

PHILIPPINE "SEDITIONARY PLAYS"

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I. *Introduction*

All forms of literature are a reflection of the society of which the writer is a part. They mirror the author's particular culture even though a specific piece of literary work may make only a small portion of society its central focus or audience. This does not exclude "escapist" literature because culture determines the manner in which fantasies are developed and the form and direction which they take. Even "art for art's sake" and "dada" counter art movements can be viewed as being reflective of their societies or culture.

In the Philippines today many artists of all types, be they writers, actors, directors, or painters have become quite concerned with attempting to make their work "committed" and "relevant." Many of these more perceptive artists have taken a long hard look at their society and have come to some basic conclusions as to the whys and hows of its ills. As I see it, the main problem of contemporary Philippine society as perceived by these artists, is a combination of a search for a Filipino identity and the proper means for eliminating economic, social, and political inequalities dividing their countrymen.

In the immediate future the search for the proper methods to express commitment to the improvement or change of Philippine society through relevant literature will become even stronger. Committed literature as such will gain an increasingly important role in the realm of Philippine arts due to the felt need of contemporary artists to deal with the problem of present day Philippine society. This new sense of commitment is basically different from previous attempts of writers to deal with, understand, or explain Philippine society because:

"... after 1970, writers saw that while they were concerned with social problems, they had not seen the real causes of these problems. So committed literature differs from socially conscious stories in that it follows a certain ideological line in analyzing the Philippine experience."¹

¹ Bienvenido Lumbea, "Literature in Ferment," *The Philippine Collegian*, March 2, 1972, p. 4.

However, this does not negate other theories of literature for as Gemino Abad said in his article "The Criticism of Literature".

"... since critical statements are relative, we ought to regard the various theories of literature 'heuristically', that is, as useful techniques, each appropriate for different ends. We would then avoid the dogmatic stand that this or that theory of literature is the only valid one or the most adequate for any question that might be asked about a literary work."²

Yet, while many different forms of literary work have a function in society it seems that other roles for literature to fulfill will increasingly take a back seat to committed literature which follows an ideological line. What final ideological line the Filipino artist will choose in his analysis of Philippine society and in what medium and with what techniques he will choose to present his analysis to his public I do not feel competent to suggest. However, in my short study of the so-called seditious plays which were staged throughout the Philippines around the turn of this century I have gained two insights which I feel invaluable when presenting committed literature in at least its dramatic theatrical form.

These insights are: one, art grows out of the life of the people and therefore, if the artist wishes to be of assistance to his people and their intellectual growth and material welfare, he must communicate with them through that ill-defined folk culture which forms the whole basis of society. The closer to the people the artist can communicate his ideas, the better he will be understood and accepted. Two, this need to return to the grassroots of the people's culture will, by definition make irrelevant much of the artistic influences of alien cultures. However, foreign artistic forms and concepts need not be rejected outright. Foreign ideas, if carefully chosen and adopted to the local situation, can be of real value.

The seditious plays staged in the Philippines at the turn of the century had a definite commitment, that of expelling the American military government so that the Philippine revolutionary forces could resume power. The art form used to communicate this was of foreign origin but had been, through a process of acculturation adopted to the Philippine setting. The plays appealed to local audiences because they enjoyed the stories presented which were an accurate reflection of the workings of the real culture in both its positive and negative aspects.

² Gemino Abad, "The Criticism of Literature," *The Philippine Collegian*, March 2, 1972, p. 4.

Furthermore, the plays, by the use of more or less subtle techniques spoke eloquently of the people's desire for liberation from the new colonial ruler. Thus, this foreign theatre form which had been adopted to the Philippine culture and the necessities of the moment spoke to the people on two levels: the basic story plot which reflected either their real life or popularly idealized situations, on the one hand, and the underlying nationalistic appeals on the other.

The success of these plays can be gauged by their positive box office attraction among Filipino audiences and by the determined effort of the American authorities to put an end to this sort of "insidious" rebellion.

This paper is an attempt to learn more of the nature, extent, and use of the theatre by nationalistic writers at the turn of the century. To achieve this end we will look into the theater forms used, the biographies of some of the authors, the plays as staged, and the reaction to the plays on the part of the Filipinos themselves and their new ruler, the American government. From this exercise I hope we may see the value of writing for the people using stories based on their own lives and also how successful adoption of alien art forms can add greatly to the impact of communicated ideology. Perhaps such an inquiry will be of some benefit to concerned writers of the day who wish to make their commitment relevant and useful.

II. *Theatrical Forms in the Philippines*

The Filipino people have long been the recipients of aspects of foreign cultures which have often come in such massive doses that the average Filipino has good reason to wonder what has been developed by native intellect and in what ways have foreign art forms and ideas been assimilated into the culture. An answer to such a question would give the Filipino a clearer concept of what makes him "tick" and of what distinguishes him from other peoples. I cannot directly answer this question but in the field of drama I can state that the Filipino people have had dramatic forms of their own even before the Spaniards came.

Drama in the Philippines probably had its origins in ritualized ceremonies dealing with religious practice. This may be called dramatic art as there were definite characters, lines, and plots. Later, even during the Spanish colonial regime the population had its own dramatic

forms such as the *duplo* which was a farcical portrayal of local customs associated with both domestic and public life and the *karagatan* held during social get-togethers in which individual guests would be asked to make extemporaneous speeches revolving around amusing situations involving the group or some people in the group.³

Spanish priests added to the Philippine dramatic cultural heritage their own standards of drama which had a definite religious orientation. There were works like the *Panapatans* depicting the birth of Christ, the *Cenaculo*, presented during Lent which dealt with the suffering and resurrection of Christ, and, of course, the very popular *Pasion*.⁴

Later in the 17th century, Filipino and Spanish priests began to translate Spanish comedies into local dialects and these became known as *comedias* and later as *moro-moro* plays. Each play was a story of conflicts between Christian kings and nobles and Mohammedans. The struggle, which was spiced with a good deal of humor, always ended with a victory for the Christian rulers. Over a period of time the moros began to look more like Muslims from Mindanao and the fight scenes began to represent more closely battles between different groups of Filipinos rather than battles of Spaniards vs. North African or Middle Eastern moros.⁵ Yet, assimilation of Spanish religious plays was more profound than mere changes in dress and actions. Vicente Barrantes in his book *El Teatro Tagalo* as quoted by Quintina Daria observed that:

"The punctiliousness, the loyalty, the love and religiousness which abound in those comedies are genuinely Filipino without any of the unpalatableness of egoism and fierce fanaticism or the immorality and blasphemy which seemed to characterize their counterparts in the Spanish theatre of the 17th century;"⁶

Meanwhile, another theatrical form, which later became known as the *zarzuela*, had been developing in Spain. It was first known as the *Sainete* and to the dramatic action and dialogue were added music and dance. It was:

"... a brief comedy or farce, usually in one act, depicting scenes from popular or middle class life. The tone is humorous, ironical, or satirical, but no attempt is made at preaching or reforming manners. Plot is of less importance than humor of

³ Quintin Daria, "A Study of Severino Reyes as a Dramatist." (unpublished Master's Thesis, University of the Philippines, Diliman, Quezon City, 1954), pp. 17-18 and 21.

⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 19-20.

⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 21-22.

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 23.

situation and liveliness of dialogue. The characters, representing familiar types from lower classes, vary in number from two to twenty, and they talk and act in a perfectly natural manner. The majority of the Sainetes are simply *tranch de vie*, slightly exaggerated, that might be seen at anytime in cafes, squares, and market-places of a big city; occasionally they represent provincial life."⁷

Still later the introduction of Italian opera caused the demise of the "zarzuela grande," but a variation of the original which was not as extensive in production, the "zarzuela chico" did survive and it was this *zarzuela* form which eventually entered the Philippines.⁸

The *zarzuela* was first introduced into the Philippines in 1878 when the troupe of Dario Cespedes from Spain came to Manila. A year later Elisea Esguerra and Alejandro Cubero arrived in Manila to train local actors and to form their own troupe.* By 1893 the Zorrilla Theatre was opened to hold *zarzuela* productions thus indicating the enthusiasm with which the performances must have been greeted.⁹

However, even though the audience could enjoy the real life situations, thinly veiled social comments, and interspersed music and dance, issues which might have created a controversy over religious or political questions were carefully avoided in the dialogue. On October 4, 1839, the *Censura Previa*, a Royal Order to establish a censors commission in the Philippines had been issued and much later on October 7, 1856, a Superior Decree was promulgated pursuant to the Royal Order for the establishment of a Permanent Commission of Censors.¹⁰ With such a body inspecting artistic works any dissent would not have been tolerated in, at least, the early years of the history of the *zarzuela*.

The effect of the Philippine revolt against Spain was to liberate her authors from the repressive hand of censorship and the stifling atmosphere of Spanish rule. The *zarzuela* became the logical choice of dra-

⁷ Isagani R. Cruz, "The Zarsuela in the Philippines," *A Short History of Theater in the Philippines*, Isagani R. Cruz editor (No publisher or date given probably from the National Media Center as it was undertaken at the behest of the First Lady, Mrs. Imelda Marcos, copies available at the Cultural Center of the Philippines Library and at the University of the Philippines Library), pp. 124-125.

⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 127-128.

⁹ Daisy Hontiveros-Avellana, "Philippine Drama: A Social Protest," in *Brown Heritage: Essays on Philippine Cultural Traditions and Literature*, edited by Antonio G. Manuud, (Quezon City: Ateneo de Manila University Press, 1967), p. 670.

¹⁰ Teodoro Agoncillo, "The Development of Tagalog Language and Literature," *Fookien Times Yearbook*, (September, 1952), p. 79.

matists to use as a vehicle of protest. One of the leaders in writing patriotic and anti-Spanish *zarzuelas*, whose work *Walang Sugat* will be discussed later, was Severino Reyes. He realized the educational value of the zarzuela and together with other writers the *zarzuela* soon became a living newspaper which reported the events of the day and attacked the excesses of the Spaniards.¹¹

In April of 1902, Reyes staged his one act *zarzuela*, *Sumalangit Nawa* (R.I.P.), a parody on the moro-moro portraying it as a long-decayed corpse awaiting burial.¹² This play effectively symbolized the awakened Filipino spirit which now sought to spread ideas of independence from restraining aspects of the Spanish cultural influence, in particular, religious-oriented drama.

When the United States entered the war against Spain and collaborated with Aguinaldo, the hopes of the revolutionary forces were understandably high. The great American republic was coming to aid the nationalist Filipinos who were professing the ideas expressed in that egalitarian document, the Declaration of Independence. As events were soon to show, however, the difference between expressed ideals and actual practice is often great. The Treaty of Paris and McKinley's "Benevolent Assimilation Proclamation" of 21 December, 1898 extended American rule over the Philippines and military commanders were instructed to implement this policy.¹³ The effect of the American act of betrayal was crushing, coming as it did after the Filipino people had gotten a taste of freedom and a smell of victory. While American rule imposed controls over Philippine life, there did remain more avenues of expression and dissent open to the writer than had been known under Spanish rule. This factor, plus the newly promulgated law which outlawed the word "kasarinlan" which referred to Philippine independence greatly influenced Filipino writers to turn their *zarzuela* writing skills on the "bagong panginoon" or new lord.¹⁴

However, I should mention here that there seemed to be some doubt as to whether or not all the plays that have earned the label of

¹¹ Iluminada Magno, "A Critical Study of the Zarzuela in Pangasinan of Catalino Palisoc," (unpublished Master's Thesis, The University of the Philippines, Diliman, Quezon City, 1954), p. 9.

¹² Daria, *op. cit.*, p. 10.

¹³ Teodoro A. Agoncillo, and Oscar M. Alfonso, *History of the Filipino People* (Quezon City: Malaya Books, 1967), pp. 256-257.

¹⁴ Teodoro A. Agoncillo, "Pasulyap na Tingin sa Panitikang Tagalog, 1900-1950," *Philippine Studies*, Vol. 18 No. 2 (April, 1970), p. 230.

seditions were, in fact, *zarzuelas*. Eufronio Alip says that Aurelio Tolentino's work *Luhang Tagalog* (Tagalog Tears) was a play not a *zarzuela* and credits Tomas Remigio's *Malaya* (Free) with being a symbolic and patriotic play.¹⁵ Nicanor Tiongson of the Department of Filipino and Philippine Literature of the University of the Philippines claims that *Malaya*, *Tanikalang Guinto* (The Golden Chain) by Juan Abad, and even Aurelio Tolentino's *Kahapon, Ngayon, at Bukas* (Yesterday, Today and Tomorrow) were not, strictly speaking, *zarzuelas*, but were rather lyric plays or "mga dula sa berso,"¹⁶ Finally, one play which certainly does not fit the description of a *zarzuela* was Pedro A. Paterno's *Magdapi* (Fidelity Rewarded) which used mythical characters in a fantasy story to drive home its message.

III. *The Authors*

Whatever theatrical form, *zarzuela* or otherwise, was being used at the turn of the century to promote nationalism, there can be little doubt that each individual writer had made his own personal commitment to this cause. Throughout the country writers had first attacked the Spanish friars and government and also had spoken eloquently on behalf of patriotism. When the American government took control of the Philippines, writers continued their cries for patriotism and a growing number wrote works urging resistance by the people against the new masters. Although the line between a patriotic and a "subversive" play might sometimes be very hard to determine, some writers are most often cited as being subversive in their writings. The best known of these subversives are Juan Abad, Patricio Mariano, Juan Cruz Matapang, Pedro A. Paterno, Pascual H. Poblete. Tomas Remigio, Severino Reyes and Aurelio Tolentino, all of whom showed a commitment in their writings and personal lives. In order that we might better understand the thinking of the aware writers of this time period and the sacrifices they were willing to go through to deliver their thoughts to their fellow countrymen a short review of the biographies of some of these writers is now important. For this purpose we will choose four of the better known writers: Abad, Tolentino, Poblete, and Reyes.

Juan Abad who was born in Sampaloc, Manila, had a history of working for Philippine independence which first manifested itself in

¹⁵ Eufronio Melo Alip, *Tagalog Literature* (Manila: University of Santo Tomas Press, 1930), pp. 112 and 118.

¹⁶ Nicanor Tiongson in a private interview January 15, 1972.

1898 when he joined the staff of the newspaper *La Independencia*. His interests gradually turned him to the theater. On September 3, 1900 he staged his play *Mapanglaw na Pagka-alaala* (Sad Remembrance) at the Teatro Universal. This led to his first arrest and the discovery that he had not taken an oath of allegiance to the United States which all adult males were supposed to have done. His next play, *Manila-Olongapo*, was about his arrest, his imprisonment, and later exile to Olongapo. This did not daunt Abad and in 1903 his most famous play *Tanikalang Guinto* (the Golden Chain) opened in Batangas causing his second arrest. The judge of the Batangas Court of First Instance, Paul W. Linebarger, convicted Abad of sedition giving him a sentence of two years and a fine of \$2,000. While appealing this decision to a higher court, Abad, who was out on bail, wrote another play, *Isang Punlo ng Kaaway* (A bullet of the Enemy). After the Supreme Court had reversed the decision of the Batangas court, he staged this latest play at the Teatro Rizal in Malabon, Rizal on May 8, 1904 and was again arrested. These repeated molestations and the defeats of the revolutionary forces by American troops successfully frustrated him and he wrote no more.¹⁷

The story of Aurelio Tolentino is more involved but it is also much more interesting. Tolentino was born in Guagua, Pampanga on October 6, 1868. Upon finishing his schooling he worked as a clerk in Tondo where he met Andres Bonifacio and became introduced to the Propaganda Movement by helping to distribute *La Solidaridad*. He became a Mason and after the break-up of the *Liga Filipina* he became one of the earliest members of the katipunan after the formation of the first triangle. He had joined Emilio Jacinto, Andres Bonifacio, Faustino Mañalak and others in their trip to Pamitinan Cave in Montalban where the first demand for independence was made on 10 April 1895. He was arrested some two weeks after the outbreak of the revolution but was soon released. Upon being released, he joined General Aguinaldo and was one of the signatories to the Declaration of Philippine Independence at Kawit on June 12, 1898. He then went to the Bicol Region where he served General Vicente Lukban as *inspector de armas*.¹⁸

¹⁷ E. Arsenio Manuel, *Dictionary of Philippine Biography Volume I*, (Quezon City, Filipiniana Publications, 1955), pp. 1-5. See also Teodoro A. Agoncillo, and Oscar M. Alfonso, *History of the Filipino People* (Quezon City: Malaya Books, 1967), pp. 306-307.

¹⁸ E. Arsenio Manuel, *Dictionary of Philippine Biography Volume II*, (Quezon City, Filipiniana Publications, 1970), pp. 371-373.

With the outbreak of the Philippine-American war, he was named to the Filipino Commission which was to confer with the Schurman Commission about the question of peace. He became a staff writer for the newspaper *La Patria* and was arrested in November of 1899 for his writings, but was later released. He then tried starting his own paper *Filipinas* but this was soon stopped by the authorities because of the paper's political color.¹⁹ It was then that Tolentino seriously turned to what for him was a new form of ideology communication, the theater.

His first play, *Sinukuan*, was a symbolic *zarzuela* in three acts which had the downfall of the revolution as its main theme. His next work *Luhang Tagalog* was not actually seditious but did stir up the audience and "inspired thoughts of war and treason." The American authorities, by a policy of harassment and threats of arrests, managed to suppress its showing.²⁰

For his part Tolentino knew that while the Filipinos might not be a match for the American troops, the spirit of independence had to be kept alive. Because arrest would be imminent if his writings were too outspoken, he, as well as the others, realized that symbols would have to be used. His play *Kahapon, Ngayon, at Bukas* (Yesterday, Today, and Tomorrow) staged at the Libertad Theater** on May 14, 1903 went too far, however, in its condemnation of the American regime. Everyone in the theater was arrested and Tolentino was convicted of sedition and charged with 2 years imprisonment and a fine of \$2,000.²¹

The play was suppressed and the conviction of Tolentino sought because Enriquez Calderon, a former Spanish officer, objected that certain lines in the script which had been noted "Not To Be Used" were actually included in the production.²² However, the opening night performance showed more than ample evidence of the incendiary nature of the play. Tolentino's own part in the production included the ripping apart of the neck of a nipa eagle. Meanwhile, at another point in the play, the actors, who were dressed in appropriate colors, came together so that for a moment they collectively formed the Philippine

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 374.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 374-375.

²¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 376-377

²² Amelia Lapeña-Bonifacio, *The "Seditious" Tagalog Playwrights: Early American Occupation* (Manila: Zarzuela Foundation of the Philippines, Inc., 1972), p. 15.

flag.²³ Before the play was finished fifteen or twenty Americans in the audience, being unable to control themselves, leaped upon the stage smashing scenery and furniture thereby creating a serious riot which made for the immediate cause of the arrests.²⁴

While free on bail he joined his old friend Artemio Ricarte in Palomar, Tondo on about the 5th or 6th of January 1904 and advised him that his planned uprising using only knives and bamboo lances which had been effective against the Spaniards would pose no threat to the American soldiers. Still later when Ricarte's other plan to lead an uprising vanguarded by some old friends of his who were then members of the Ilocos Constabulary failed, Tolentino again joined him. This was on February 9, 1904. Two days later, when people sent by Macario Sakay met with Ricarte and Tolentino, it seems that Tolentino had already been named as dictator by Ricarte for the revolutionary government they were planning to set up. These delusions of grandeur did not remain long and soon Ricarte and Tolentino wrote a petition to Governor-General Wright asking to be included in the amnesty of July 1902. Wright never answered and the two revolutionaries soon went their separate ways each to be arrested after not too long a time.²⁵

Tolentino was incarcerated in 1904 with a sentence of life imprisonment but had his sentence gradually reduced to eight years and finally in 1912 Governor-General Forbes granted him pardon.²⁶

Rather than the story of an intransigent radical like Tolentino the life of Pascual H. Poblete seems more typical. He was born in Naic, Cavite in 1857 and from 1888 until 1896 he founded a number of newspapers voicing the desire for a liberal government. In 1896 he was sent to Spain as a prisoner but upon his return he became active again.²⁷ Turning his attention to the new American regime he wrote *zarzuelas* in addition to his newspaper activities.

His *zarzuela*, *Pagibig Sa Lupang Tinubuan* (Love for One's Native Land), was severely censored and became the subject of extended litigation in 1900. When it was finally shown it was still quite potent

²³ Arthur Stanley Riggs, "The Drama of the Filipinos," *Journal of American Folklore*, Vol. 17, No. 67, (October-December, 1904), p. 285.

²⁴ Bonifacio, *op. cit.*, p. 27.

²⁵ *Memoirs of General Artemio Ricarte* (Manila: National Heroes Commission, 1963), pp. 127-130.

²⁶ Teodoro A. Agoncillo and Oscar M. Alfonso, *op. cit.*, p. 307.

²⁷ Hector K. Villarroel and others, *Eminent Filipinos* (Manila: National Historical Commission, 1965), pp. 211-212.

and Poblete and his producer Melencio de Leon were imprisoned but were later released by General Otis.²⁸ Poblete kept up his spirit, however, and became one of the founders of the Aglipayan Church, the Nacionalista Party, and the first labor union in the Philippines.²⁹

Finally, we will look at the life of Severino Reyes who we have already noted as the leading exponent of the *zarzuela*. His plays, unlike those of the above authors, were not actually seditious but were very patriotic. Thus Reyes is more representative of the majority, although not the most progressive, of Philippine playwrights.

Reyes was born in Santa Cruz, Manila on February 11, 1861. He was arrested on the charge of being a Mason when the revolution broke out in 1896, but was soon able to escape. He did not fight during the war but started his *zarzuela* career writing plays in support of nationalism. They gained immediate acceptance and he became a very popular writer.³⁰

Two of his patriotic plays were *Filipinas para los Filipinos* (The Philippines for the Filipinos) and *La Venta de Filipina al Japon* (The Sale of the Philippines to Japan). In the latter play one character suggests that the Americans will abandon the Philippines to Japan and then a Filipino patriot ends the play with a speech about freedom.³¹

Reyes' play *Walang Sugat* (Not Wounded) has been a subject of contention as to what the message of the play really was. For example, Tiongson, of the University of the Philippines' Department of Filipino claims that *Walang Sugat* was a comical anti-Spanish farce and not a serious anti American drama.³² His point is well taken as the play is set in the last years of the Spanish regime and the manuscript of the play doesn't indicate any particular anti-American bent. However, Bonifacio points out how this analysis can be deceiving because *Walang Sugat*, and some other works, to be properly classified should be known as *Chameleon Plays*. The *Chameleon Play* requires only a simple alteration of costume, scenery, or make-up to completely change the play's object of derision.³³ Thus, *Walang Sugat* which was

²⁸ Teofilo del Castillo, *A Brief History of Philippine Literature* (Manila: Progressive School books, 1937), pp. 210 and 228.

²⁹ Villaruel, *op. cit.*, p. 212.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 227-228.

³¹ Avellana, *op. cit.*, p. 672.

³² Tiongson Interview.

³³ Bonifacio, *op. cit.*, pp. 30-31 and 35-36.

originally an anti-Spanish work became anti-American due to the need of the cause of Philippine independence.

Reyes wrote these and other plays to increase Philippine national pride and to develop a real national theater but did not go to the extremes taken by Abad, Tolentino, Poblete, and others so as to encourage the wrath of the American government. Thus, we can see that he was perhaps not as fervent in his methods and approach to achieving Philippine national independence as these others were, but what is more important is that he, as well as the more militant writers, used the same sorts of story plots and worked his messages into the plot in the same manner as the "subversives." Each writer used a common style of writing because the people would be attracted to the play's content and would accept its ideas only if presented by the use of symbols and *double entendre* familiar to them.

IV. *The Spread of Seditious Plays*

When considering the impact of Philippine committed drama during the first years of American rule it is important to look to those areas lying outside of the direct influence of Manila. All of the writers so far mentioned were born and raised in Manila, Central Luzon, or in the general area known as the Southern Tagalog region. Abad's play *Tanikalang Guinto* was shown in Batangas which is in the southern Tagalog region and the other plays were produced in either Manila proper or in what is now known as Rizal province. Did this form of committed drama have influence outside of this Tagalog area? Some writers seem to think not.

Isagani Cruz in his article *A Short History of Theater in the Philippines*, says that Tagalog *zarzuela* writers were more revolutionary because they viewed themselves as being "creative writers of literature". Writers in the other provinces, meanwhile, were more concerned with attracting large audiences and doing well at the "box office".³⁴ Later he states that "Political theater flourished in Manila; it did not flourish in any real sense in any other part of the Philippines."³⁵ How true is this view?

If we think of the spread of culture, politics, economic programs in the Philippines, we will notice that Manila has almost always been in

³⁴ Cruz, *op. cit.*, p. 142.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 151.

the forefront. Almost everything new begins in or enters through this "primate" city. It is therefore logical to expect that this dramatic movement reached its most complete and fullest form in Manila. Furthermore, because the American government acted swiftly to stifle this heresy, once it had been brought to their attention, there was possibly little opportunity to transmit seditious plays in their most radical state to provinces outside of Manila's direct influence. Yet, the question remains as to whether this movement was completely stopped from entering other areas.

I think it can be said without too much hesitation that, while not disregarding the bravery and valiant efforts of the Filipino revolutionary forces, the American government was fairly successful in quickly establishing their rule over the country. However, to say that this theater gained popularity only in and around Manila denies the fact that Filipinos in other areas of the country might not also have empathized with and appreciated the messages of patriotism, freedom, and anti-Americanism inherent in many of these plays. To say that this spirit did not exist in non-Tagalog areas lends credence to the view that the revolution was instigated and pursued solely by and for the Tagalog "tribe". Also, to make categorical statements about the extent of the "seditious" plays is very premature since there seems to be little real knowledge even now of what drama was being produced at the time. Currently some instructors connected with the Department of English at the University of the Philippines are collecting works that were staged in places like Cebu and Iloilo during the early period of American rule and are discovering much previously unknown material.

Lilia Realubit, in her Master's thesis on popular drama in Bikol, found that when Alejandro Cubero's *zarzuela* troupe broke up in 1892 some of the actors came to Naga to spread the theatrical form there. It never became extremely popular because of the popularity of a local theater form the *Veladas* and because of the essential conservatism of the capital which was under heavy priestly influence. The residents taking the pastoral letter of 1886 seriously thought that *zarzuelas* were not for Catholic eyes and ears. Even in places in the Bikol region which permitted *zarzuela* productions the development of scripts in the vernacular was retarded because of the abundance of Spanish actors.³⁶ How-

³⁶ Lilia Maria Fuentebella Realubit, "A Study of the Popular Drama in Bikol," (unpublished Master's thesis, the University of the Philippines, Diliman, Quezon City, 1961), pp. 121-126.

ever, during the revolt, the situation began to change and some local plays such as Timoteo Ortile's works which were both fiercely anti-Spanish and patriotic, were produced.³⁷

Later, during the American regime, some patriotic and semi-seditious plays were written such as *Pinapagtios sa Pirit* (Forced to Suffer) written by Eustaquio Diño, the former editor of the "Herald Bicol," in which the girl Didang (representing the Philippines) is forced by her parents to marry a man (representing America) she did not want.³⁸ In Sorsogon, Sorsogon, Asisclo Jimenez wrote a number of plays some of which were quite nationalistic such as *Ang Pagkamoot Asin na Balos* (Love and its Rewards) and *Pagkamoot sa Banuang Tinoboan* (Love for the Motherland).³⁹

Illuminada Magno has analyzed the works of the Pangasinan author Catalino Palisoc and found that many of them stress patriotism.⁴⁰ Also, Jay Javillonar has noted that Proceso Pabalan in his *Apat Ya Ing Junio* stressed the need to keep alive the idea of and the search for freedom "especially in a subdued suffering nation".⁴¹ And finally, Bonifacio has noted that the "seditious" play *Ang Katipunan* (The Katipunan) by Gabriel Beato Francisco was staged in Laoag, Ilocos Norte as late as February 21, 1905.⁴²

In addition to all this, Arthur S. Riggs, who was a correspondent and daily newspaper editor in Manila from 1902-1904, tells us that after the play *Hindi Ako Patay* (I Am Not Dead) was suppressed and its author arrested, "copies of the play, painfully written in longhand, circulated throughout the province"⁴³ In fact, Riggs was quite certain of the widespread appearance of seditious plays and stated that they were, "acted throughout the provinces of Luzon, Samar, and other large islands".⁴⁴ Of how many plays this was true, we cannot say, but certainly people far from Manila might have witnessed some of the best of the seditious plays.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 132.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 137.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 143-144 and pp. 153-154.

⁴⁰ Magno, *op. cit.*, p. 38.

⁴¹ Ely V. Javillonar, "The Significance of Mariano Proceso Pabalan in Capampangan Dramatic Literature," (unpublished Master's Thesis, University of the Philippines, Diliman, Quezon City, 1961), p. 77.

⁴² Bonifacio, *op. cit.*, p. 24.

⁴³ Arthur S. Riggs, "Seditious Drama in the Philippines," *Current History*, Vol. 20 No. 116 (April, 1951), pp. 202 and 207.

⁴⁴ Riggs, *The Drama of the Filipinos*, p. 284.

In the light of these facts and the absence of complete data it doesn't seem fair to state that outside of Manila playwrights would be unaware of or unsympathetic to nationalism. Manila was the most advanced in regards to seditious plays but she was certainly not the sole reservoir of nationalism. Plays presented in the provinces may not have been as strident as Manila presentations, but there were writers dealing with the subject and audiences who appreciated their efforts. The reaction of the American government and of individual American citizens supports this view and shows that drama as a vehicle for agitation and social protest was both commonplace and widespread.

V. *The American Reaction*

In the preceding sections we have investigated the probable extent to which both the comparatively mild patriotic play and the radical seditious play were written and produced. We found the extent of radical and seditious productions to be quite impressive and from this fact we might presume that they continually met a receptive audience. To confirm this presumption I would like to quote some observations made by a man who although quite racist, was nonetheless a witness to this period of Philippine drama, the aforementioned Arthur S. Riggs. He said:

"Who of us Americans has ever dared arrest and jail to see a play, however lurid? The Filipinos did that again and again. At times entire towns made up the audience. In more than one instance, also, it was suspected that local detachments of police or constabulary were secretly sympathetic."⁴⁵

The reason he credited for the interest in this form of entertainment was that:

"... the Filipino had been tricked into believing that independence was a sacred natural right,"⁴⁶

this was easy because,

"... the illiterate native psychology is of a mixed oriental nature,"⁴⁷

and those fooling the masses and producing those plays were,

"... a fifth column of saboteurs who strove to drive all Americans into the sea for the sake of their own personal benefit and glorification."⁴⁸

⁴⁵ Riggs, "Seditious Drama in the Philippines," p. 204.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 203.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 202.

⁴⁸ *Loc. cit.*

Riggs sent copies of two "seditious" plays plus the "relatively harmless" *Magdaspio* to his friend Dr. Albert Ernest Jenks, Chief of the Ethnological Survey of the Islands, who as an "official opinion" wrote back to him that:

"I am glad to have seen these plays, because now I know the Filipino character better than before . . . They show the pitiful shallowness of the native mind, and its lack of inventiveness. . . They are puerile and weak, where one would most naturally look for something strong and essentially virile."⁴⁹

John Foreman, another observer, noting how the plays were so openly presented in front of the authorities couldn't quite understand why the revolutionary writers would try such tactics and wrote off the phenomena as "... one of those mysteries which the student of native philosophy must fail to solve."⁵⁰

Yet, the native mind was not as mysterious as Foreman believed because for quite some time the Filipino playwright had been able to stage his "puerile and weak" plays right under the very nose of the American military government. There were many reasons why such a situation could have taken place, the most obvious being the language barrier. As well, the Americans scorned the native's concept of drama and were put off from attending Filipino productions held in playhouses of dubious quality. Instead, the American rulers imported their own forms of entertainment directly from the mother country. And finally, the Filipinos and their mestizo friends kept up a wall of silence as to the real nature of these plays until the earlier mentioned Calderon at last blew the whistle on them.⁵¹

Once the situation was fully realized the military government assumed the duty of suppressing seditious drama as part of its campaign of "pacification". Brigadier General Henry T. Allen as the Chief of the Constabulary, was put in charge of this activity and he noted that:

"Tagalo (sic) dramas of a highly seditious nature were produced at first in Manila, subsequently in the provinces, under the auspices of said party (he was referring to the fledgling Nacionalista Party which staged a number of *zarzuelas* during their formative years so as to gain attention and public sympathy). Partially veiled meanings of the dialogue were supple-

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 204

⁵⁰ John Foreman, *The Philippine Islands*, (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1906), pp. 553-554.

⁵¹ Bonifacio, *op. cit.*, pp. 1-2.

mented by the stage setting, and double entendres were freely resorted to."⁵²

Obviously, this conspiracy had to be stopped.

In the provinces, the American military government sometimes used the heavy hand of totalitarian suppression to stop these plays. On October 24 of 1899 a *zarzuela* troupe which had been started in Bikol under the auspices of no less than the *gobernadorcillo*, Don Hugo de la Torre, staged a performance at the Legaspi town fiesta. This was to be the last such production to be held for as soon as American troops arrived, this dramatic form was seen no more and the troupe eventually broke up.⁵³ As we have already seen, nationalistic playwriting was not completely stopped in the Bikol Region, but such repression obviously presented a serious obstacle to the growth of committed drama in the area.

This strategy could not be resorted to in Manila and many other areas. Police authorities had to allow the presentation to go on and content themselves with finding and suppressing only those plays which were truly "seditious".

General Allen had a very difficult job because plays could be staged under a false and innocuous title thus deceiving the authorities as to its real content. When a play was found to be "seditious" the police had to act quickly so as to stop the production and arrest the "guilty parties".⁵⁴ Later the court case had to be constructed and handled with great care so that convictions could be gained.

This latter aspect of police work must have been a particular problem to the authorities for as we have seen in the discussion of individual authors; Juan Abad's conviction for staging *Tanika'ang Guinto* was reversed by the Supreme Court, Aurelio Tolentino was only threatened but not arrested for producing *Luhang Tagalog*, and General Otis, himself, felt compelled to release Pascual Poblete after his arrest for showing *Pag-ibig Sa Lupang Tinubuan*. The fact that convictions could not always be gained in these cases which involved some of what are often considered the more seditious of this period's dramatic works shows the skill of writing that the authors had mastered which communicated the "committed" message but which also made a conviction based on the Sedition Law very difficult to obtain.

⁵² Manuel, *Dictionary of Philippine Biography Volume II, op. cit.*, p. 378.

⁵³ Realubit, *op. cit.*, p. 129.

⁵⁴ Riggs, *op. cit.*, p. 204.

Even the new Americanized school system in its attempt to change Filipino thinking attacked Filipino drama. The policy was that drama was only to be used as a means of learning English and for such a purpose it should be read but not seen.⁵⁵ Realubit noted that even as late as about 1922 or 1923, according to an informant, when a *zarzuela* was scheduled to be shown in Naga the American school teachers there were successful in banning it.⁵⁶

Thus, we can see that the sentiments of individual Americans and those in authority in both the military and civilian branches of the American government were quite negative in regards to the "seditious" drama presentations. Furthermore, the American military forces were engaged in an active campaign to suppress these productions and while they were often frustrated by the courts we have noted that the authorities were successful in cutting short the playwriting career of many a seditious writer.

To have a clear idea of the techniques used by these artists so that we might better understand why the plays were so powerful, disregarding Riggs above stated opinion, it is necessary that we now look at the plays themselves and their manner of production.

VI. *The Seditious Plays*

The first play we will review is *Kahapon, Ngayon at Bukas* by Aurelio Tolentino. By looking in depth at this play we can see some of the techniques used to incite the passions of the audience.

In this play, as in almost all the others, even the very names of the characters had a double meaning. The names and their translations and significance are as follows:⁵⁷

<i>Tagalog</i>	<i>Translation and Definition</i>	<i>Significance</i>
Inangbayan	Mother Country	Philippines
Dilatnabulag	Blind one with her eyes open	Spain
Bagongsibol	New comer-intruder	America
Masunurin	Very Obedient	Filipina girl
Taga-ilog	People of the river	Tagalog people
Matanglawin	Hawk eyes	Spanish government

⁵⁵ Cruz, *op. cit.*, p. 155.

⁵⁶ Realubit, *op. cit.*, p. 186.

⁵⁷ Ricarte *Memoirs, op. cit.*, pp. 191-192.

<i>Tagalog</i>	<i>Translation and Definition</i>	<i>Significance</i>
Malaynatin	The one we know	American government
Asalhayop	Beastly	Tagalog traitor
Dahumpalay	A Venomous snake	Tagalog traitor
Haring-bata	Young King	Chinese King
Halimaw	Lion	Friar
Walangtutol	Without objection to orders	Filipino countrymen

The synopsis of the play goes like this:⁵⁸

Act I. YESTERDAY. — Period prior to the arrival of the Spaniards in these islands. From the day that the Chinese took Balintawak the anniversary of that day has been celebrated as a day of mourning, but Asalhayop has a feast and has dishonored this day of mourning. Inangbayan has given them advice, and not having succeeded in dissuading them she told them to continue celebrating the feast over the tombs of their ancestors who had died to defend the people. Tagailog arrived and invited all to take up arms to redeem the country from the power of Haring-Bata who had reduced it to subjection. Asalhayop informed Haring-Bata of this for the purpose of serving the enemy but when Inangbayan denounced Asalhayop's treachery to Tagailog the latter ordered that Asalhayop be burned alive. Then the battle commenced; Haring-Bata was killed, and the people triumphed. Dilatnabulag arrived together with Matanglawin; they told Inangbayan and Tagailog that the Tagalog armies would fight against them, and offered to aid them in their peril. This they swore, and in order to solemnize the oath, Tagailog and Matanglawin each drank of the other's blood from a golden cup.

Act II. TODAY. — The present time. All the people appear kneeling before Dilatnabulag, Halimaw and Matanglawin, and all offer their wealth except Tagailog. When told that he must offer his wealth as the others did he threw before Dilatnabulag the money which he offered. He was immediately imprisoned. Dahumpalay advises or urges Dilatnabulag that Tagailog be shot, but Matanglawin orders that he be liberated. Halimaw visits Tagailog in prison in order to insult him. An order arrives to set Tagailog free. Halimaw received the order and hid it and did not put Tagailog at liberty. Halimaw called Inangbayan and her daughters and despoiled them of their jewels, offering to liberate Tagailog. Tagailog discovered that the one who had betrayed him was Dahumpalay, and his face was burned so that it might not be recognized; Tagailog put on Dahumpalay's clothes, exchanging his own for them, and taking the pass of the dead man left the prison without being recognized by anyone. Dilatnabulag and Matanglawin entered the prison with the idea of ordering that Tagailog be shot. Upon seeing the dead body of Dahumpalay they thought the corpse was that

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, pp 190-191.

of Tagailog who had committed suicide. Immediately a rumor was spread that Tagailog was dead, and simultaneously a report that his spirit commanded a big army. Halimaw ordered that Inangbayan be buried alive. The revolution against Matanglawin began and Tagailog was victorious. The grave where Inangbayan was buried opened and she came forth immediately, not dead, but on the contrary, reincarnated and with more glorious life than before. Thereupon Bagongsibol and Malaynatin arrived and united themselves to Inangbayan and Tagailog, promising to be true friends.

Act III. TOMORROW. — The future. The hearts of the good and the bad have united in order to upraise the people. Inangbayan and her daughters were sewing the flag of the people which they will float as soon as the new moon appears. Tagailog asks Malaynatin to give independence to the people. Malaynatin does not agree, and later falls asleep and dreams, and in his dreams it appears to him that a great misfortune will come to him. Tagailog organizes some air ships, cannons and guns with electric bullets, trenches and movable fortifications as well as the army which he has organized and said that the countersign and signal were as follows: when he raises the blue light, it will be the signal that the flag waves in the town; if the light which follows is red it is a signal that Malaynatin has agreed to give independence. The hour arrived; the signal was given and the flag was hoisted. Bagongsibol and Malaynatin arrive and Inangbayan asks them to grant her independence which she desires, but Bagongsibol does not agree to it. Inangbayan shows her the thousands of men who form Tagailog's army, but in spite of all this Bagongsibol does not consent. Immediately there appear boys and girls who prostrate themselves before Bagongsibol and ask independence for the people. Bagongsibol is unable to deny this request, and kindly grants the desired independence for which she is cheered and Inangbayan and Malaynatin and Tagailog are hailed with honor.

In addition to the names of the dramatic characters and the general plot, Tolentino added a number of different techniques to heighten his message's impact.⁵⁹

Tolentino did not seek to instruct the public by the use of purely figurative language but filled his drama with political phrases seething with sedition, rebellion, and insurrection and it is only necessary to know the definition and significance of the respective characters to arrive at a complete understanding of the meaning of the author. In the second act in which Aurelio Tolentino took the part of Tagailog, it was represented that the chief of the Filipinos was a ghost, and that a ghost could not be killed or conquered: that America and the American government were molesting Spain and her government, and that if America and the American government sided with the ghost of the Filipino people, Spain and the Spanish government would fall

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*

without fail; that the American government told the Philippine people that the Filipinos with their own forces could not dominate Spain and the Spanish government, and as Spain had been America's enemy the Filipinos were asked to help to fight the Spaniards, and the Filipinos and Americans agreed to help each other. The Philippine people were represented as being victorious over Spain and as persecuting the friars; that the Philippine people demanded of the friars the whereabouts of Inangbayan (Mother Country), meaning the Philippine Islands, and that the friar showed where he had buried her, and the Philippine people pulled her out of the grave; whereupon a rising sun appeared from behind mountain peaks painted on the scenery of the stage decorations, and the mother country thereupon declared, "Now that my sons will live while the world lasts, have confidence that so long as I shall produce flowers without end and flowers of the most beautiful liberty;" and she then ordered that the friars, Spain and the Spanish government be buried alive in the grave where they had buried her; whereupon these three characters were pushed into the open grave, there being a hole in the floor of the stage representing a grave.

In Act 3 it was represented that the Philippine Islands ordered America and the American government to leave the Filipinos alone and not to disturb them in their exclusive liberty, accompanied by the threat that if America and the American people impede or disturb the exclusive liberty of the Philippine Islands the blood of the people will run in torrents, and in that case America and the American government will have to respond before the creator for the lives which are lost and for the orphans who will be at the mercy of death. America replied, "It cannot be."

Thereupon the children appeared and knelt before the character representing America and said: "This is the record of our unhappy country. We offer it to thee that thou mayest be acquainted with the history of our fathers." Then they placed the book in Bagongsibol's hands from which it fell, and where it fell there appeared, as if by magic, a banner or flag like the one Inangbayan (Philippine Islands) was carrying, and which was, by manipulation of a wire, drawn across the stage, accompanied by the words "Mabuhay ang Bayan" (Long live the people).

The play *Hindi Ako Patay* by Juan Cruz Matapang as reported by Foreman utilized many of the same techniques. However, his plot, unlike Tolentino's highly politicized story, has more mass appeal in that it uses a love story filled with rivalry and deceit as its basis. Foreman describes the play as follows:

"Maimbot (personifying America) is establishing dominion over the islands, assisted by his son Macamcam (American Government) and Katuiran (Reason, Right, and Justice) is called upon to condemn the conduct of a renegade Filipino who has accepted America's dominion, and thereby became an outcast among his own people and even his own

family. There is to be a wedding, but, before it takes place, a funeral cortege passes the house of Karangalan (the bride) with the body of Tanguan (the fighting patriot). Maimbot (America) exclaims, "Go, bury that man, that Karangalan and her mother may see him no more." Tanguan, however, rising from his coffin, tells them, "They must not be married, for I am not dead." And as he cries *Hindi Ako Patay*, ("I am not dead,") a radiant sun appears, rising above the mountain peaks, simultaneously with the red flag of Philippine liberty. Then Katuiran (Reason, Right, and Justice) declares that "Independence has returned," and goes on to explain that the new insurrection having discouraged America in her attempt to enslave the people, she will await a better opportunity. The flag of Philippine Independence is then waved to salute the sun which has shone upon the Filipinos to regenerate them and cast away their bondage."⁶⁰

Juan Abad's play *Tanikalang Guinto* is very similar in this respect, but its ending is not on such a happily expectant note as is *Hindi Ako Patay*.

"The Golden Bracelet in many ways is a common place theme, somewhat reminiscent of older plays like *Malaya*, but quickened, by a touch of bitter farce at the final curtain and by the introduction of a parrot as a spy. Liwanag, the heroine, is the daughter of Maimbot, who represents the American government. She wishes to marry the loyal Filipino Kaulayao, whom Maimbot disapproves of for obvious reasons. Nag-tapon, the inevitable traitor, who eventually proves to be Kaulayao's own brother, is in Maimbot's pay, and the action develops through a long series of stratagems and frustrations. In Act II Maimbot gives his daughter a golden bracelet to distract her attention from her loyalist lover, and to bribe her to agree to his plans to "enslave" the Filipinos. Before the unreal medley is over, Maimbot tries unsuccessfully twice to kill her, and is prevented once by nightmare spirits, once by a miraculously appearing angel. Kaulayao is shot by his traitorous brother, and dies. Liwanag also dies, and is shown at last riding a cloud into heaven and bidding farewell to Kaulayao, to whom she will return when she has circled the universe and Nag-tapon is dead. On the stage Nag-tapon laughs bitterly and exclaims that he is immortal. This last is a touch indicating the hand of an expert dramatist, for it suggests that evil and its forces are immortal, while peace and independence can never emancipate any people until traitors are converted."⁶¹

Finally, we come to Pedro A. Paterno's play *Magdapio* which was quite different from the above three. Paterno did not use a directly, politically motivated historical plot as did Tolentino or a story based on

⁶⁰ Foreman, *op. cit.*, p. 554.

⁶¹ Riggs, *op. cit.*, p. 206.

the problems of Philippine romance. Instead Paterno wrote a mythologically oriented love story which leaned heavily on the use of allegory. A description of the story which was translated into English and privately published by General Allen in 1903 goes something like this:⁶²

ACT I. The Aetas are in possession of a sacred mountain *Magdapio* which according to legend has a beautiful girl and her father living inside it. The Malays believe that because the mountain contains this girl and many fine jewels it should belong to them and not the Aetas. A battle is fought to determine the future ownership of the valuable mountain and the girl inside.

ACT II. The mountain splits open and Mapalad the chief of the Aetas and a number of his men come to see the girl who is named *Magdapio* after the mountain and her father Botokan. Love between *Magdapio* and Mapalad immediately develops and marriage plans are made even though there is great danger from the unvanquished Malays. Due to the danger from the Malays a marriage ceremony is quickly performed and as soon as the newlyweds are about to leave, a number of arrows are shot onto the stage. Mapalad and Botokan are wounded, *Magdapio* faints, and the Malays come onto the stage and carry off *Magdapio* and Mapalad.

ACT III. In the camp of the Malays somewhere near Laguna de Bay the Malay warriors and their chief, King Bay, are celebrating the victory. Bay tries to take *Magdapio* for his own, but reviving from her state of confusion and fainting spell, she fights him off. Because of his anger at being rejected Bay has Mapalad thrown into the sea to be eaten by alligators. Heartbroken, *Magdapio* jumps in after him gladly accepting the same fate.

ACT IV. On the bottom of Laguna de Bay lives the god Baguio who is seated on his throne. An alligator brings the body of *Magdapio* to him and places her at his feet. The good and wise god Baguio questions *Magdapio* and learning of her faithfulness makes her Queen of the Oriental Sea.

In all of these plays the real situation was never directly dealt with and America was never named outright because arrest would have been immediately forthcoming. The strategy was to use a presumably innocuous sounding plot but to fill the production with a number of double meanings, revolutionary symbols, and allegorical situations ren-

⁶² Castillo *op. cit.*, p. 197.

dering the real purpose of the play explicit to only the native audience. The story plot which was superficially similar to many non-political productions but which used these stories to introduce an ideological message of nationalism had a great appeal to the local audiences which may not have understood or appreciated a more direct ideological approach.

The seditious plays were also used to communicate very direct warnings to would-be "Americanistas". One play, *Ang Kalayaang Hindi Natupad* (The Freedom That Has Not Been Obtained), promised all traitors that they would be buried alive. Meanwhile, the play *Pulong Pinaglahuan* (The Eclipsed Island) asked the traitors how they could accept positions in government from the invader while their brothers were in the mountains fighting for freedom, and vowed not to let a foreign power and its local lackeys make slaves of the people again.⁶³

Perhaps so as to be sure that the audience understood the play's message it was quite common for one of the actors to make a rousing speech at the end of the performance as was mentioned above in connection with Reyes' play *La Venta de Filipinas al Japon*. This was not a new technique because the *zarzuela* traditionally had a speech for its conclusion which restated the moral message of the play. However, the eulogy of the seditious play is quite unique.

"... these speeches were delivered extemporaneously, the speakers, depending on how strongly they were inspired and goaded on by the cheering audiences, became quite impassioned in their tirades against the U.S. and their countrymen who have turned traitors to the cause of independence."⁶⁴

Yet, the Filipino playwright did not limit his imagination to the lines of the play. He also made effective use of his stage props. A number of these devices such as Tolentino's nipa eagle, his flag colored actors, a rising sun which represented the Katipunan, a hole-in-the-stage grave, a slogan-bearing banner pulled across the stage by a wire, red flags, and the hero riding to heaven on a cloud have been mentioned above but should again be noted. The Filipino playwright used each of these, and more, devices to present non-verbal symbolisms which effectively heightened the meaning and dramatic impact of his work and, sometimes, to facilitate the transformation of an anti-Spanish play into an anti-American one.

⁶³ Bonifacio, *op. cit.*, p. 17.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 29.

It almost need not be mentioned that the mere fact that the audience could identify with and become involved in the story tends to show the assimilation that foreign theatrical forms, mainly the *zarzuela*, had undergone. Native dramatic art forms had been heavily influenced by an influx of alien ideas and forms but had in turn adopted these forms by injecting Philippine stories and situations based on local values. By presenting stories based on these values and injecting allegorical parallels concerning Philippine independence, these forms had been successfully remoulded and integrated into Philippine culture and at the same time and because of this, the theater had become a powerful tool for ideological use because issues integrated into stories based on Philippine values became meaningful and real to the common *tao*. The characters looked, talked, and acted like real people possessing human qualities and faults. The virginal young maiden might be forced or influenced to consider the rich alien as a future mate but ultimately she made her decision based upon what was right and good, i.e., the true love she felt for her faithful and ardent boy-next-door suitor.

VII. *Summary and Conclusion*

The Filipino people had a rudimentary form of theater even before the arrival of the first colonizers. This theater may not have been the sophisticated and polished drama which we of the twentieth century conceptualize as being the legitimate stage, but it was nonetheless theater. This theater fulfilled the needs of the people and was based on their culture's values, norms, and mythology.

The arrival of the Spaniards introduced not only a new form of government but also new values, norms, and myths and communicated these new concepts, in part, through Spanish (and therefore new and alien) dramatic forms. The result of this cultural influx was an increase of Philippine social complexity and at the same time a modification of these foreign concepts and art forms so that they could be assimilated into the framework of the local culture.

However, the stability of the state wherein Spaniards ruled over Filipinos was far from complete and satisfactory. Antagonisms built up between the two groups which finally erupted in 1896. In addition to bolos and guns the Philippine revolutionaries used subtle weapons such as short stories, novels, newspapers, and plays to free their country from Spanish rule. Although it seems very likely that many different forms

of plays were presented there seems to be little doubt that the majority of plays used against foreign colonialists were *zarzuelas*.

This form of dramatic art was particularly useful to the revolutionists for a number of reasons. First, the story plots, unlike religious plays, were based on the lives of common people and were presented as naturally acted out stories using everyday speech and dress. Second, the situations encountered and the problems dealt with were familiar to the audience and the production was spiced with entertaining songs and dances. And finally, the *zarzuela* presented thinly veiled comments and socially relevant pronouncements in relation to the plot which was in turn based on social, religious, and political issues of the day which directly concerned the audience.

Before the outbreak of the hostilities, Philippine authors had been reading works by Spanish authors such as Zorrilla, Calderon de la Barca, Benavente, and others and had been able to improve their writing techniques.⁶⁵ Once *zarzuela* techniques were synthesized into the context of Philippine culture they might have become a powerful weapon of social reform but the heavy hand of Spanish censorship negated the realization of this potential role.

By breaking the bond of censorship the revolution became a catalytic force to a period of Philippine literature which saw a great deal of creative effort blossom forth where formerly there had been only occasional and limited glimpses of Filipino creativity. However, the topic of this paper was not an examination of this particular phase of the history of Philippine literature, but of the period immediately following the early years of American occupation. The excesses of the Spanish government and religious orders were not completely forgotten by then but the focus of this time period became completely unified under the ideology of patriotism and nationalism and therefore anti-Americanism. Hence, much of the literature of these years was in a real sense, totally committed.

Many plays were written during the first years of this century which attacked the new American regime and while we have not had the time to analyze but a very few of them, we have had the opportunity to discover the manner in which many were produced. Radical anti-American authors used the common *zarzuela* format and injected double

⁶⁵ Agoncillo, "Pasulyap na Tingin sa Panitikang Tagalog", *op. cit.*, p. 231.

entendres, revolutionary symbols, and meaningful allegory. The basic story plot was kept simple and was used to increase the impact of the double meanings because underlying messages were clarified by the microcosmic action on the stage which was a representation of a real life situation. It was a happy circumstance that the techniques used to increase the clarity and impact of the *zarzuela* also kept the American authorities, in many cases, from completely realizing the full meaning of each of these plays.

However, the new rulers inevitably had to discover the real meanings of these plays and when they did a policy of suppression was initiated. One arrest followed another and soon the truly seditious play could no longer be seen. We might look upon Aurelio Tolentino's final imprisonment in 1904 as a data at which the seditious play ceased to effectively exist. The arrest of Tolentino, and also Abad, had coerced other anti-American writers who were loyal to the ideology of freedom from foreign domination to change their format.⁶⁶ In the future only those plays concerning politics which stressed patriotism without going to the extent of advocating rebellion against the American government were seen. Another factor which sealed the fate of the "seditious" *zarzuela* and made it passe was the establishment of the Philippine Assembly in 1907. By this time nationalists had realized the futility of fighting against superior armed strength and were using the strategy of working non-violently for eventual independence by proving themselves and their country worthy and capable of managing their own affairs.⁶⁷

When vaudeville came to the Philippines, the *zarzuela* and other forms of theater were already waning in popularity and the population readily accepted this new form of entertainment. Still later, motion pictures came to the country and delivered a deadly blow to Philippine theater.⁶⁸

Thus, we can see that seditious plays, most often the *zarzuela*, were made into an effective form of committed art. The *zarzuela* had been originally derived from a foreign source but was assimilated into Philippine culture and had become a popular form of entertainment. The *zarzuela* with its accent on social comment set within stories based di-

⁶⁶ *Loc. cit.*

⁶⁷ Manuel, *Dictionary of Philippine Biography Volume I, op. cit.*, p. 5.

⁶⁸ Cruz, *op. cit.*, pp. 154.

rectly on common values and situations found among the average citizen's experiences became a perfect tool for committed theater which wished to show the ultimate cause of the nation's problems from an ideological standpoint. Later, under the force of military suppression and the opening up of a peaceful alternative avenue to the goal of achieving Philippine independence, the "seditious" plays lost their popularity.

Today, as was mentioned in the introduction, more and more young artists in the Philippines are looking at their society and are making some definite conclusions as to the how and why of its ills. The mere fact that so many intelligent and idealistic persons are engaged in such an activity is indicative of the fact that something must indeed be acutely wrong. I started this paper not so much to influence anyone's ultimate conclusions as to the why of present day Philippine society's ills but rather to offer some suggestions as to how personal commitment to an ideology might be best translated into effective and relevant committed art. For this purpose I choose the theater because other forms of art:

"... do not have the kind of voice that utters sentences, offers propositions and problems and arguments the way theater, for instance, can become a voice."⁶⁹

I also became quite confirmed in my initial belief that art in general and "committed" art in particular need not be so other-culture oriented and that its impact will be greater if divested of phony aspects.

"The problem in the Philippines, however, is made more crucial by the injection of a high degree of what Cavell terms as 'fraudulence'. It is manifested by a glib aping and parody of every 'avant garde' or 'in' movement abroad fostered by an equally gullible dilettante clientele. By and large, Philippine artists have shown an absolute lack of awareness for the issues involved in painting (and until recently we might have added theater). Consequently, there is also an inability to come to grips with the issues in terms of the Philippine situation."⁷⁰

I furthermore hope that today's committed artists do not make tactical errors in their attempts to establish effective communications with the Filipino people. For, after all, meaningful communication is

⁶⁹ Gemma Mariano, "Art for Art's Sake — A Requiem," *The Philippine Collegian*, March 9, 1972, p. 4.

⁷⁰ Rodolfo Paras-Perez, "Art and the Reverence for Relevance," *Solidarity*, Vol. 5 No. 12 (December, 1970), p. 43.

the essence of art and especially so for committed art which must be as effective as possible in communicating its underlying ideology.

For example, Jose Ma. Sison's suggestions for the future form of the *zarzuela* is to:

"Replace the mawkishness and class reconciliation in the zarzuela with the revolutionary spirit and proletarian standpoint; and foolish love songs with revolutionary songs."⁷¹

I think it is obvious that change in all societies is inevitable and because of this presumption I find nothing wrong in altering or completely rebuilding any social institution or, in this case, any culture's art forms. Instead, what causes me concern is that too radical a transformation of Philippine dramatic art may keep committed art from effectively relating with the average Filipino who may not be ready for the change. The use of popular social situations combined with ideological themes was extremely effective in capturing the attention of widely scattered audiences during the early years of American rule and in implanting a determination to achieve the goals of national freedom. The educative value of committed theater may be lost if there is an overemphasis on strident revolutionary form rather than effective communication. Education of those unaware of the logic and conclusions of whatever ideology is the primary objective of committed art and effective communication with the audience is the only way to achieve this educational function.

"But it is precisely why you write so that people will know. You see, how many people know about, really understand what national democracy means; or the class struggle in Philippine society. It's a phrase one hears. Perhaps, one knows the definitions. But the committed writer does not simply clarify definitions but objectifies in very vivid terms what seems to be only a phrase or a clause. So to show class struggle a short story writer may write a story about a farmer who works for an hacendero as a collector. The farmer has a family he is trying to keep together, children he has to send to college, so that he allows himself to be the instrument of oppression of the landlord. There are other peasants who have to pay their debts, who have to give their share of the harvest, with the farmer acting as intermediary. Now this is a situation which clarifies the role of an individual farmer who becomes an instrument of oppression, although he himself belongs to the class of the oppressed. Such a situation clarifies what would just be an abstract discussion in an interview like this."⁷²

⁷¹ Jose M. Sison, "Task of Cadres in the Cultural Field," *Sinag*, January, 1972, p. 4.

⁷² Lumbera, *op. cit.*, p. 4.

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* The actual date of the introduction of the *zarzuela* seems open to some question. Iluminada M. Magno in her U.P. Masters Thesis "A Critical Study of the Zarzuela in Pangasinan of Catalino Palisoc" claims that Spanish zarzuelas first came to the Philippines in the 1840's and that one of the first *zarzuela* companies was headed by a certain Don Narciso de Escosura and his wife. This was the only reference I found.

As well, Isagani R. Cruz in his article in the book he edited *A Short History of Theater in the Philippines* gives 1880 as the date when Alejandro Cubero and Elisea Esguerra came to Manila. The names and dates I have used were the ones most often to appear in various sources.

** Daisy Hontiveros-Avellana on page 671 of her article "Philippine Drama: A Social Protest" found in Antonio G. Manuud's anthology *Brown Heritage* mistakenly claims that it was held in the Zorrilla theater.