a surprising array of theaters were built: the Tondo theater in 1834; a nipa-roofed theater on Arroceros in the 1840s; the Gran Coliseo de Binondo in 1846, "a real Spanish theater from the very beginning"; the Teatro del Principe Alfonso in 1862; the Teatro Circo de Bilibid which featured bullfights at first, then symphonies, zarzuelas, comedies; the Teatro de Sibacon; the Teatro de Vanedades; the Teatro Filipino in 1880; and eventually the famous Teatro Zorrilla in 1893, with its 1,352 seats; and others — adding up to a total of twenty-six (in Manila alone) by the time of the Revolution in 1898 (Buenaventura, 1994).

The groups of amateur actors put on mainly repertories of Spanish plays, a fact which made Spanish dramaturgy and Spanish theater available to the Filipino audience and writer. A very important influence in this regard was the arrival in the Philippines of professional theater artists because of the change of political temper in Spain.

A wave of political deportations brought Narciso de la Escosura and the actress Carlota Coronel (from the Teatro del Príncipe of Madrid) to Manila in 1848, to present *La conjuración de Venecia*, *La pata de cabra*, and *La redoma encantada*, the two latter "obras de magia." When politics changed in Spain and they returned home, their favorable reports about Manila's reception of theater encouraged the

Compania del Teatro del Balón of Cadiz, directed by Manuel López Ariza, to come in 1852 and perform *Isabel la Católica*, *El Tío Cañillitas*, and some *sainetes* by Ramón de la Cruz at the Binondo theater. Dario Céspedes presented, in late 1878 or early 1879, *Jugar con fuego* and *El barberillo de Lavapiés*, "hits" of the Madrid popular (zarzuela) theater.

Very important figures in the infusion of contemporary Spanish theater into the Philippines were director Alejandro Cubero, who has been called the "father of Spanish theater in the Philippines," and zarzuela actress Elisea Raguer, who arrived in 1880. They not only presented plays, but trained the young Filipino actors who became the mainstays of the Spanish zarzuela in the Philippines: Praxedes (Yeyeng) Fernandez (who started performing at sixteen or seventeen), Patrocinio Tagaroma, Nemesio Ratia, and Jose Carvajal.

The writing of contemporary plays about Philippine subjects (instead of Moro-Cristiano battles and religious topics) also started in the nineteenth century. Retana makes mention of: *La conquista de Joló*, a three-act drama in verse by Antonio García del Canto, first performed on 11 June 1865 and inspired by the exploits of General Urbiztondo; *Una página de gloria* by Federico Casademunt and Regino Escalera, one act in verse, first performed 23 April 1876, celebrating the Jolo campaigns of General Malcampo; *Répública ... doméstica* about "costumbres manilenses," also by Casademunt and Regino Escalera, in one act and in verse, first performed 30 June 1878; *José el carpintero* by Juan Zulueta de los Angeles, about "costumbres filipinas," in one act and in verse, published 1880; Jose Rizal's *Junto al Pasig*, first performed at the Ateneo de Manila, 8 December 1880; the famous *Cuadros filipinos*, sainete by Francisco de Entrala, performed 1882, which aroused the ire of Filipinos who saw it as a "savage burlesque of all that is Filipino"; in March 1896, a play by Eduardo Saavedra called *A 7 con 7 el pico ó La llegada del "peso insular" y el fin de los contratos usurarios*, which had to do with the price of sugar.

The Zarzuela

Since the zarzuela form had been successfully introduced into the Philippine Spanish theater and to its Spanish and Filipino actors and writers, the turn of the century saw the next logical step: the Filipinization of the zarzuela by means of its birth in the vernacular.

The zarzuela is a play with music, and is named after the Palacio de la Zarzuela near Madrid, where entertainments called “fiestas de la zarzuela” were presented for the kings. It existed in the Spanish theater long before it was given the name. It was popular theater, and when the more polished Italian operas came to Spain in 1703, the impresarios branded the zarzuela “un arte vulgar,” since they professed to prefer the “high” tone of the opera.

In the Philippines, the first vernacular zarzuela extant and on record was written in Pampanga: Mariano Proceso Pabalan Byron’s *Ing Managpe*, first staged at the Teatro Sabina in Bacolor, Pampanga on 1 September 1900. Its instant success was encouraging, and within the next decade almost every other region developed zarzuelas in its own vernacular. In Pangasinan, Catalino Palisoc wrote *Say Limang ag Napketket, Pampinsiwan* in 1901; in Iloilo Valente Cristobal wrote *Ang Capitan* and *Ang Mga Viciohan* in 1903; and Severino Reyes premiered his one-act zarzuela *Ang Kalupi* in April 1902 (double-billed with his anti-komedy *R.I.P.*, which brought about demonstrations and stone throwing by the *komedyantes*) and his three-act *Walang Sugat* on 14 June 1902.

The Filipino *sarswela*, as it developed, was principally about domestic life: obedient or disobedient children, negligent or devoted parents, problems brought about by gambling or drinking or politics or poverty, and, most of the time, problems and complications involving love (rich boy-poor girl and vice versa; conflicting suitors, each favored by a parent; love between servants, children, parents). Again and again, Filipino folk writers — there were no professionals to speak of except perhaps in Manila — played variations on the domestic theme, thus reflecting the concerns and perceptions of Filipino daily life.

These the plots unraveled on stage. Reyes’s *Walang Sugat* is about Julia and Temyong, who loved each other but had to be parted because Temyong had to go to war. Julia, as an obedient daughter, had to accede to her mother’s wish that she marry Miguel, a rich but slow-witted nephew of the parish priest. A message sent to Temyong brings him back just in time to save her from marriage — through a ruse. A side plot about Temyong’s father and other villagers being flogged and deceived reveals a resentment against the Spanish colonizers.

Servando de los Angeles's *Ang Kiri* is about a "dalagang masaya," who has suitors of wealth and political power, but falls in love with a country boy. When he marries his country sweetheart, she realizes the folly of her ways and accepts the faithful Jose, a poet and longtime suitor. Precioso Palmas' *Paglipas ng Dilim* focuses on the romance between the demure Estrella and the newly graduated Doctor Ricardo, which the flirt Caridad tries to sunder. Patricio Mariano's *Anak ng Dagat* has Nene, who has grown up as a fisherman's daughter, finding out that she is a rich man's heiress, which causes Carlos, the poet she loves, to stay away. They find happiness in the end.

The one-act *sarswelas* consisted of little vignettes about husbands who bet at the cockfights and lose all their money; wives who play *panguingue*, widows and widowers planning marriage and hiding this from their respective offspring; possessive fathers guarding precious daughters; disobedient sons and daughters realizing the folly of their ways — all the little foibles and fictions reflective of Filipino family concerns. The *sarswela* songs, which functioned as part of the dialogue, served as exposition (of mood, situation, feelings), development, comic interlude, or even simply musical pause. As in the opera, which was beginning to be staged in Manila at this time, there were solos, duets, trios, sextets, and grand choruses, depending on the availability of singers and on the magnitude of the *sarswela* (a one-act play had a single situation, a three- to five-act play or *zarzuela grande* had greater scope and depth).

These songs became the hits of the period, for example "Nabasag ang Banga" from Hermogenes Ilagan's *Dalagang Bukid*. The stars, like Atang de la Rama, became the folk heroes and heroines of the day. The professional troupes usually opened the new *sarswelas* at the Zorrilla, then went on to perform at the smaller theaters, and then to play one-night stands at town and barrio fiestas all over Luzon and the larger southern cities. The towns and barrios generally had their own writers, *sarswelas*, and troupes, and these performed at fiestas, and could even be hired for a fee by other towns not blest with their own *sarswelistas*. The town of Meycauayan, Bulacan, for example, at one time had eight *sarswela* troupes operating independently of each other. The late singer-actor Aurelio Estanislao remembers first hearing Atang de la Rama sing in his hometown of Bocaue when he was a

child, and how mothers would shush their crying children, refusing to go home to cook dinner just yet, because “Kumakanta pa si Atang.”

Thus, although it made a dramatic entrance onto the Manila stage through Severino Reyes’s attack against the komedya (*R.I.P.*), the *sarswela* actually started entering Philippine consciousness in the last two decades of the nineteenth century — in Spanish. First, Spanish plays were performed by Spanish then by Philippine actors. Then plays written by peninsular or island-born Spaniards in Spanish about Philippine subjects or events were performed by local actors (trained by theater people like Cubero). Finally, at about the turn of the century, plays were written by Filipinos in various vernaculars about Philippine matter, and performed on hometown and Manila stages. Thus did the Spanish zarzuela become the Philippine *sarswela*.

The Philippine *sarswela* provided what can be called the first professional Philippine theater: namely, actors and actresses and troupes who earned their living from performing in *sarswelas*; authors and composers who were mainly *sarswela*-creators; theaters like the famous Zorrilla that were mainly for the *sarswela*; and a whole world of stage craftsmen, costume makers, musicians, and other support staff (in Pandacan, it was said, one could rent or buy all that was necessary for a *sarswela* in one day).

The *sarswela*, with its music and dances and party scenes, appealed to the music-loving Filipino (one notices the same ingredients appealing in present-day movies), especially since the stories were neither about imagined Moros and Cristianos nor about Biblical characters but about men and women recognizable and even identifiable with oneself.

The Drama

The prose play, called *drama*, moved into the vernacular even before the *sarswela*. One of the earliest published plays on record was Cornelio Hilado’s *Ang Babai nga Huwaran*, written in 1878 and first published in 1889 in Iloilo. This heavily didactic piece presents two fathers, one overindulgent and the other prudent; two daughters, one spoiled and the other obedient; two young men, one who chooses a wife for beauty and the other who chooses one for her virtue. Tomas Remigio’s anti-Spanish verse drama, *Malaya*, was written in Spain in 1898 but

first staged on 26 August 1902. It was also Tomas Remigio who wrote the oldest extant comic drama, *Mga Santong Tao*, which is about a *cura* (parish priest), a sacristan, and a fiscal, all lusting after a poor peasant's wife and getting humiliated by their victim in amusing and appropriate ways.

The dramas were mostly in prose and predominantly romantic and/or tragic and/or comic. Without the lightening effect of song, they came to bear the "heavier" — and usually more lachrymose — themes that today one associates with soap opera and movie tearjerkers. Occasionally they had songs, but these were not integral to the dialogue, such as patriotic songs in the dramas with political themes. The latter, called "seditious" by the Americans, were the drama's moment of glory.

The Filipinos, who had just driven away a colonial master of three hundred years only to realize that the "friend" who had offered help was now the new colonial master, felt an anger that boiled over and erupted in the drama. Such playwrights as Juan Abad, writer of *Tanikalang Guinto* (1902), Juan Matapang Cruz, author of *Hindi Aco Patay* (1903), and Aurelio Tolentino, famous for *Kahapon, Ngayon, at Bukas* (1903), wrote out their protest against the new colonizers. What seemed to be dramas of family life or of unhappy romances were read clearly by the Filipino audiences as they were meant to be: thinly veiled political allegories. For example, Liwanag (Light), heroine of *Tanikalang Guinto*, is enticed by her sly uncle, Maimbot (Greedy), not to marry her sweetheart, Kaulayaw. Maimbot's gift of a golden bracelet eventually becomes a chain that binds her — a clear analogy for America and her gifts that bind. Inang Bayan (Mother Country), the heroine of *Kahapon, Ngayon, at Bukas*, sees her son Taga-ilog (riverside dweller; Tagalog) imprisoned by the Spanish government, Matanglawin (Hawkeye), and is tricked by Halimaw (Monster), the Spanish friar, with the help of treacherous natives Asalhayop (Beastly) and Dahumpalay (Snake in the Grass). After the defeat of the Spaniards she warns her children about the new "friend," Malaynatin (Who Knows?), the American government, from whom she begs and whom she eventually challenges for freedom for herself and her children.

These plays were staged at a time when the Sedition Law forbade "printing, publishing or circulating any handbill, newspaper or

publication, advocating ... independence or separation,” the Flag Law forbade the raising of the Philippine flag, and the national anthem could not be played or sung without risk of punishment.

The playwrights took the risk, and were imprisoned for their valor — some, like Juan Abad and Aurelio Tolentino, more than once. Producers and directors took other risks, like introducing characters wearing flag colors to form the flag onstage at a given signal; or suddenly having the whole cast sing the “Himno Nacional” at the end of a play; or even presenting an unscheduled speech, sometimes by a rebel in hiding. Little wonder that the theater of that time was exciting, unpredictable, and as vital as a newspaper, reflecting current issues and courageous protest.

After 1907, when the first National Assembly was called, negotiations for independence began, the anger died down, and the dramas thereafter played on predictable formulae of family conflict and tragedy, romantic triangles, and the like. An example would be Jose Maria Rivera’s *Esperanza* (1916), about a lady who has put a colorful past behind her but is still spurned by her husband’s rich family. His illness brings the problem to a head, and a sudden inheritance brings a happy ending.

One of the most famous romantic dramas of this period is Cirio H. Panganiban’s *Veronidia* (1919), in which the heroine has left her husband for Cristino, a childhood suitor, and is torn with remorse especially since Roselyo is dying and their only child soon brings her news of his death. Cristino’s pride will not allow him to let her go to Roselyo, and in his dilemma he stabs her. The play was first shown in Panganiban’s hometown, Bocaue, but became a great hit and “flooded the theater with tears” in 1927, when Atang de la Rama, then “Queen of the Zarzuela” and indeed of Philippine professional theater of the day, and acclaimed poet Jose Corazon de Jesus played the lead roles.

The drama plot may still be seen in contemporary survival in tear-drenched movies depicting family tragedies, martyred mothers, and love triangles, as well as in radio and television soap operas and situation comedies today.

If the twenties and the thirties were a theater world, with audiences happily viewing reflections of their own lives in the dramas and sarswelas on stage, one might ask why these eventually faded from the dramatic scene. There were at least three reasons.

First, the English language had by the thirties become established as the language of the educated, the intelligentsia, and the elite. Consequently, the thinking audience that could have pushed this quasirealistic theater into an age of authentic realism, had turned to English and begun staging Shakespeare and Shaw, or the plays written in English by such Filipino university graduates as Carlos P. Romulo, Vidal Tan, and Jorge Bocobo (all of whom became presidents of the University of the Philippines). The first play in English by Filipinos was *A Modern Filipina*, by Jesusa Araullo and Lino Castillejo of the Philippine Normal School, written in 1915. Thus, although theater in English was far from established and far from the going concern that vernacular theater was at this time, the English language changed the people's attitude to the vernacular theater, which came to be relegated to the uneducated, the young, and the provincial audiences.

Secondly, there was serious competition from two newer entertainment forms: vaudeville and the movies, especially the "talkies." These were new, they brought with them the "progressive" American culture, and they were accessible. Filipino films, moreover, inherited plots, stars, and even styles from both *sarswela* and drama.

Thirdly, the *sarswelas* and dramas themselves had become stereotyped. "Obras maestras" and copies and variants of these were played, replayed, copied, parlayed in different vernaculars. The same characters walked the stages: *dalagang mahinhin*, loyal heroes, strict fathers, suffering mothers, in a chess game with various gambles and combinations, but with unvaryingly happy endings, often brought on by some forced resolution, or a *deus ex machina* or two. Real problems were touched upon: gambling, family relationships, rich versus poor, even usury and land tenancy and exploitation, but the problems were not thought through, but hurriedly marshaled onward to the happy ending when the loyal suitor eventually won the shy heroine. As in the *komedya*, this theater still worked with formulae, and not with ideas, offering assurance, not analysis. The stage of realism and ideas might possibly have come as a later development, had not the age of the *sarswela* and the *drama* ended in the thirties.

These were significant in that *sarswelas* and *dramas* were, first, indoor theater predominantly in prose, and therefore better suited to realistic and more intimate situations than the outdoor, grandiloquent verse theater had been. Secondly, they handled Filipino

subject matter — stories, lives, foibles, values — directly, while the *komedyas* and *sinakulos* had only touched these incidentally, accidentally, or peripherally.

Vod-a-vil / Bodabil

Vaudeville, which had originated in France, was introduced to the Philippines by the Americans, mainly as entertainment for American troops. Filipino *vod-a-vil* or *bodabil* was introduced in 1916 by Sunday Reantaso upon his return from the United States, but the credit for really establishing the form belongs to Lou Borromeo (Luis Borromeo, who returned from the U.S. in 1921), whose troupe performed at the Savoy and the Empire and introduced chorus girls, jazz, minstrel songs, skits, variety acts, and such showbiz names as Dimples, Toy Toy, Hanasan, and the Alabama Brothers.

Bodabil eventually developed such stars as Katy de la Cruz, Canuplin, Bayani Casimiro, Vicente Ocampo of the famous “Chit-chit-rit-chit” (whom Daisy H. Avellana calls “the greatest star in vaudeville”), the impresario Jose Zarah who staged “extravaganzas,” and many others.

In later years *bodabil* was to degenerate to the Clover Theater show, then to burlesque, then to excuses for girlie and strip shows that were eventually banned from decent theaters and relegated to sleazy bars and cheap moviehouses. In its heyday, however, it was the venue by which American musical culture came painlessly, easily, and almost unnoticeably into Philippine life. The stars — except for a few, like Atang de la Rama, who sang only *kundiman* — were known for songs, dances, or comedy that were local versions of American vaudeville acts. Katy de la Cruz was a torch singer à la Sophie Tucker; Canuplin confessedly copied Charlie Chaplin, but eventually developed his own pathos and humor; Bayani Casimiro started out as the Philippine Fred Astaire; the chorus girls tried for the precision of the Rockettes and the singers all sang American hits. The culmination of this is seen in the profusion of contests for “The _____ (Johnny Mathis, Joni James, Elvis Presley, Perry Como, etc.) of the Philippines.”

Bodabil was drama only incidentally and fragmentally. It was a variety show, which usually included a comedy skit — the drama portion. During the Japanese Occupation, however, since there was a

dearth of movies and indeed of entertainment, a group led by film director Lamberto V. Avellana, which became the nucleus of the later Barangay Theater Guild, put on "stage shows" which were vaudeville modified with a bias for drama. A stage show had a full-length play — in Tagalog, since English was forbidden by the Japanese authorities — followed by songs and dances and comedy acts by such greats as Tugo and Pugo. Dramatic Philippines, led by Narciso Pimentel, Jr., staged plays translated from English or written especially for the troupe, for example, Francisco "Soc" Rodrigo's translation of *Cyrano de Bergerac*, the famous Lenten play *Martir sa Golgota*, and the oft-replayed *Sino Ba Kayo?* by Julian Cruz Balmaceda (originally written as *Sangukuwaltang Abaka*, modified in 1943 for staging by the group).

In Japanese-occupied Manila, the stage show served not only to keep up spirits, but also to communicate messages of hope to the audience ("Darating na si Mang Arturo [MacArthur]" [Arturo Will Be Here Soon]). Backstage was also said to have served as a message drop for the guerrillas, and a song-signal ("Bakit Ka Hindi Dumarating?" [Why Haven't You Come?]) was used to warn any guerrillas in the audience whenever the Kempeitai entered the theater and they had to leave.

After the Japanese left, bodabil went back to copying and aping American performers. Although it produced some "originals" like the Reycard Duet, it has since fallen on bad times, with shows that contain vulgar skits, acrobatic acts, and "fashion shows" that are a flimsy excuse for parading flimsily clad girls who often engage in actions that would never have been allowed on the old bodabil stage. It survives, in a way, in the variety shows on television, which have a little of everything, but hardly any drama left to dignify them with the name.

Philippine Theater in English

The writing and staging of Philippine plays written in English started before the Pacific war, but took on impetus after 1945, when the American presence returned, even more strongly, since it came with "Liberation." Most of this activity was centered in schools, which of course were the centers of speaking and writing English. Notable in this regard are: the U.P. Dramatic Club directed by Wilfrido Maria Guerrero and before him Jean Edades; the Ateneo Dramatic Guild

directed by Henry Irwin, S.J. and later James B. Reuter, S.J.; the Arena Theater based in the Philippine Normal College, headed by Severino Montano and later Naty Crame Rogers; and the Aquinas Dramatic Guild of the University of Santo Tomas.

Although many of the plays staged were foreign, there was an occasional effort to stage a Philippine play, especially at the University of the Philippines, which had the advantage of having playwright Wilfrido Ma. Guerrero in residence. Guerrero, Ermita-bred and English-educated, was an authentic voice of his generation and his class — the class and the generation that lived the situations and spoke the kind of English he wrote.

Semiprofessional groups also existed — not school-based, but unable to exist exclusively on theater — most notably the Barangay Theater Guild headed by Lamberto V. Avellana and Daisy Hontiveros Avellana, which premiered with great success Nick Joaquin's *Portrait of the Artist as Filipino*, one of the greatest plays of the Philippine theater in English.

Encouragement for the writing of plays in English was provided by the Palanca Memorial Awards, which since 1954 have included the one-act play as a prize category, and later the three-act play as well. The first such award was given to Alberto Florentino, for *The World Is an Apple* (1954). However, since the award did not include assurance of or funding for production, many of the plays remained what Florentino has called "filing cabinet drama." As the property of the prize-giving body, they were neither published nor staged, but filed away. A few groups — and theater groups then sprouted and disappeared like mushrooms — staged these. Occasionally a playwright would exert effort to get his plays published, or get a school or other group to stage one. But it was not till the sixties that the Palanca Awards Committee started committing funds to the publication of Palanca plays; and not till 1975 were funds committed to production.

Among the prominent winners of Palanca awards for plays in English were Alberto Florentino, Wilfrido Nollado, Nestor Torre, Jesus Peralta, Fidel Sicam, and Estrella Alfon. The awards are now given for both works in English and Filipino.

The Return to the Vernacular

By the early sixties, theater people were noticing how difficult it was to draw audiences to plays. Some blamed the audiences' lack of exposure to drama; others cited a need for education. A few realized that the problem was language; that although some Filipinos had the command of the language necessary to write works like Guerrero's *Forever* and Montano's *Sabina*, English was still not the language of the heart, much less of the gut, of the majority. Thus, audiences were limited to the highly educated, to those devoted to theater, and to the relatives of the devotees. Listening to theater in English, the Filipino became preoccupied with the actor's ability to speak English, and not with the play and its core.

Onofre Pagsanghan, with his background in drama at the Ateneo under Henry L. Irwin, S.J., acted upon this realization by adapting Thornton Wilder's *Our Town* into *Doon Po sa Amin*, turning Grover's Corners into Barrio San Roque, the editor into a high school principal, the soda fountain into a halo-halo counter. Rolando Tinio, fresh from his MFA at the University of Iowa and theater training in England, decided that Filipino was absolutely as capable as English or any other language to contain the whole range of ideas and emotions found in Western drama, and proved this by successfully translating and staging such plays as Tennessee Williams's *Glass Menagerie* (*Laruang Kristal*), Strindberg's *Miss Julie*, and Arthur Miller's *Death of a Salesman* (*Ang Pahimakas ng Isang Ahente*).

The Philippine Educational Theater Association (PETA) was founded in 1967 by Cecile Guidote who, during her theater studies at Baylor University, had dreamed of a theater that would reach the people. It started by staging Philippine plays in English, but found its place in the theatrical scene when it found its home theater, the Fort Santiago ruins that are now the Dulaang Raha Sulayman. In those ruins were staged Virginia Moreno's *Straw Patriot*, in its translation, *Bayaning Huwad*, and Nick Joaquin's *Portrait of the Artist as Filipino*, translated into *Larawan*. From then on, PETA was committed to the language, and has since presented adaptations, translations, and mainly new plays in Filipino, gaining experience and an audience, and forging the style and orientation that make it today's premier theater group.

Still other forces cooperated with the above to bring theater back to the vernacular: history and social movements. The sixties were a troubled time. National problems precipitated not only a reexamination of ideas and structures, but a rise of nationalism and of student activism. Theater was one of the most active forms taken by the latter.

Proletarian theater, also called committed, activist, national democratic, engaged, corrective, agit-prop (agitation-propaganda), workers', radical, leftist, street, guerrilla, revolutionary, and people's theater, was all that, since it was committed to informing the people of their rights, of the exploitation perpetrated against them, of all the *isms* ranged against them (imperialism, capitalism, feudalism, fascism, bureaucrat capitalism), of their own ignorance of the graft and corruption in the government and the suppression of human rights. It was theater meant not only to entertain and inform, but also to persuade and activate.

It was street theater in that it abandoned buildings and auditoriums, and took to the streets, Plaza Miranda, campuses, factories, churches, sidewalks, the backs of trucks, the shade under trees, provincial plazas, even the steps of the Cultural Center — wherever were gathered the proper audience for the message to be projected. It was not confined to standard theater hours, but was presented at any time of the day or night, during a demonstration or march, during a strike or sitdown protest, in a quadrangle to disrupt classes.

The theater style was influenced by Chinese revolutionary theater (such films as *The East Is Red* and *Red Detachment of Women* were shown here at the time), but also picked up from all the styles of Western theater that had been learned in theater classes and by watching plays in English through the years. Because of the need for mobility and flexibility, arena-style theater or pantomime or any other combination of styles needing minimal props was used. Because the audience was generally heterogeneous, ambulant, and composed mainly of the masses, allegory and expressionism were much used, sometimes in broad gestures and satirizing reminiscent of traditional theater. Some theater groups wove in folk dances and songs (with modified lyrics) to link the content of their theater to the experience of their audience.

This was theater of ideas, at last; theater that analyzed and explained, and suggested solutions and actions. The language, but naturally, was Filipino and other local languages. The characters were types, representative of whole classes. On these last two counts — language and characters as types — the proletarian theater had links to traditional theater. Still another link was the fact that most of them were communal creations, and written for definite audiences (urban or rural, Plaza Miranda or a particular strike-bound company).

The significance of this theater was that it took Philippine drama beyond the stages of entertainment, escape, and exposition, and into the further stages of ideas, analysis, and persuasion. In this they can be linked to the protest plays of the early years of the American regime, the difference being that they were much more direct — sometimes shockingly so.

In proletarian theater of the late sixties and early seventies, Philippine theater had ventured a long way from the colonial theater of the Spanish period, and had made a leap into theater of ideas, picking up from the tradition of protest begun in 1903. This theater ended with the imposition of Martial Law in 1972.

The Contemporary Scene

On the contemporary scene one finds a panorama of drama and theater that reflects the whole stream of more than four hundred years of Philippine theater. Among the Muslim Filipinos and the other non-Christian cultural communities are still found the rituals, songs, dances, and customs of indigenous theater. In the towns and barrios distant or far enough from the encroachment of mass media are still visible remnants of Spanish colonial theater — religious dramas and dramatizations, the *komedya* — some little changed since the nineteenth century, some vastly changed by the influence of media (for example, the use of movie scores as background music, costumes influenced by De Mille's *The Ten Commandments*, the use of floodlights and filters). The *sarswela* still survives in some towns and, because music is always viable, has undergone many contemporizing scene changes to emerge as “modern” zarzuelas or musicals or rock operas, for example, Virgilio Almario's *Bernardo Carpio*, Amelia Lapeña

Bonifacio's *Ang Bundok*, Bienvenido Lumbera's *Ang Palabas Bukas*, Domingo Landicho's *Sumpang Mahal*.

Most of the plays being written and presented, however, are in the realistic temper, reflecting the problems, concerns, and ideas of the present-day Filipino. The age of realism of Philippine theater is upon us, brought in through the Western education offered in our schools, learned from Western models or on study grants or trips abroad, and developed by the need to understand and express the complexity of modern life.

Thus, the majority of the plays being written are in the strain of social realism, where man is seen as an individual functioning in and being acted upon by society. Here belong the plays about poverty, about injustice and oppression, about the powerful and powerless, about the problems of particular sectors like *batilyos*, squatters, landless tenants, beggars, and scavengers.

There are also plays of psychological realism, about the problems created in individuals by their particular traumas, environments, networks of family and heredity, and opportunity — plays about the expatriate, the homosexual, the alienated; about the generation gap; about father-son conflicts; about marital discord.

Many plays use legend and history to understand contemporary problems — thus the numerous plays drawn from or developing various parts of the Rizal novels; the plays about Bonifacio and Valentin de los Santos and Dagohoy; the reinterpretations of Bernardo Carpio and folktale and myth.

All the styles in the world theater repertoire are used: epic theater, expressionism, theater of the absurd, allegory, shadow play, puppet theater, Kabuki, Noh, and others. Styles from traditional theater — *duplo*, *komedya*, *sarswela* — have been and continue to be explored as vehicles for “Now” messages.

Theater groups exist in schools, of course, where the study of plays and theater techniques is at hand, and available for experimentation. The better known troupes are the U.P. Repertory Company, which stages traditional and contemporary Philippine plays, and takes touring groups to perform outside the campus; the Dulaang UP., which specializes in translations from world theater; the Mindanao State University's Sining Kambayoka, which has created a unique theater style based on an indigenous folk form, the *bayok*, which it has

applied to both folkloric and contemporary subject matter; the Integrated Performing Arts Guild (IPAG) of the Mindanao State University in Iligan City; the Ateneo High School's Dulaang Sibol, which is seen by the director, Onofre Pagsanghan, as a force for the formation of the young, rather than as training ground for the professional theater man. However, Dulaang Sibol's poetic, symbolic style is a strong and definite presence in today's theater, especially since it trains its members in writing plays and music, designing and crafting scenery and props — all within minimal budgets — relevant training for theater in a developing country.

The nearest to a professional theater group the country has is PETA, which manages its PETA-CITASA workshops, its Kalinangan Ensemble, its Teen Theater, and its outreach training programs in a professional and organized manner. However, its members earn minimal fees, and have to hold other jobs, not being able to subsist only on theater. Its regular seasons of Filipino plays, all located within a definite social perspective, draw a predominantly urban crowd from a wide range of social levels, to its performances.

Aside from the above groups, innumerable others sought their own thrusts and their own audiences: Dulaang Babaylan, which specialized in the revival and updating of traditional plays; Teatro Kabataan, which ran training programs that drew drop-outs, professionals, students to its little theater in the suburbs; Barasoain Kalinangan, running two-year training programs in Malolos; An Balangaw, retrieving and staging folk forms from Leyte and Samar; and hundreds of other theater groups in churches, communities, barrios, housing projects, towns, private homes, etc. All have very little money, all depend on sponsors, donations, ticket sales, the loan of props and costumes, the dedication of members, the generosity of theater experts (for example the late Adul de Leon, Joonee Gamboa, the PETA directors and artists) and scholars who help out with lectures and workshops and advice.

The Philippines today does not have a national theater as it is understood in First World nations — a complex of buildings and people, state-supported, devoted to a nation's theater, both in tradition and change. The Cultural Center of the Philippines (CCP) has three venues for theater, a resident theater company, the beginning of a professional school for actors, an outreach program, modest

grants and aid for other theater companies, programs, and festivals, and a vision for theater that is moving towards national dimensions. It could someday be the national theater, if it is supported by the proper legislation, funding, and definition, but it is not that yet in governmental intention or scope.

What the country has, therefore, is a complex of people, communities, and groups, all devoted to theater that is, in many and various ways, authentically Philippine. 