

A SHORT HISTORY OF THE PHILIPPINE SARSUWELA (1879-2009)

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Introduction

In the Philippines, the *sarsuwela* is a play with songs and dances that is usually written in colloquial prose. Containing from one to five acts, it presents typical Filipino characters moving within the framework of a love story and engaged in conflicts arising from contemporary social, political, economic, or cultural issues. The *sarsuwela* is also called *sarsuela*, *zarzuela*, *sarsuelet*, *drama lirico*, *operetta*, *sarsuyla*, *dulang hinonihan*, *dulang inawitan*, or *dulang may awit* in the various languages of the country.

Very typical are the story and characters of the most famous *sarsuwela* of all time—the phenomenal *Dalagang Bukid*, a three-act *sarsuwela* by librettist Hermogenes Ilagan and composer Leon Ignacio, which premiered at the Teatro Zorilla in Manila in 1919. Atang de la Rama, the *sarsuwela*'s star, claimed that it had at least 1,000 performances before it was restaged at the Manila Grand Opera House in 1940 as a *beneficio* for Hermogenes Ilagan. In 1987, the play was restaged for Atang de la Rama by Tanghalang Pilipino of the Cultural Center of the Philippines (CCP) to celebrate Atang's proclamation as National Artist for Theatre and Music.

Act I opens at the salon of a nightclub with an interesting set of habitués: senators and congressmen spending money on women; the American John and his Filipina girlfriend Petra; the *bailarina* (taxidancer) Miling and her admirer Parlong, a married man; and Cobang who arrives with her suitor Paco looking for her husband Parlong. The young and handsome Cipriano enters, looking for his beloved Angelita, the “Dalagang Bukid,” for whom he sings a *romansa*. Cipriano is confronted by the haughty Don Silvestre, a wealthy old man and ardent suitor of Angelita, who tells Cipriano that Angelita’s parents have already promised to marry Angelita off to Silvestre. Just then, the flower vendor Angelita enters and her blooms are bought up by Don Silvestre. She then obliges everyone with the song “Nabasag ang Banga” (probably the most famous of all sarsuwela songs). As she steps down from the platform, Silvestre takes her hand. Cipriano objects, but Silvestre pulls Angelita. The rivals fight; Silvestre falls to the ground. All characters burst out into a *konsertante*, after which Angelita and Cipriano leave secretly.

Act II happens on the street in front of Angelita’s house. Cipriano brings Angelita home, but the two hurriedly separate when Don Silvestre appears. Just then Angelita’s parents, Sabas and Maria, arrive penniless from a *pangguingue* game. Silvestre tells them that Cipriano might take Angelita away from him. The parents, who owe Silvestre a lot of money, reaffirm their choice of the older man for their daughter. The next day, Cipriano comes to visit Angelita and they sing a romantic duet. Knowing Silvestre’s designs on her, Angelita urges Cipriano to set an early date for their wedding. Cipriano agrees. As the neighbors arrive, Don Silvestre announces that Angelita has won the beauty contest for which Silvestre has spent a considerable amount of money.

Act III opens with Don Silvestre hosting a banquet in a restaurant to celebrate Angelita’s victory. Later, Angelita’s parents leave for their daily *pangguingue*, while Angelita secretly meets with Cipriano at a room downstairs. The next day, Sabas and Maria tell Silvestre they had lost the seven hundred pesos that Silvestre gave them for Angelita’s

coronation gown. Silvestre tells them it is alright. At the coronation night, Silvestre and the *koro* await the entrance of the beauty queen. After some time, Angelita arrives with Cipriano and asks that the latter stand as her escort. Don Silvestre objects, but Angelita announces to everyone's surprise that she has just married Cipriano, who is now a full-fledged lawyer. Silvestre accepts his defeat and congratulates the newly-weds (Ilagan 1987, 376-518).

Introduced into the Philippines 130 years ago, the sarsuwela can boast of an eventful history that may be divided into four periods: 1) The Beginnings of the Sarsuwela, 1879-1900; 2) The Flowering of the Sarsuwela, 1900-1930s; 3) The Decline on Stage and Migration to the Screen, 1930s-1970s; and 4) The Revival and Revitalization of the Sarsuwela, 1971-2009.

The Beginnings of the Filipino Sarsuwela: 1879-1900

The roots of the sarsuwela may be traced to two dramatic forms of the nineteenth century: 1) the local *sainete* and 2) the Spanish *zarzuela*. The *sainete*, like the *entremes*, was a comic skit with songs that served as curtain raiser or intermission to the long and ponderous komedya of the nineteenth century. The most famous *sainete* of that century was Francisco Baltazar's *La India Elegante y El Negrito Amante* (The Fashionable India and her Aeta Suitor), 1860, which lampoons the colonial mentality of the Tagalog Menangge, who rejects the Aeta Tomeng because he has dark skin and comes from the mountain (Flores 1950, 1-16). The picaresque characters, colloquial dialogue, earthy humor, and lively songs associated with the *sainete* were later to appear as features of the Filipino sarsuwela.

But if the Filipino *sainete* was an important forerunner, the Spanish *zarzuela* was the direct progenitor of the Filipino sarsuwela. After the opening of the Suez Canal in 1869, which cut the travel time between Europe and Asia by about half, more Spanish dramatic troupes came to the Philippines to perform. One of these troops was

the *compañia* of author and impresario Dario Cespedes, which staged the famous Spanish zarzuela *Jugar con fuego* (Play with Fire), by writer Ventura de la Vega and Maestro Francisco Asenjo Barbieri in Manila at the close of the year 1878 or the beginning of 1879 (Retana 1909, 98). Soon after in 1880, the Madrid actors Alejandro Cubero and his partner Elisea Raguer staged *La Calandria* in Manila and stayed on to form the *Compañia Zarzuela Cubero*. Later after Cubero's death in 1888, the group was renamed *Compañia Zarzuela Raguer* and was composed of Elisea and the local mestizo actors that Cubero himself trained and directed. For his achievement, the *El Renacimiento* called Cubero the "Father of the Spanish Theatre in the Philippines" (Retana 1909, 188). Among the mestizo actors Cubero and Raguer worked with were Praxedes "Yeyeng" Fernandez, Venancia Suzara, Patrocinio Tagaroma, Nemesio Ratia, and Jose Carvajal, who later established their own companies, like the *Compañia Fer-su-ta* (Fernandez, Suzara, and Tagaroma) (Retana 1909, 117-120). It was Raguer's company that staged Spanish zarzuelas in Naga and Iloilo between 1892 and 1893 and probably in Vigan, Ilocos Sur and San Fernando and Bacolor, Pampanga in the same years. At about the same time, the companies of Navarro Peralta and Balzafiori performed Spanish zarzuelas in Cebu in the 1880s (Mojares 1997, xv; Uranza 1972, 316; Realubit 1976, 30; Fernandez 1978, 32).

The zarzuela form instantly captivated audiences in Manila and the provincial capitals, and inspired the formation of local troupes which specialized in the staging of only Spanish zarzuelas. Among the groups were the *Compañia Zarzuela de la Torre*, formed in 1894 by the Capitan Hugo de la Torre of Legazpi, and the *Compañia Zarzuela de Camalig*, founded in 1901 by Capitan Anacleto Solano. De la Torre's group in turn inspired the establishment of the zarzuela company of Leon Paras in Sorsogon (Realubit 1976, 31-34; Uranza 1972, 317). In Cebu, the Spanish apuntador of the *Compañia de Navarro Peralta* stayed on and organized local actors like Sabas Veloso, Maximo Abadia and Manuel Roa into a group, which presented Spanish plays like *El Alcalde Interino* in Cebu's Parian as early as 1894 (Mojares 1997, xvi). In Iloilo, local aficionados, both Spanish mestizos and native actors, formed the

Sociedad Lirico-Dramatica and the Sociedad Artistica-Recreativa which staged Spanish plays for local audiences (Fernandez 1978, 33).

Among the plays performed by troupes from Manila (with only Spanish actors or with Spanish and mestizo actors) and troupes from the provinces (with Spanish and mestizo actors) were: *La Mascota*, *Boccacio*, *El rey que rabio*, *El anillo de hierro*, *El Barberillo de Lavapies*, *La pasionaria*, *Las hijas del Zebedee*, *La tela de araña*, *La marcha de Cadiz*, *Chateaux Margaux*, *Niña Pancha*, *El duo de la Africana*, *El Capitan de Lanceros*, *El chotis*, *Las cigarreras*, *El canto flamenco*, *Los desaparecidos*, *El comendador*, *Los ratoneros*, *La musica clasica*, *la cabanita*, *Los aragoneses*, *Gran Via*, *El campanero y sacristan* (Realubit 1976, 30, 33; Fernandez 1978, 35). It was these plays that the first *ilustrado* writers, directors, and composers of the Filipino sarsuwela watched and used as models for their own works. From these Spanish plays, the native sarsuwela inherited the romantic story, the manipulated plot, the typical but stereotyped characters, the musical forms (*valse*, *polka*, *romansa*, *danza*) and conventions (*solo*, *dueto*, *concertante*), the vocal typology (*soprano*, *alto*, *tenor*, *baritono*, *bajo*), the orchestral instrumentation, and the stage conventions of the proscenium stage (e.g., the use of *telones*, *bastidores*, and *bambalinas*) (Tiongson 1988, 182-184).

With their exposure to Spanish zarzuelas and the desire to create plays that would be understood by the greater majority of their countrymen, *ilustrado* writers and composers created the first vernacular sarsuwelas. The earliest vernacular sarsuwela so far discovered is *Budhing Nagpahamak* (Tragic Conscience), circa 1890, a five-act Tagalog sarsuwela by writer Maximino de los Reyes and Maestro Isidoro Roxas of Bulacan, a love story of betrayal and revenge. Other early Tagalog sarsuwelas were *Masamang Kaugalian* (Bad Customs), 1898, by Pantaleon Lopez and a certain Remigio of Pandacan; *Pag-ibig sa Lupang Tinubuan* (Love for the Native Land), 1901, a three-act sarsuwela by Pascual Poblete and Maestro Severino Kenpin Bautista; and *Ang Kalupi* (The Wallet), 1902, a one-act sarsuwela by Severino Reyes and Maestro Fulgencio Tolentino (Manuel 1994, 339; Javellana 1994, 709-710; Beltran and Tiongson 1994, 386-387).

In no time, writers and composers in the regions who had seen the Spanish zarzuelas either in their provincial capitals or in Manila created sarsuwelas in their own languages. Among these pioneer sarsuwelas are: *Ing Managpe* (Dog with Patches) by writer Mariano Proceso Pabalan Biron and composer Amado Gutierrez David staged at the Teatro Sabina in Bacolor, Pampanga in 1901, which was followed the year after by the full-length sarsuwela *Alang Dios* (There is No God), by writer Juan Crisostomo Soto (Crissot) and composer Pablo Paloma (Manlapaz 1981, 18-20); *Say Liman ag Naketket Pampinsiwan* (The Hand that Cannot be Cut Must be Kissed), a play about the abuses of the Spanish friar by writer Catalino Palisoc, staged in 1901 in Lingayen, which earned for Palisoc the epithet “Father of the Pangasinan Sarsuwela” (Legasto 1996, 15); *An Maimbud na Aqui* (The Gentle Child), written by Nicolasa Ponte-Perfecto of Naga, which is about inveterate gamblers Miang and her husband Ote, who plan to marry off their daughter Cande to a wealthy Chinese merchant who will pay off their debts and give them gambling money (Realubit 1976, 30-31); *Ang Capitan* (The Captain), 1902, a play about the maiden Magdalena who is courted by a capitan and a Chinese, by Valente Cristobal who is acknowledged as the “Prince of the Hiligaynon sarsuwela” (Lucero 1996, 15); and *Meysa a Candidato* (The Candidate), 1908, a one-act sarsuwela by Mena Pecson Crisologo which exposes the corrupt and illegal practices that politicians employ to capture the votes of the common man (Hufana 1963, 189-204, 42-55).

The rise of the Filipino sarsuwela in the first decade was, however, strongly contested in most of the regions where it appeared, especially since the proponents of the sarsuwela paved the way for the new form by showing it as superior in all ways to the komedya, an older dramatic form that had lorded it over the Philippine stage in town and country for centuries. In some instances, the writers of the sarsuwela began by attacking the komedya (the verse play about the conflict between Moors and Christians in Medieval Europe) as ignorant and backward. Later they authored their first sarsuwela to prove that the sarsuwela was a more enlightened and enlightening form of theatre.

In Manila, Severino Reyes wrote and staged *R.I.P. (Requiescat in Pace)* at Teatro Libertad in 1902, which ridiculed the komedya as unrealistic and escapist and fit to be buried in a coffin with all the remnants of colonial culture under Spain (Reyes 1987, 497-542). The nationalist newspaper *El Renacimiento*, like the ilustrados Felipe Buencamino, Manuel Xerez Burgos and Pablo Borbon, lauded Reyes for staging *R.I.P.* which they said, like Cervantes's *Don Quixote*, banished the silly romances of chivalry and far-away kingdoms forever (Tiongson 1982, 80-83).

But the *moromoristas* saw *R.I.P.* as a grave and unforgivable insult to the komedya and its artists. To assert the supremacy of the komedya, the *moromoristas* paraded on horses and in full costume in front of Severino Reyes's house shouting, "Hindi maaari mamatay ang komedya" (The komedya cannot die)." Two weeks after, they staged Juan F. Bartolome's *Kailan Ma'y Buhay, E.P.D. y Resurrexit*, which attacked Reyes. Moreover, all theatres that staged *R.I.P.* were stoned. The komedyantes even threatened the lives of anyone who acted in the play (especially Hermogenes Ilagan whose Compañia Gatchalian-Ilagan produced the play and who came out as the main character Colas). In response to their threats and following the success of the one-act sarsuwela *Ang Kalupi* which was twin-billed with *R.I.P.*, Reyes wrote and staged *Walang Sugat* (No Wounds) with music by Fulgencio Tolentino in 1902, in order to finally get rid of the moro-moro. He contracted former komedya actors to act and sing for *Walang Sugat*, which turned out to be a tremendous and rousing success. The controversy, however, did not end there. When Reyes's actors appeared once more on the komedya stage, he terminated their sarsuwela contracts, prompting labor leader Isabelo de los Reyes to come to the defense of both the *komedyantes* and the komedya. In the newspapers, Isabelo argued that the komedya should not be killed because (a) although it came from Spain, it has become completely indigenized through its depiction of Filipino customs, (b) it uses magic and enchantment which are fashionable in European theatre, and (c) it depicts fantasy which is part of folklore and literature. However, Isabelo admitted, the komedya could be improved in terms

of costume, acting, design and direction. Isabelo's arguments stirred a hornet's nest, especially among writers of *Muling Pagsilang*, like Patricio Mariano who insisted that the komedya is hopelessly Spanish, and Lope K. Santos who disagreed that the komedya has become Filipino because its stories, fighting scenes, language, costumes and awkward verses and dialogue cannot in any way be called Filipino. Another clash between the komedya and sarsuwela happened in Malabon. In 1904, the municipal government charged the komedyantes higher fees than the sarsuwelistas, because the komedya "made no contribution to the education of the people." The komedyantes brought the matter to Governor Wright's office and the latter, upon advise of Governor Arturo Dancel of Rizal, reversed the decision of the Malabon Town Hall. Dancel argued that the komedya should be supported because it has never propagated anti-government ideas, the way the sarsuwela and drama have against the American insular government (Reyes 1904; Tiongson 1982, 83-39).

The same altercation between the komedyantes and the sarsuwelistas was witnessed in the provinces. In Cebu, Vicente Sotto criticized the komedya in his newspaper *Ang Suga* in 1902, calling it the "linambay," because the komedyantes wielding their swords looked like crabs (lambay) flexing their claws but never really biting anyone. Sotto ridiculed the fantastic stories of princes and princesses who battled lions and tigers, and of birds which sang like human beings. To counter the linambay, Sotto wrote and staged the drama *Ang Gugma sa Yuta nga Nataohan* (Love for the Native Land), which is about Aurora's rejection of her suitor Octavio who accepted the position of judge under the American colonizers. After 1902 and throughout the first three decades, other invectives were hurled against the komedya by the educated who wanted to prove to the Americans that Filipinos were now capable of creating a higher form of culture and by journalists who felt that the komedya was against good manners (Mojares 1997, xx-xxii).

In the Ilocos, Mena Pecson Crisologo wrote and staged the one-act sarsuwela *Codigo Municipal* in 1908. In the play, the town

mayor calls a meeting at the *munisipyo* to consult komedyantes and sarsuwelistas about what show to put up for the fiesta. The mayor prefers the komedya, so the komedyantes enact several scenes from a komedya where among other things Prinsipe Bernardo rides a cyclone from which he hurls stars at the Moors and eliminates all of them. The sarsuwelistas point out the illogicalities in the komedya story and proceed to sing Iloko songs and dance the cakewalk, all of which delight the mayor. In the end, everyone agrees that the sarsuwela is better than the komedya, just as democracy, the new form of government under America is superior to monarchy, the political system under Spain (Hufana 1963, 189-204).

In Pampanga, Felix Galura wrote and published the verse narrative titled *Ing Cabiguan* (which had two editions in 1915), where he exposed the ignorance that was propagated by both the *kuriru* (metrical romance) and the *kumidya* (which were based on the *kuriru*). In his introduction to the work, Pilo-Pilo said the youth see only the arrogance of *personajes* and the lasciviousness of women in the komedya, so all they dream of is to be a komedyante, wearing luxurious costumes, executing pompous gestures and marches, posturing with necks tilted to one side. Galura then narrated the story of two young lovers who steal away from the komedya rehearsal, elude the girl's mother and elope. Galura laughed at the way the komedya princess fought and even conversed with the lion in Kapampangan and at the speed with which the prince fell in love with the princess. Galura concluded that "it is time to burn this untruth and throw it into the river, there to be buried by the soil of our language" (Manlapaz 1981, 15-18).

Finally, Epifanio de los Santos, in his *El Teatro Tagalog*, explained why the komedya was the object of disdain. "In these komedyas, the meaning of history, geography and aesthetics lies on the floor. The braggadocio and threats which do not go with the Tagalog language, as well as the ignorance of the theatre and backwardness of the actors who seem to be chosen from whoever happens to be passing by, are the reasons why the performances of these komedyas have become very objectionable" (Tiongson 1982, 94-95).

The Flowering of the Filipino Sarsuwela: 1900-1930s

In spite of the staunch defenders of the komedya in government and the print media, the komedya declined and was replaced by the sarsuwela in most regions of the country. Between 1900 and the 1930s, the musical play reigned in the theatres and outdoor *entablados*, in cockpits and public halls, in the city as well as the countryside, for a number of reasons. For one, a new generation of audiences who was educated in America's schools had begun to outgrow the naivete and obscurantism of Spanish colonial culture and were now ready for a theatre that would depict real experiences that ordinary Filipinos were undergoing whether in the social, political, religious or economic level. Secondly, the American Insular Government, which had incarcerated the writers, directors, and actors of "seditious" dramas like *Tanikalang Ginto* (Golden Chain) and *Kahapon, Ngayon at Bukas* (Yesterday, Today and Tomorrow), in the early 1900s, now encouraged literary and dramatic works like the sarsuwela, which would avoid questions about the legitimacy of American domination of the islands and would concentrate instead on the innocuous depiction of local customs and individual problems. Lastly, the urban audiences as well as the rural aristocracy shifted their patronage from the long-winded and escapist komedyas to the three-hour, light and "realistic" sarsuwelas.

The Golden Age of the sarsuwela in Manila and other Tagalog provinces witnessed the production of a host of sarsuwelas which were shown in commercial theatres of the city (Teatro Zorilla, Teatro Libertad, Manila Grand Opera House), or in open-air entablados in the provinces, both Tagalog and non-Tagalog. Severino Reyes wrote about twenty-six sarsuwelas, among which was *Walang Sugat*, 1902; *Minda Mora* (Minda, the Muslim Girl), 1904; *Filipinas para los Filipinos* (The Philippines for the Filipinos), 1905; *Ang Pagbibili ng Pilipinas sa Hapon* (The Sale of the Philippines to Japan), 1906; and *Ang Puso ng Isang Filipina* (The Heart of a Filipino Woman), 1923 (Beltran and Tiongson 1994, 386-387). Hermogenes Ilagan, who had acted in Spanish zarzuelas, wrote *Wagas na Pag-irog* (True Love), 1903; *Dalawang Hangal* (Two Fools), 1904; *Bill de Divorcio* (Divorce Bill), 1912; *Dalawang Bukid*, (Country

Maiden), 1919; *Buhay ng Himala't Kababalaghan* (Life of Miracles and Mysteries), 1923; and *Ang Sigaw ng Bayan* (Cry of the Country), 1926 (Carpio 2000, 25-80, 120-135, 161-196). Pantaleon Lopez wrote *Masamang Kaugalian* (Bad Customs), 1901; *Ang Ynfierno* (Hell), 1903; and *Ave de Rapiña / Ibong Manlulupig* (Bird of Prey), 1909 (Manuel 1994, 339). Patricio Mariano was known for *Luha't Dugo* (Tears and Blood), 1905; *Si Tio Selo* (Uncle Selo), 1905; *Unang Binhi* (First Seedling), 1912; and *Anak ng Dagat* (Child of the Sea), 1921 (Galang 1994, 348-349). Servando de los Angeles's most famous sarsuwelas were: *Ang Ararong Ginto* (The Golden Plow), 1925; *Ang Kiri* (The Flirt), 1926; *Dakilang Punglo* (Great Bullet), 1926; *Alamat ng Nayon* (Legend of the Barrio), 1927; and *Ang Awit ng Bodabilista* (The Song of the Vaudeville Artist) (Tiongson 1994, 290). Maximino de los Reyes was known for *Dahas ng Pilak* (The Violence of Silver), 1905, for which he was incarcerated; *Ang Mag-anak* (The Relatives), and *Kundangan* (If It Were Not For...), both one-act sarsuwelas (Manuel 1994, 291). Julian Cruz Balmaseda authored *Sapote*, 1906; *Sa Bunganga ng Pating* (In the Jaws of the Shark), 1921; and *Tala sa Kabundukan* (Star of the Mountains), 1921 (Tiongson and Fernandez 1994, 264-265). Aurelio Tolentino wrote *Sinagtala*, 1901; *Sumpaang* (Oaths), 1904; *Germinal and La Rosa*, 1908; and *Ang Sulo y Yebana* (The Sulo and Yebana), 1909 (Manuel, Manlapaz and Tiongson 1994, 413-414). Florentino Ballecer was famous for *Sundalong Mantika* (Sluggish Soldier), *Mutya ng Pasig* (Muse of Pasig), and *Batik ng Kabihasan* (Blemished Civilization) (Galang 1994, 263-264). Antonio Molina was known for *Ana Maria*, Engracio Valmonte for *Ang Mestisa* (The Half-Breed Lady), Precioso Palma for *Paglipas ng Dilim* (After the Darkness). Among the composers who created music for these writers were Fulgencio Tolentino, Jose Estella, Leon Ignacio, Bonifacio Abdon, Nicanor Abelardo, Gavino Carluen, Hipolito Rivera, and Juan Hernandez. Stars of the Tagalog sarsuwelas were Casiana de Leon, Estanislawa San Miguel, Amanding Montes, Titay Molina, Atang de la Rama, and Victorino Carreon, Hermogenes Ilagan, Marceliano Ilagan, Horacio Morelos, and Jose Corazon de Jesus. Writers, directors, composers and actors belonged to *companias* or *samahan*, like the Gran Compania de la Zarzuela Tagala de Severino Reyes, the Compania Zarzuela Ilagan or Samahang Ilagan, Samahang La Dicha, Samahang

Paguia of Tondo, Samahang Gabriel of Santa Cruz, Samahang Sarsuela Ballecer, and Samahang Antonio Sempio of Bulacan (Tiongson 1995, 77-79).

In Pampanga, the most famous sarsuwela playwrights of the first decade were: Mariano Proceso Pabalan Byron who wrote *Ing Managpe* (The Dog with Patches), 1900; *Ing Atul Ning Dios* (God's Judgment), *Adua Tata* (Two Fathers) and *Apat Ya ing Junio* (4th of June). Pampanga's best-known dramatist, Juan Crisostomo Soto (Crissot) wrote *Ing Paninap nang Don Roque* (Don Roque's Dream), 1901, the famous *Alang Dios!* (There is No God!), 1902, as well as *Sigalot* (Trouble), *Ing Perla qing Burac* (A Pearl in the Mud), *Julio Agosto* (July August), *Perla, Zafiro at Rubi* (Pearl, Sapphire, and Ruby), *Ing Culasisi ning Garia* (The Parrot of Garia), *Sultana* (The Lady Sultan), *Ing Mestiza* (The Half-Breed Lady), *Ing Dalaga* (The Maiden), *Puti't Pula* (White and Red), *Kiki-Riki*, *Ing Caviteña* (The Lady from Cavite), and *Ing Anac nang Katipunan* (Child of the Katipunan). Among Aurelio Tolentino's sarsuwela in Pampango were *Damayan* (Cooperation) and *Ing Poeta* (The Poet), while his elder brother Jacinto penned the sarsuwelas *Ing Mangaibun* (The Lustful One), 1901; *Nung Tosu Ya Man Ing Matchin*, *Apaglalalangan Miya Mu Rin* (Clever as the Monkey May Be, You Can Still Trick It), and *King Bingid Ning Bakulkol* (At the Edge of the Pit). To a younger generation of sarsuwelistas belonged: Jose Gutierrez David who authored *Amanda*; Isaac Gomez who was known for *Sampagang Asahar* (Orange Blossoms) and *Ing Sumpa ning Ulila* (The Orphan's Curse); Roman Reyes who wrote *Bulaklak ning Casalanan* (Flower of Sin), *Caduang Dios* (Second God) and *Dayang Azul* (Blue Blood); Jose Sanchez who created *Bayung Katipunan* (The New Katipunan); Sergio Navarro, Jr. who authored *Ninung Makikasalanan?* (Whose Fault Is It?); Jose Gallardo who did *Crucifjong Pilak* (The Silver Crucifix); and Urbano Macapagal who wrote *Bayung Jerusalem* (New Jerusalem) with son Diosdado, *Sumpang Metupad* (Curse Fulfilled), and *Atul ning Banua* (Heaven's Judgment). Composers for these writers were Amado Gutierrez David, Pablo Palma, Dionisio Andres, Doroteo David, Jose Estella, Angel Rubio, and Victor Lumanog. Theatre troops that presented sarsuwelas and dramas in Pampanga included the Compania

Sabina which ran the Teatro Sabina of Bacolor, Compania Dramatica also of Bacolor, Compania Paz and Compania Ocampo of Candaba, Compania Lubeña of Lubao, and Dramatica Fernandina or Compania Reyes of San Fernando (All data on Pampango sarsuwela from Manlapaz 1981, 17-27; Castro 1981, 35-36, 45-46, 100; Lacson 1984, 182-211; Aguas 1963, 13-15).

In Pangasinan, after his first and most popular sarsuwela *Say Liman Sakit na Baley* (The Disease of the Country) (1905), Palisoc wrote and staged 11 more sarsuwelas, the most popular being *Say Mangasi Singa Kinalab na Balite* (The Charitable are Like a Tree Overrun by the Balete Tree), 1906; *Ang Pacayari'y Pilac* (The Power of Silver), 1913; and *Politica'y Tilaan* (Election Fraud), 1914. Because of the success of Palisoc's musicals, many writers followed his footsteps. Foremost of them was Pablo Mejia of San Nicolas who wrote *Say Aron Ginmalet* (Ingrained Love), 1907; *Panaun Aman* (The Old Days), 1916; *Dosay Lipot* (Treachery's Punishment), 1916; *Basingkawel* (Election Campaign), 1920; *Manok ya Ibululang* (Fighting Cock), 1920; and *Divorcio* (Divorce), 1925. Other sarsuwelistas of Pangasinan were: Sergio Ferrer of Lingayen who was known for *Baclao ya Gulong-gulong* (An Iron Chain for the Neck) and *Mailalo ed Pacayari* (Reliance on Power); Juan Biason of Mangaldan, who wrote and staged *Say Biin Maarod Asawa To* (The Woman Who Loves Her Husband), *Say Biin Maagap a Oalna* (A Virtuous Woman), *Say Laquin Maagap* (The Covetous Man), *Say Marocson Mansioman* (The Cruel Stepmother), *Maaron Anac* (The Ungrateful Child); Aurelio Celestino of Lingayen who authored *Say Quieo Ya Angapoy Serom* (A Tree Without Shade); Juan D. Santos of Mangatarem who wrote *Karna-na* (Yesterday, Today, Tomorrow) and *Say Karamilay Basingkawel* (Election Campaign Promises), 1935; and Francisco Cruz of Lingayen who penned *Taloran Pasak na Filipinas* (Three Nails Piercing the Philippines). Other sarsuwelistas were Pablo Bermechea of Dagupan; Juan Cruz, Jose Santos and Mike Ventanilla of Lingayen; Basilio Dalope of Urdaneta; Alejandro Mendoza of San Carlos; Andres Tamayo of Santa Barbara; Gregorio Venezuela of Pozorrubio; Pablo Vicente of Asingan; Jose T. Pecson, Vicente Quintana, Francisco Reynoso, Antonio M. Sison, Juan Villamil, Felix Zamora, Julian Zulueta, Jose Mejia, and

Nicolas Mejia. The sarsuwelas were performed in various towns of Pangasinan by three major groups: the Olup Ferrer of Sergio Ferrer of Lingayen, the Olup Biason of Juan Biason of Mangaldan, and the Olup Mejia of Pablo Mejia of San Nicolas (All data on Pangasinan sarsuwela from Legasto 1996, 14-26; and Casambre 1987, 141-145).

In the Ilocos, the sarsuwela coexisted in peace with the komedya for a long time. One komedya and two sarsuwelas were usually staged in honor of the town's patron saint. Among the sarsuwelistas of the first generation were: Mena Pecson Crisologo of Vigan, Ilocos Sur who followed up his *Codigo Municipal* and *Meysa a Candidato* with *Neneng, Oerno Naitulagadingan Pigma nga Ayat* (Heroismo del Amor) (Neneng or the Heroism of Love), and *Don Calixtofano, Caballero de la Luna*, (Don Calixtofano, Gentleman of the Moon). From the same generation were Filemon Palafox who wrote *Dalusapi* (Red-Speckled Cock), 1915; Pascual Agcaoili who was known for *Daguiti Agpaspasucman ti Basi* (Basi Vendors), 1925; Martin Purugganan who authored *Biag ti Senador* (Life of a Senator) and *Sabong ni Carayo Wenno Panagsalisal ti Pintor ken Musiko* (Cockfight of Carayo or the Rivalry Between the Painter and the Musician); Claro Caluya who wrote *Pateg ti Lumuna nga Cari* (The Value of a First Promise) and *Napatay ti Ayat ti Ili* (Love of Country is Paramount); and Marcelino Crisologo Peña, Mariano Gaerlan, Mariano Navarette, Florencio Lagasca, and G. A. Teodulo.

To the second generation of sarsuwelistas who were active between 1925 and 1950 belonged: Leon C. Pichay who authored *Balligi ni Panagsalimetmet* (Triumph of Thought); Eufemio S. Inofinada who did *Natakneng na Panagsalisal* (Noble Rivalry); Pantaleona Aguilar who was known for *Panagsalisal da Escribiente, Millionario ken Abogado* (Rivalry Between a Clerk, a Millionaire and a Lawyer); Jose Garvida Flores who wrote *Teriang*; Guillermo Lazo who wrote *Lulua*; Isaias Lazo who did *Panagpili*, 1927, and *Siac Ti Anac Mo*, 1954; and Nena Paron, Florenda Reintegrado, Valentin Ramirez, Tomas Daproza, Rogerio Panlasigui, and Pedro Aurelio.

The third generation which wrote in the 1950s included Barbaro Paat, who wrote *Nanangco* (My Mother) and *Salisal ti Nabacnang Ken Napanglao* (Rivalry of the Rich and the Poor Man); and Constante Arizabal, Juan Guerrero, Lorenzo Mata, Melchor Roxas, and Alejo Villegas.

Ilocano sarsuwelas were presented in Ilocano-speaking provinces in the Ilocos, Abra, La Union, Nueva Vizcaya, Pangasinan, Nueva Ecija, Cagayan, and Isabela by itinerant groups. Some of these are the Red Avila Troupe of Vigan, the Barbaro Paat Group of Bantay, the Bravo Family of Solid West, Vigan, the Riverside Sarsuela Guild of Laoag City, and the Sison Dramatic Guild of Pangasinan (All data on Ilocano sarsuwela from Tupas 1987, 11-16; and Rosal 1993, xiii-xxvii).

In the Bicol region, the towns of Legazpi, Camalig, and Sorsogon produced the most number of sarsuwelistas from 1900 to 1940. Legazpi sarsuwelistas were: Nicolasa Ponte-Perfecto, who penned *An Maimbud na Aqwi* (The Gentle Child), 1920, as well as *An Marahay na Sorogon* (The Good Servant) and *An Pag Oring Mahamis* (Sweet Envy); Eusebio Tallada who wrote and staged *Ang Magirinanang Binarayan* (The Abandoned Mother and Child) and *Maguibo Mo Man Daw* (Do You Think You Can Do It?); and Eusebio Tiño who was believed to have authored *Pinapagtios sa Pirit* (Forced to Resist).

Camalig, a town first known for staging Spanish zarzuelas, produced Justino Nuyda, who wrote original sarsuwelas in Bicol like: *Tabon-Tabon* (To Come), *An Pagcamoot sa Pirac* (Love of Money), *An Daragang Baragohon* (The Fickle-Minded Girl), *An Lalaquing Osbawon* (The Braggart), *An Panahon Bulawan* (Time is Gold), *Ma Isag sa Ma Talao*, *Ma Talao sa Ma Isag* (The Brave to the Coward, the Coward to the Brave), *An Caogmahan Tumang sa Pirac* (Happiness is Against Money), and *Teniente Amado* (Lieutenant Amado).

Sorsogon produced four prolific sarsuwelistas. Asisclo Jimenez wrote twenty-six plays, some of which were: *Ang Diwang Pagtubod na Sukbali* (Two Wrong Beliefs) and *An Fiscal Mayor sa Simbahan* (The

Chief Fiscal of the Church) which satirized religion; *Apat na Cami* (Now We Are Four) and *An Sarayaw sa Salon* (Dance in the Cabaret) which was about relationships between husbands and wives; *An Paalingan ni Lucas* (The Leisures of Lucas) and *Barogkos sa Kabikoon* (United in Crooked Ways) which attacked the komedya; *An Lupit sa Payo* (The Scar on the Head) which was against gambling; and *Pagkamoot sa Banuang Tinoboan* (Love for the Native Land), a nationalistic play about Alfredo who fights in the revolution against Spain and his wife who plots the massacre of all Spaniards upon her husband's return.

Jose Figueroa wrote *An Matamiagnon nga Agom* (The Thoughtless Wife) and *Longaran an Saliri* (Take Care of Your Own), while Valerio Zuñiga wrote *Angelina*, about a girl whose sweetheart joins the Revolution. Bonifacio Baeza wrote ten sarsuwelas which include *An Pagmawot nin Cayamanan* (The Desire for Wealth), *Luha nin Sarong Ina* (Tears of a Mother), and *Mapognao na Capaladan* (Unhappy Fate).

Other Bicolano sarsuwelists were Benito Olango and Simeon Gio of Masbate, and Gregorio Loyon and Arcangel de la Rosa of Catanduanes. Composers for the Bicol sarsuwela were Mariano Ripaco, Valentin Javier, Daniel Juanesca, and Juanito Napay. The plays were staged and produced by companies like the *Compania de Zarzuela Bicolana* of Justino Nuyda or produced and directed by the writers themselves, as in the case of Asisclo Jimenez (All data on Bicol sarsuwela from Realubit 1976, 30-47).

The sarsuwela in Cebuano called *zarzuela*, *sarsuwelang binisaya*, *sarsuyla*, *dulang hinonihan*, *dulang inawitan* enjoyed popular support in Cebu from the first decade to the 1930s. After his prose dramas, Vicente Sotto wrote his last play, a sarsuwela titled *Maputi ug Maitum* (White or Black). It was Buenaventura Rodriguez, originally a playwright in Spanish, who authored many of the famous sarsuwelas in Cebuano, among them: *Inday*, 1917; *Matam-is* (Sweet), 1918; *Luha* (Tears), 1919; *Gugma* (Love), 1919; *Balaod sa Kinabuhi* (The Law of Life), 1920; *Paraygon* (Affectionate), 1921; *Miss Smile*, 1926; *Dumagsa*

(Alien), 1930; *Ang Mini* (The Counterfeit), c. 1926; *Salilang*, c. 1931; *Pahiyum* (Smile), 1935; and *Bomba, Nyor!* (Let 'em Have It, Sir!), 1925. For his part, Pio A. Kabahar wrote and staged *Ang Limbong ni Tintay* (Tintay's Deceit), 1916; *Nagun-uban sa Langit* (Despoiled of Paradise), 1917; *Alaut* (Wretched One), 1919; *Fe, Esperanza, Caridad*, 1920; *Rosas Pangdan*, 1929; *Fifi*, 1929; *Ongra sa Inahan* (the Love of a Mother), 1933. Other sarsuwelistas were Antonio Abad who wrote *Anak sa Kabukiran* (Child of the Mountains), 1915; Alberto B. Ylaya who did *Ang Singsing Bulawan* (The Golden Ring), 1917; Florentino Borromeo who penned *Karnabal* (Carnival), 1917; and its sequel *Pasayloa* (Please Forgive!), 1919, as well as *Yutang Natauhan* (Motherland) and *Igsuon* (Brother/Sister), both 1919; Jose Feliciano who created *Mabangis nga Silot* (Fierce Retribution), 1919, and *Loling Bihag* (Loling the Captive), 1920; Vicente Alcosoba who authored *Paz*, 1920, and *Katapusang Hinabong* (Final Remedy); Silverio Alaura who did *Tungod Kanimo* (Because of You), 1924, *Sala sa Gugma* (Love's Sin), and *Hinikalimtan* (The Forgotten One); and Vicente Alcover who wrote *Sa Hukmanan sa Langit* (At Heaven's Court), 1935.

Music for these sarsuwelas was composed by Jose Estella, Manuel Velez, Brigido Lakandazon, Marcos Abadia, Rafael Gandiongco, Tomas Villafior, Celestino Rodriguez, Pedro Tabaque, Vicente M. Florendo, R. A. Abellana, Mariano Alfafara, Pio and Justo Kabahar, Zacarias Solon and Dondoy Villalon. The most famous actors of the sarsuwela and dula were Tura Rodriguez, Piux Kabahar, Tonyo Kyamko, Peping Rosales, Biloy Rosales, Ipyon Cananea, Lalyang Hernandez, Remedios Lingaton, and Doray Sillora. Actors appeared in teatros of Cebu or on open stages in the towns of Cebu, Bohol, Negros Occidental, and even in Mindanao. Sarsuwela troupes included the *Compania de Aficionados Filipinos* and the *Compania Zarzuela Bisaya-Mandawense* (All data on Cebuano sarsuwela from Mojares 1997, xx-xxiv; Ramas 1987, 831-842; Ramas 1982, 59-62, 78-87, 82-99).

The Hiligaynon sarsuwela had its golden age from 1903 to 1930 during which the eight major Ilongo sarsuwelistas produced their sarsuwelas and dramas. Considered the "Prince of the Hiligaynon

Sarsuwela,” Valente Cristobal wrote and staged the first sarsuwela *Ang Capitan* in 1903, and thereafter created about thirty plays in all, most of which were sarsuwelas. A writer, director, impresario, producer, prompter, Cristobal produced the one-act sarsuwela *Asawa Balaye* (Spouse and Daughter-in Law’s Parent), 1910; *Ang Calipay sang Panday* (The Joy of a Carpenter), 1906; *Madaya*, 1906; *Maimon nga Amay* (The Jealous Father), 1908; *Ang mga Viciohan* (The Vice-Ridden), 1903; *Si Platon* (Platon), 1907; *Ma-pa-ta*, 1927; *Tuburan sang Himaya* (Fountain of Joy), 1911, and *Ang Lalang ni Tarcila* (Tarcila’s Deceit), 1910. He also authored the full-length sarsuwela *Nating*, 1908, and *Si Salvador*, 1912.

Jimeno Damaso wrote thirteen plays, six of which are sarsuwelas: *Nalaya kag Manalingsing* (Withered and Bloomed Again), 1910; *Si Amalia kag si Lucas* (Amalia and Lucas), 1912; *Dalitan nga Ungon* (Poisonous Thorns), 1914; *Ang Anak sang Cagab-ihon* (The Child of the Night), 1915; and *Ang Kapalaran* (Fate), 1924.

Journalist and composer Angel Magahum wrote eight one-act sarsuwelas, among them: *Ang Panimalay ni Kabesa Ytok* (The Family of Kabesa Ytok), 1907; *Ang Anak nga But-anon* (The Obedient Child), 1909; *Bumaliskad ang Paya* (The Coconut Shell is Overturned), 1909; *Napulo sa Libo* (Ten Thousand), 1909; *Pito kag Salapi ang Piko* (Seven and a Half Per Pikul), 1909; *Naghuyop sa Lusong* (Treasured Gem), 1910; and *Paghinangpanay* (Getting to Like Each Other), 1930.

Poet and politician Serapion Torre penned three sarsuwelas: *Sayup nga Ikamatay* (Fatal Mistake), 1915; *Pagtabang sang Anak* (Sympathizing with the Child), 1916; and *Dagta nga Makatinlo* (Sap that Purifies), 1919.

Jose Ma. Ingalla called his works operettas because they had more than the usual number of songs in a sarsuwela. These were: *Dinaguit* (Kidnapped), 1910; *Tigailo sang Caimon* (The Price of Jealousy), 1913; *Mainungon* (Loyal), 1908; *Maming*, 1906; *Mga Anac sang Dagat* (Children of the Sea), 1910; *Gugma kag Konant* (Love and Money), n.d.; *Dumut kag Huya* (Revenge and Shame), 1911; *Dugung*

Malubong (Impure Blood), 1923; and *Sa Tiangge ni Takay* (In Takay's Market), 1928.

Journalist and labor leader Jose Ma. Nava authored: *Si Luding* (Luding), 1912; *Si Datu Palaw* (Datu Palaw), 1912; *Carnaval* (Carnival), n.d.; *Dugung sang Kabikahon* (Pride of the Race), n.d.; and *Kulintas nga Mutya* (Pearl Necklace), n.d.

The only woman sarsuwelista, Miguela Montelibano went into theatre to augment the family income. She wrote and staged: *Ang Kailo nga Nagtalang* (The Poor Who Are Lost), 1919; *Ang Dalamguhanon sang Malalison* (The Dream of the Disobedient), 1921; *Kailo nga Tapalan* (Poor Scapegoat), 1921; *Cusug sang Imul* (Strength of the Poor), 1921; *Mainawaon* (Understanding), 1921; *Masubu nga Camatuwiran* (The Awful Truth), n.d.; and *Filipinas*, 1929.

Eriberto Gumban also has dramas and sarsuwelas but none of them have survived. Gone are his five sarsuwelas, among them: *Ang Kahapon Pangabuhi* (Life Yesterday), 1910, and *Ang Yawa nga Bulawan* (The Golden Devil), 1913. Other sarsuwela writers were Leopoldo Alerta, Mateo Nonato, Peregrino Javelona, Miguel Lavante, Antonio Salcedo, and Salvador Magno. Composers of the sarsuwela music were Felipe Prado, Juan Paterno, Teodoro Gallego, Bibiano Calero, Rufo de la Rama, Leopoldo Calero, Antonino Ledesma, Leocadio Calero, Roman Brillante, and Gerardo Chavez (All data on Hiligaynon sarsuwela from Fernandez 1978, 48-82; Fernandez in Lucero 1996, 11-20; Damaso 1987, 672-677).

Like their Cebuano and Ilonggo counterparts, the Lineyte-Samarnon writers began writing sarsuwelas in Spanish and eventually in Waray. As the *hadi-hadi* or komedya declined, the sarsuwela gained more adherents. The Waray sarsuwela enjoyed wide support from about 1915 to 1938. These were written by twelve playwrights.

Ilustrado Norberto Romualdez, Sr. wrote and staged what is called the first sarsuwela in Waray, *Ang Pagtabang ni San Miguel* (The

Help of Saint Michael), in 1899. In 1927, his *An Anak han Manaranggot* (The Daughter of a Tuba-Gatherer) was staged at the Ateneo de Manila. Following Romualdez, composer and musician Alfonso Cinco wrote the sarsuwelas *Pipong*, 1915; *Puraw nga Mutya* (Pure Pearl), 1920; *Pandong han Himaya* (The Veil of Happiness), 1929; and *Siyahan nga Gugma* (First Love), 1929.

The most famous poet and playwright of Leyte, Iluminado Lucente, wrote thirty plays, twenty-two of which may be considered sarsuwelas: *Hi Teresa ngan Hi Perto* (Teresa and Perto), 1914; *Mga Anak Han Luha* (Children of Tears), 1922; *Diri Daraga, Diri Balo, Diri Inasaw-an* (Not a Maiden, Not a Widow, Not a Married Woman), 1929; *Kaagi hin Usa nga Daga* (Story of a Dagger), 1933; *Kon Makabotos nga an Babayi* (Should Women Vote), 1937; *An Bantog nga Tambalan* (The Famous Faith Healer); *Mga Bukad ngan mga Tunok* (Flowers and Thorns), 1942; *Up Limit Pati an Gugma* (Even Love is Off Limits), 1945; *An Gimaupayi nga Kabilen* (The Best Inheritance), 1955; and *Ha Katungkan han Kinabuhi* (In the Thorns of Life), n.d.

Poet and playwright Francisco V. Alvarado used the sarsuwela as a vehicle of protest against American rule. Among his sarsuwelas are: *Lolay*, 1922; *Lambong han Himaya* (The Shadow of Glory), 1931; *An Duha nga Gugma* (Two Loves), 1932; and *An Bitay nga Bulawan* (Golden Chain), 1933.

Emilio Andrada, Sr., who served Burawen town by managing dramatic presentations and church activities, wrote the sarsuwela *Matam-is an Gugma* (Love is Sweet), 1936, and *An Daraga nga Malabiao* (The Vain Lady), 1938.

Jesus Ignacio, a fisherman and bus conductor from Tanauan, called his plays drama or melodrama, although they had songs and dances like sarsuwela. These include: *An Anak han Yawa* (The Son of the Devil), 1924; *An Pasaylo* (Forgiveness), 1947; *An Hiniloman ha Kasingkasing Kaaway Han Gugma* (The Secret of the Heart is an Enemy of Love), 1950; *An Iroy nga Naguin Olipon* (The Mother Who

Became a Servant), 1953; *An Mabangis nga Amay* (The Cruel Father), 1957; *An Mabangis nga Pinacairoy* (The Cruel Stepmother), 1957; *An Matalompigos nga Agaron* (The Brutish Master), 1957; and *Pitic Mingaw*, n.d.

Director, actor, and writer Margarito Nonato wrote several plays but only one survives: *Anak San Kagab-ihon* (Child of the Enemy), 1935. A bus driver from Carigara, Pedro Acerdan wrote and staged the sarsuwelas *Con Ascion Gugma* (Ascion's Love), 1930, and *An Baybayon ni Gudoy* (Gudoy's Seashore), 1936.

Composer and writer Moning Fuentes authored her first play *An Divorcio* (Divorce) in 1926 and another play, *An Tim-as Nga Gugma* (True Love) in 1930. She went back to writing plays only in the 1960s (All data on Waray sarsuwela from Filipinas 1991, 35-36).

The vernacular sarsuwelas mentioned above were written and staged by writers and directors for very specific audiences in their regions. They used the native language and presented characters and situations that would be familiar to the audiences belonging to specific ethnolinguistic groups and cultures. Often sarsuwelas drew stories, characters, and issues from real life, whether past or present.

In spite of this condition, a critical look at these sarsuwelas will reveal that a big number of problems, issues and themes actually recur in or are shared by the majority of these plays, even if they use different languages and are rooted in varied vernacular cultures. This could only mean that natives of these islands had, by the first three decades of the twentieth century, developed a common consciousness and sensibility that reacted in very similar ways to the same current of events and phenomena—whether historical, political, economic, socio-cultural, religious—that was flowing throughout the archipelago during the period. These events and phenomena were specific to these decades, which saw the transition from the colonial rule of Spain just recently ended by the Philippine Revolution, to the colonial rule of the United States that had defeated the Revolution and had by now

established a new orientation (more secular) and organization (more systematic/"democratic") in Philippine society. The Filipinos' reactions to all these developments were registered and expressed quite clearly and vigorously in the theatre, specifically in the dramas (straight prose plays) and the sarsuwelas of the period. For convenience, the topics and themes of sarsuwelas in Tagalog, Pampango, Pangasinan, Ilocano, Cebuano, Hiligaynon and Lineyte-Samarnon may be divided into two general categories: (a) those relating to the past Spanish Regime and the Revolution against Spain; and (b) those relating to the newly-established American colonial regime (Themes gathered from Mojares 1997; Ramas 1982; Fernandez 1978; Ralubit 1976; Legasto 1996; Lucero 1996; Carpio 2000; Filipinas 1991; Manlapaz 1975; Castro 1981; Lacson 1984; Rosal 1993; Casambre, Tupas, Damaso in *Philippine Drama* 1987).

In all regional languages, sarsuwelas that revolved around the political, social, religious and cultural issues associated with the Spanish Period and the revolution. First, the Philippine Revolution served as the principal context of the love story in several sarsuwelas. Usually, the hero and heroine, who loved each other, were separated when the hero answered the call of Inangbayan (Mother Country) and joined the revolutionary forces. The revolution was always depicted in a positive light, as a glorious moment of pride for Filipinos. After overcoming impediments (aggressive suitors, local traitors), the lovers were reunited in a happy, rousing finale.

Contrary to the image of the revolutionaries, the characterization of the Spanish friars was invariably negative. They were depicted as arrogant, materialistic, opportunistic and cruel. They took advantage of the confessional or their priesthood to get the women they lusted after. They imprisoned or tortured anyone, especially ilustrados, who crossed their paths or questioned their authority in any way. In many of the sarsuwelas, they were incarcerated or punished, usually killed or massacred, as the main enemies of the Filipino people and the symbol and embodiment of the worst in Spanish colonialism.

With the friars were condemned the autocracy associated with colonial rule. In a few sarsuwelas, local *presidentes* or mayors and even Filipino priests were criticized for conducting themselves like the friars or the Spanish officials and for forcing their will on the people and refusing to listen to the point of view of those whom they governed or oppressed.

Several sarsuwelas also had characters, usually old conservative women, who exemplified the religious fanaticism that the friars cultivated among their parishioners. These were women who went to church and communion everyday and wore rosaries and scapulars around their necks but were selfish and cruel to their maids, tenants and other subalterns. Like the ilustrados of the reform movement, the sarsuwelas endorsed a religion that was humane and merciful.

Lastly, a few sarsuwelas satirized the komedya, as an expression of the Hispanic culture of the past regime. This centuries-old dramatic form was exposed as escapist and irrelevant because it could not depict social realities, confined as it was to the dramatization, in highly stylized manner, of the love between medieval European princes and princesses, the battles between princes and lions/giants, and the conflict between Moors and Christians. Moreover, the komedya was blamed for teaching viewers to conform to autocratic rules, leading to evil and decadence.

The majority of sarsuwelas, however, featured topics and themes associated with the American Period or the present. The issues could be domestic, socio-cultural, political and economic. The biggest number of sarsuwelas discussed domestic issues. Problems between husbands and wives could stem from husbands who kept mistresses, were insanely jealous and possessive, or had vices (e.g., pangguingue, cockfighting, drinking). In these stories, adultery, jealousy, violence, and vice were punished, while fidelity, temperance, and marital devotion were rewarded.

The problems between parents and children included: (a) parents who forced their daughter to marry someone rich (old, ugly

or Chinese) who could pay their debts, give them gambling money and save them from poverty; (b) parents who spoiled their children, who then grew up undisciplined and immoral; (c) parents who beat up or disinherited children who refused to obey them or had no “utang na loob”; (d) stepmothers who were cruel to their stepchildren; (e) mothers who wallowed in suffering and self-pity and ended up getting sick or committing suicide; and (f) children who disobeyed their parents or lost respect for them. The messages of these sarsuwelas were: parents should not inflict unnecessary and inhumane punishment on children or force them into marriages that would benefit the parents and not the children. At the same time, however, children were advised to obey their parents and always show them respect.

Sarsuwelas about courtship usually praised virtuous and refined young women and patient, gentlemanly and educated suitors, and condemned young rakes who used violence, money or blackmail to get the heroine as well as playboys who took advantage of many girls. The ending of sarsuwelas always rewarded the gentle suitor (he gets the virtuous heroine) and punished the suitors who were insincere and opportunistic.

The socio-cultural problems that appeared in many sarsuwelas as principal or secondary problems were the vices that destroyed people and must be destroyed. Foremost among these were the most common vices of that period: gambling in the form of pangguingue games among women, and cockfighting among men; immoderate drinking, especially among men; wasteful and expensive way of life which was beyond one's means; and utter laziness and sloth. These vices led to bankruptcy and poverty, the break-up of families, the marriage of daughters to rich men they did not love, prostitution, adultery, thievery, and even murder. These vices were the reason for the backwardness of society. Like the priests at Sunday sermons, sarsuwelas always preached against the vice-ridden, and demanded that they mend their ways at final curtain or die.

Unlike the Spanish friars who discouraged education, American officials established educational institutions, from the lowest to the highest level, for all Filipinos. Education met with an ambivalent reaction among sarsuwelistas. On the one hand, and consistently, sarsuwelas always endorsed education, praising it as important to social mobility and one's economic progress, not to mention one's enlightenment and development as a human being. In many sarsuwelas, parents dreamed of their children finishing higher schooling or the educated boy got the beautiful girl while the student who skipped classes and spent his allowance on drinking, gambling, and women got his comeuppance in the end.

On the other hand, many sarsuwelas strongly disapproved of Filipinos who spoke English, and forgot or looked down upon their own native languages. The sarsuwelas also frowned on the Americanized who rejected traditional Tagalog, Ilocano, Pangasinan, and Cebuano customs and costumes, or adopted a liberal attitude that was equated with immorality, or drove their husbands or parents to commit crimes for money that they needed to sport the Americanized lifestyle they could ill afford. Unfortunately, most sarsuwelistas who condemned the Americanized Filipino did not realize that this Americanization proceeded primarily from the very same education that they praised and endorsed without reservation.

With the spread of Americanization, a divorce bill was introduced in 1912 to the National Assembly. The legalization of divorce drew a whole range of reactions from sarsuwelistas in almost all regions, who presented the arguments for and against the bill. The conservative Catholic point of view insisted that marriage was binding and forever and it was a sin to put asunder what God hath put together. On the other hand, the more liberal welcomed the bill because divorce would give women a way out of oppressive marriages, and discourage/eliminate adultery and philandering.

Women's suffrage was a hotly contested issue during the American period, debates in the legislature and in media started from

1918 when it was first proposed in the National Assembly and lasted till 1937 when it was approved. Again, the sarsuwelas had two opposite reactions to suffrage. Those against it believed that men and women should adhere to the sex roles that they had been trained to play, with some arguing that women should be like the submissive Maria Clara of Rizal's *Noli*. On the other hand, those who endorsed suffrage believed that women, who were now educated like the men and could even earn like the men, should have the rights enjoyed by men, including the right to participate in the running of government through suffrage. Moreover, suffrage was seen as a step towards empowering women to take positions in government in the future.

The political issue found in many sarsuwelas concerned the corruption and mismanagement of those in government. The inefficiency of local officials was depicted in some sarsuwelas, while the abuse of those in power was criticized in others. The sarsuwelas insisted that public officials should not use their position to exercise personal control over their constituencies. Public officials were public servants, not public tyrants, the sarsuwelas pointed out.

A second political issue had to do with the elections, where politicians used all means, mostly illegal, to win political positions. Sarsuwelas dramatized how politicians "courted" voters on election day, giving them transportation, food and golden promises, in order to get their votes. Other sarsuwelas exposed the outright buying of votes, and the different ways of cheating when the votes were counted. The sarsuwelas were highly critical of these nefarious election practices and censured those who were responsible for them.

Two economic issues were raised by a few sarsuwelas. The first was connected to the feudal ownership of lands in the countryside. A few sarsuwelas denounced caciquism, condemning landlords who were cruel to their tenants or who cheated their tenants of their rightful share of the harvest. Many of the illegal practices of these landowners were exposed and attacked as well, like landgrabbing and the creation of fake titles, and most commonly, usury or the imposition of high interest

rates on the money or rice bags borrowed by farmers. The sarsuwelas lauded government efforts to lend money at low rates to farmers and endorsed a simple lifestyle so that peasants would not need to borrow money from landlords in the first place.

The second economic issue had to do with the machinations of the new system of free enterprise introduced by America. However, only one playwright, Aurelio Tolentino, had the courage to expose the tactics of monopoly capitalism employed by American businesses during the first decade. Tolentino wrote sarsuwelas that showed how the Americans exerted every effort to gain complete control of local cigar factories, like *Germinal*, *La Rosa*, and *La Yebana*, which were owned by Filipinos. Tolentino fought for Filipino ownership of factories, especially because he believed that foreign capitalists would be less likely to sympathize with the problems of Filipino workers.

No doubt the sarsuwelas from 1900-1930 represented a most remarkable development from Spanish regime plays like the *komedya* and *sinakulo*, if only because they chose to interpret the burning issues in Philippine society during the first decades of the American colonial period. Not only were the costumes, dialogues and situations of the sarsuwelas authentic and recognizable; more importantly, they succeeded in projecting on stage the significant concerns of their time (e.g., the abuses of those in political positions, the conflict between traditional Hispanic culture and the modern American way of life, the contradictions between landlords and peasants, American and Filipino capital, capitalists and workers.)

And the sarsuwelas went farther than the mere depiction of contemporary issues. Bravely, they launched diatribes against the usurers, caciques, Americanized women, inveterate gamblers, drinkers and womanizers, autocrats in government, and other oppressors in Philippine society. No wonder the sarsuwelas captured the imagination of the masses who patronized and enjoyed these presentations.

But while the masses seemed to have supported the sarsuwelas, these plays did not necessarily present a deep or radical understanding of the problems they presented nor even a realistic solution to these problems. In these plays, landlords, usurers, cockfighters, panggingue addicts, drunkards, and the colonially minded change their ways at narrative closure, implying thereby that these problems have been solved or are so easily remedied. The sarsuwelas were able to give this impression because they viewed all problems as individual rather than systemic. From its viewpoint, the sarsuwelas believed that social order was restored once the individual repented and changed his ways, because there was basically nothing wrong with the system—even if in reality it was controlled by a foreign power and the local elite. No wonder the characters of the sarsuwela, although recognizable as types from Philippine society, were never allowed to become real. Instead, they needed to remain as stereotypes representing good and evil so that the playwright could manipulate them, together with the plot, to come to a conclusion that preserved, restored, and promoted the established “order of things,” no matter how unjust this might be for the majority who were poor and powerless. Most of the old sarsuwelas then seemed to have been written and produced mainly by ilustrados and the middle class, for the consumption of the masses but ultimately for the reaffirmation of the economic-political-social elite of Philippine society. Only a few, like those of Tolentino, understood and dared to expose the systemic inequities and iniquities in U.S.-dominated Philippines.

The Decline on Stage and Migration to Film: 1930s-1970s

By the decade of the 1930s, the sarsuwelas gradually disappeared from the theatres of Manila, Cebu, Iloilo and other urban centers because the theatres were taken over by two new forms of entertainment. Introduced by Borromeo Lou in 1921, *bodabil* attracted a younger generation of Americanized Filipinos who preferred the brassy songs (American jazz, blues, ballads) and risqué dances (charleston, tango, samba), the comedy skits and circus acts of the colorful variety

show. Similarly, after the successful screening of the first Filipino-made talking picture in 1933 (*Ang Aswang*) and the subsequent and immediate rise to popularity of talking pictures, American and local businessmen established one studio after another in quick succession (Filippine Films, Parlatone Hispano-Filipino, Sampaguita Pictures, LVN Pictures, X'Otic Films, among others). In no time, these studios were producing about 50 films a year on a regular basis and of different genres (including melodramas, South sea adventures, comedies, and, most importantly, musicals). Moreover, within the decade, the sarsuwela lost its mass following and special sponsors in Manila, Cebu, and especially in Iloilo, when the bulk of the hacienda production shifted to Negros.

At the end of World War II and up till the 1950s and 1960s, the sarsuwela continued to be staged, sometimes together with the komedya or the stage show, in provinces like Pangasinan, Ilocos and Leyte-Samar. However, with the spread of Americanized education and the inundation of the rural areas by film, radio, and later television, the sarsuwela was eventually set aside as outmoded and irrelevant, except perhaps in the Ilocano-speaking areas which continued to sponsor komedyas and sarsuwelas (with contemporary themes and costumes) presented by commercial troupes from the Ilocos and Pangasinan as part of the celebration of the feast of the town's patron saint.

But then again, it could be said that the sarsuwelas never really died but merely migrated from stage to screen, undergoing a change of medium that was as logical as it was "natural." As early as 1912 when the first silent features were made, the American producers chose known sarsuwela companies to act in their respective Rizal movies. Edward Gross used the theatre group of his wife, sarsuwela star Titay Molina, for his *La Vida de Rizal* (The Life of Rizal), while Albert Yearsley hired the Gran Compania de la Zarzuela Tagala de Severino Reyes to appear in his *El Fusilamiento de Dr. Jose Rizal* (The Execution of Dr. Jose Rizal). In 1919, when Jose Nepomuceno, the "Father of the Filipino Film," chose to shoot the most popular sarsuwela of his time, *Dalagang*

Bukid (Country Maiden), as the first locally-produced silent feature, it was logical for him to use the stars that made the sarsuwela famous, namely, Atang de la Rama and Marceliano Ilagan, among others. From then on, the actors, directors and writers of the sarsuwela (as well as drama and bodabil later on) systematically “migrated” to the cinema, bringing with them the themes, values, stories, and characters as well as the acting, directorial and musical conventions of the sarsuwela. Thus some of the most popular musicals of the Filipino film industry from the 1930s to the 1970s were really filmed sarsuwelas: *Bituing Marikit* (Beautiful Star), 1937; *Ay, Kalisud* (Oh, Misery!), 1938; *Giliw Ko* (My Beloved), 1939; *Pakiusap* (Request), 1940; *Tunay na Ina* (The Real Mother), 1940; *Bakya Mo Neneng* (Your Wooden Clogs, Neneng), 1949; *Maalaala Mo Kaya?* (Can You Remember?), 1954; *Waray-Waray* (Nothing), 1954; *Pilipino Kustom – No Touch!* (Filipino Custom, Do Not Touch), 1955; *Ang Tangi Kong Pag-ibig* (My Only Love), 1955; *Ikaw Kasi* (It’s Your Fault), 1955; *Tingnan Natin* (Let’s See), 1957; *Doon Po Sa Amin* (Back Home), 1960; and *The Gift of Love*, 1970. As may be expected, the character types, convoluted plots and moralistic endings of these films are also inherited from the old sarsuwelas.

Revival and Revitalization: 1970-2009

In the decades after World War II, educated Filipinos imbibed American cultural standards through obligatory courses on Anglo-American literature and drama at all educational levels. Not surprisingly, these English-speaking Filipinos raised on Shakespeare, Ibsen and Williams, paid no attention to the native theatre, which was considered as “illegitimate” and certainly not worthy of critical study, much less revival. Only a few schools, such as Centro Escolar University, performed sarsuwelas like Florentino Ballecer’s *Sundalong Mantika* (Sluggish Soldier) and Engracio Valmonte’s *Ang Mestisa* (The Half-breed Girl) during this period, but the interest generated by these productions was more academic than popular. The same may be said of the revival by Rolando Tinio of Precioso Palma’s *Paglipas ng Dilim* for the Ateneo de Manila University in 1969.

By the 1970s, however, a militant nationalism had risen and launched the search for a Filipino identity both inside and outside academe. Social scientists sought to reorient history, psychology, anthropology, philosophy, economics and political science towards a Filipino point of view, while students, professionals, workers, farmers formed mass organizations which took to the streets to work for an economy and government that would benefit the majority of Filipinos. In the same spirit, artists, cultural workers and scholars began to see the need for building a culture that would be pro-Filipino and pro-people, and which would serve as a unifying force for a country that had been fragmented by three centuries of Spanish colonization and half a century of American “benevolent assimilation.”

As theatre scholars studied the ethnic rituals and mimetic dances of the pre-Spanish traditions, as well as the *sinakulo*, *komedya*, *sarsuwela* and drama of the Hispanized traditions, some theatre artists, notably those of Dulaang Babaylan (founded 1973), started to revive these plays or revitalize them with new themes, worldviews, approaches and staging techniques. Outstanding revivals of traditional *sarsuwelas* are the Zarzuela Foundation’s *Walang Sugat*, 1971; Bancom’s *Ang Kiri* (The Flirt), 1974; and St. Paul College’s *Filipinas Para Los Filipinos* (The Philippines for the Filipinos), 1982. Following the new CCP’s emphasis on the revival and revitalization of traditional forms as an integral part of the creation of a Filipino national theatre, the then newly-established CCP resident company Tanghalang Pilipino restaged *Dalagang Bukid*, 1987; *Paglipas ng Dilim*, 1989; *Walang Sugat*, 1994; *Pilipinas Circa 1907*, 1992; and *Sa Bunganga ng Pating*, 1995. To document these productions and encourage theatre groups to stage these *sarsuwelas*, the CCP came out with a *sarsuwela* series which reproduced the scripts, costume designs and minus one music of *Dalagang Bukid*, *Paglipas ng Dilim*, and *Walang Sugat*.

In contemporary revivals of the traditional *sarsuwela*, modern directors saw it fit to put more substance into what were considered “naïve” or schematic stories by: (a) adding more dialogue to deepen character and character motivations; (b) adding/rewriting/rearranging

scenes to inject more “logic” and “action” into traditional plots; (c) rearranging or adding songs, to which modern audiences could relate (for example, *Bayan Ko* in the 1971 production of *Walang Sugat*); (d) beefing up scenes with more period business and dances; (e) designing sets which would be more expressive of theme and period but manageable for quick scene changes; (f) designing costumes which would be more expressive of character, period and mood; and (g) plotting lights to denote mood, time of day and change of scenes (black-outs). In short, the revitalization efforts used literary and production techniques, both traditional and modern, to make the sarsuwela “understandable” and “palatable” to the contemporary audience which had been Americanized for about a century and whose sensibility was worlds apart from that of the pre-war sarsuwela audiences. Unlike the komedya which had set characters and conventions, the sarsuwela was fortunately more open to all kinds of innovations in content, value system and worldview and more malleable in terms of modification of form.

More important than the revival of old sarsuwelas was the creation of new sarsuwelas from the 1970s to the present. Attesting to the viability of the form in our day, these new sarsuwelas tackle a wide range of subject matter from historical subjects to the latest contemporary issues. PETA’s *Halimaw* (The Monster), 1971, by writer Isagani Cruz and composer Lutgardo Labad, revolved around the autocratic monarchy that has been established in the country after the Constitutional Convention of 1971 (Cruz 1988, 1-60). U.P. Concert Chorus’s *Sumpang Mahal* (Sacred Vow), 1976, by Domingo Landicho and Rey Paguio, satirized the colonial mentality and nouveau riche arrogance of Filipino-American *balikbayans*. U.P. Repertory’s *Ang Bundok* (The Mountain), 1977, by Amelia Lapeña-Bonifacio and Fabian Obispo, dramatized the resistance of a Cordillera group to the take-over of their ancestral lands by foreign mining companies (Bonifacio 1972). PETA’s *Pilipinas Circa 1907*, 1982, by Nicanor Tiongson and Lutgardo Labad/Lucien Letaba/Louie Pascasio highlighted the conflict between Filipinos and Americans in the first decade of the American colonial regime in the economy, politics and culture (Tiongson 1985). Frank Rivera’s *Ambon, Ulan, Baha* (Drizzle, Rain, Flood), 1978 tackled the illegal practices that lead to the destruction

of the environment and the resultant floods, while his *Oyayi* was first presented in 1979 in Mindanao with the theme of family-planning (Rivera 2003 and 2004). Dulaang U.P.'s *Basilia ng Malolos* (Basilia of Malolos), 2007, by Nicanor Tiongson and Joy Marfil traced the struggle of Basilia Tantoco and the other women of Malolos in the late nineteenth century to free themselves from both the Spanish overlords and the local patriarchy.

Believing in the effectivity of the sarsuwela form for conveying nationalistic themes, the National Centennial Commission sponsored a sarsuwela contest with generous prizes to celebrate the centennial of Philippine Independence in 1998. The first place went to *Palasyo ni Valentin* (Valentin's Palace), 1999, by Mario O'Hara which chronicled the story of a gothic love triangle between a sarsuwela actress who was forcibly separated from her real love, a sarsuwela musician, to become the Spanish director's mistress. The second prize was shared by three sarsuwelas: *Hibik at Himagsik nina Victoria Laktaw, Atbp.* (Lamentation and Revolt of Victoria Laktaw and Others) by Bienvenido Lumbea and Lucien Letaba, focused on women characters, who were initially victimized by the invading American soldiers during the Philippine-American war, but were able to transcend their traumas and join the Filipino guerillas in the mountains; *Paglayang Minamahal* (Cherished Freedom) by George de Jesus III and Jesse Lucas, narrated the love story between Mauricio, the scion of a rich family, and Alodia, a distant cousin and childhood sweetheart, which surmounted many trials and achieved a glorious ending amidst festivities at the opening of the Malolos Congress; and *Bayan, Isang Paa na Lamang* (My Country, Just One Foot Remains) by Melba Padilla Magay and Lucio San Pedro, presented a grandmother in a wheelchair who narrated to the participants of the People Power Revolution the involvement of her own parents in the revolution led by the ill-fated Andres Bonifacio. All the winning plays were staged in different venues in Metro Manila from 1999 to 2001.

Outside Metro Manila, new original sarsuwelas continued to be written and staged by groups from the Ilocos, like the Paat Dramatic Guild of Bantay and the St. Catherine Zarzuela Group of Santa Catalina;

from Pangasinan like the Tamayo Stage Troupe of Santa Barbara, and Baay Dramatic Association of Lingayen; from Iloilo, like the U.P. Visayas Alumni Theatre Company of Miag-ao and another group of Henry Tejero in Tigbawan. In Silay from 1986 to about the mid 1990s, an annual sarsuwela competition was sponsored by the local government and the Silay City Arts Foundation. Participants in these contests were the city's barangays which came out with original sarsuwelas in Ilonggo, directed, performed, designed and financed by the sugar workers themselves. Most of these sarsuwelas, like *Matam-is Man Gali ang Kalamay* (Sugar is Sweet), 1992, dramatized stories drawn from the warp and woof of the *sacada's* every day life. These productions often served as occasions for socialization as well as for individual and communal expression.

The avid reception by audiences of the revivals of early sarsuwelas like *Walang Sugat*, *Paglipas ng Dilim* and *Dalagang Bukid* as well as of the continuing productions of new sarsuwelas like *Ang Bundok*, *Hibik at Himagsik* nina Victoria Lactaw and *Matam-is Man Gali ang Kalamay* prove beyond doubt that this dramatic genre imported into the Philippines from Spain 130 years ago, has been thoroughly indigenized in content and form and transformed by native artistry and ingenuity into a major pillar of the Filipino national theatre.

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