

HUMOR AS SEDITION/SEDUCTION: HUMOR AND COMMUNITAS IN THE FILIPINO ZARZUELAS

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This paper aims to study the zarzuela particularly Severino Reyes's *Walang Sugat* (ca. 1902), Juan Matapang Cruz's *Hindi Aco Patay* (1903), Aurelio Tolentino's *Kahapon, Ngayon at Bukas* (1903), and Hermogenes Ilagan's *Dalagang Bukid* (1917), as an early twentieth century Filipino art form and as repository of the ways by which humor operates to engender negotiations within community. It examines these specific texts in order to reevaluate Philippine comedy and humor, exploring how their deployment of comic strategies illuminate and underscore the creation of *communitas* in Filipino terms. It also examines the complicity of humor in defining nation as community, thereby solidifying and strengthening the nationalist struggle as one that is based, too, on local knowledge and everyday life. The nationalist agenda that underpinned the perspective of these plays as "seditious" in early twentieth century colonial Philippines and that lies in the ideals of freedom from American rule, is enfolded in these plays by strategies

that rely on the comic and the acknowledgment of humorous tactics. More than just being comic relief, or being relied upon as dramaturgic strategies, these comic openings and instances re-present the quirks, traditions, eccentricities of Philippine society, re-situate and consciously utilize carnivalesque aspects of humor in order to reconfigure a unique Filipino cultural psyche. Finally, it will study how humor in these zarzuelas as nationalist plays becomes an operating textual and cultural device that reconstitute accepted beliefs, render moot and fracture hegemonic normalcies by using comic strategies to open possibilities for deploying the comic within the nation as community, moving now to craft and define its own identity.

Humor and the Zarzuela

The zarzuelas I am examining in this paper belong mainly to Tagalog plays which were written in the period between 1900 and 1941, the acme of the zarzuelas and dramas in the Philippines (Zamora 1987, 367). The zarzuela is generally defined as a musical play, written either in prose or verse or a “combination of both,” either serious, but more often humorous, “very like the operetta” (ibid.). The zarzuela rose to fame together with many other dramatic forms in the nineteenth century to the early twentieth century in the Philippines, and in a sense came into its own as part of the dramas Tagalog playwrights used “as a means of inciting armed resistance against the new colonizers” during the period of conflict between Filipinos and Americans beginning 1898 (ibid., 370). Amelia Lapena-Bonifacio places the rise of the zarzuela, and its anti-colonial thrusts, in the early 1900s with plays like *Fuera los Frailes*; openly anti-clerical plays expressing nationalism against the Spanish authorities (Bonifacio 1972, 17). Nicanor Tiongson (1985, 25-26) cites the birth of the Tagalog zarzuela “in the last years of the 19th century, with the staging of *Budhing Nagpahamak* (ca. 1890).” At the end of the nineteenth century and the dawn of the twentieth, Philippine theater companies saw the demise of the comedia, and the rise of the zarzuela, due to certain factors: the disappearance of Spanish censorship that prohibited artistic presentations that could be construed as a “search

for a Filipino identity in the period of Reform (1882-1896) and of Revolution against Spain and America (1896-1901)” (ibid., 27). Also, the later zarzuelas became as popularly patronized as the old comedias, once they “contented themselves with the portrayal of local customs and the problems of individuals” (ibid.). The early Tagalog zarzuelas, however, were truly potent dramas whose plots

were threadbare, or at best, merely skeletal, on which hung long speeches intended to awaken antagonistic and hostile passions among the Filipinos against their new colonizers and inflame them into continuing the revolution for absolute independence for their country. (Bonifacio 1972, 24)

“Seditious,” they were called by the American colonial government in the first decades of the twentieth century, indicting these as

inculcat[ing] a spirit of hatred against the American people and the Government of the United States... [and] incit[ing] the people of the Philippine islands to open and armed resistance to the constituted authorities, and induc[ing] them to conspire together for the secret organization of armed forces... for the purpose of overthrowing the present Government and setting up another in its stead. (Fernandez 1981, xi)

Daniel Gerould (1978, 3) in his essay “Tyranny and Comedy” begins with a very real, but no less startling statement, that “comedy thrives on tyranny.” Gerould asserted that on a very shallow scale this could be seen as a way to get away from authorities or as a manipulative device against dictators by their victims, in which “systematic repression induces laughter as a healthy outburst (ibid.). Tyranny here could refer to the power wielded by the “traditional targets of comedy,” such as the unbending senex of Roman comedy, “despotic parents, pedants, jealous husbands” of English Restoration comedy (ibid.). However, Gerould extends this proposition by “singl[ing] out one striking phenomenon: the comic portrayal in drama of the all-powerful political tyrant

wielding the apparatus of mass oppression and ruthlessly crushing the human rights of others on a vast scale....” Gerould asks: “[c]an savage tyranny, with its reign of terror and death, be treated as comical? Can even the indiscriminate victimization of the guiltless be laughable?” (ibid., 4).

I begin by laying down part of this paper’s problematique on what Gerould inquires into, because the zarzuelas as were earlier studied, was not seen at all as comic apparatuses whose subtleties intend to subvert the existing power alignment in Philippine colonial history. For the most part, we saw many of the fin-de-siecle Tagalog zarzuelas as propagandistic musical dramas not much noted for subtlety. On the contrary, these were branded as “seditious” because these were mainly seen as serious dramas, consciously advocating revolt against either Spanish or American governments, focusing Filipino individual and communal agencies to overt acts of defiance.

While the zarzuela was primarily seen as propagandistic material at a time of conflict, I posit that the potency of these nationalistic plays rely on the deployment of humor and comic strategies that are particularly Filipino in nature, making these plays familiarly Filipino, underscoring the appeal of these plays by interweaving the comic with the very serious undertow of these plays. I shall examine here the most evident comic strategies that both push the national proselytism of these plays, while also subverting these within the more communal, familiar, humorous aspects of these plays.

Othering the Antihero: Making Villainy Laughable

Juan Matapang Cruz’s *Hindi Aco Patay* (1903), Severino Reyes’s *Walang Sugat* (ca. 1902), and Aurelio Tolentino’s *Kahapon, Ngayon at Bukas* (1903) (hereon, HAP, WS, and KNB) feature the binary opposition of the nationalistic but deprived hero/heroine, versus the foreign predator/oppressors, who are depicted as icons of abundance and of greed. The basic plot of these zarzuelas focuses on the depiction of the

treachery of the foreigner, and the valiant bravery and love of country of the characters who depict the native love of country.

Structurally, Cruz's *HAP* appears to echo Reyes's *WS*, in its use of comic deception as an integral part of the plot that would expose the ineptness of the villain/foreigner, as it provides a comic comeuppance for this unpatriotic antagonists.

Naming has become an evocative device to underscore this lack of virtue, of which, ultimately, the worst is the lack of love of country. We see this most clearly used in *HAP* and in Tolentino's *KNB* in which all characters are most evocative of signs of the presence of patriotism, or the lack of it. Allegorical naming in the zarzuela is more than just a device to emphasize acceptable virtues—the characters are named in order to clarify comic identity, which may also be revealed by way of costume. And while characters are exteriorly defined by “occupation, social class, wealth (or its absence)... mood and temperament” (Charney 1978, 54), in Cruz and in Tolentino, naming itself becomes a form of play, leveling identity and ridicule at these zarzuelas' characters at the same time. We will also see later how allegory has simplified not just plot but the very depiction of character, creating a palpable division among characters as Filipinos, or more loosely, as inhabitants of these islands.

Juan Matapang Cruz's *Hindi Aco Patay*

Most comical in its depiction of the comic antihero is Juan Matapang Cruz's *HAP*. Ualang-Hinayan, Cruz's comic antihero is described in the dramatis personae as “walang-awa, malupit, walang habag, taksil” (merciless, cruel, traitorous). I deemed Ualang-Hinayan in *HAP* the most comic stereotypical villain in these zarzuelas for a number of reasons. Ualang-Hinayan is an allegorical comic foil to the virtue of Karangalan, his sister, Pinagsakitan; his mother/Filipinas, the motherland; and Tanguan, the patriotic hero; even to Kauri and Kakulay, the more ordinary Filipino characters, who turn out to be better than Ualang-Hinayan himself.

The play begins with Maimbot (Envious) stating that he wishes for Macamcam (Greedy) to marry Karangalan (Honor), boasting of their wealth. Tangulan (Protection), Kauri (Of the Same Kind), and Kakulay (Of the Same Color) discuss Pinagsakitan's (Sorrow/Dolor) and Karangalan's plight, especially in the light of the death of Karangalan's father. This led to their present state of poverty. To add to this, Tangulan and Ualang-Hinayan's friendship has waned, as the latter became friendlier to Macamcam.

Ualang-Hinayan gives us a view of his brazen nature in this early scene:

Tangulan: Wala naman,
 Ang oras ay pinapalipas ko lang.
 Mula ng mamatay ang
 butihin mong ama
 Ay nagdalang-hiya na akong magpakita
 Sa iyong ina...
 Maging ang ina ko'y
 Mayroon ding karamdaman...
 Ano kaya ang pinakamainam
 Upang ang ating ina'y
 Kapwa guminhawa?

Ualang-Hinayan: Tanong mo'y di ko matutugon.
 Ang nasa ko'y magkamal ng limpak
 Na salapi
 Upang itong paghihirap ay mangyaring
 Iwaksi!... (Act 1, 549)

In addition to this incipient greed that he verbalizes so openly, later on Ualang-Hinayan adds envy and jealousy to his list of vices, when he prejudices Tangulan's feelings for his sister. Ualang-Hinayan then befriends Macamcam and leads the latter to his home, where Macamcam presses his suit for Karangalan's hand. Despite Pinagsakitan's demurral that Karangalan needs the advice of elders like Katuiran (Right Reason), and peers like Kakulay and Kauri, Ualang-Hinayan himself takes on the Macamcam's suit, trying to prevail upon Karangalan. He then pushes Pinagsakitan and Karangalan to accept Macamcam's money:

Ualang-Hinayan: Narito, Karangalan,
 Tanggapin ang kuwintang
 kaloob ni Macamcam

Karangalan: Ualang-hinayan, Ako't ang ina
 ko'y di nangangailangan
 Ng ganyang yamang di pinaghirapan—
 Bagkus nga'y nakamit sa pagbibili
 Ng dangal at buhay ng iyong kapatid.

Ualang-Hinayan: Huwag kang
 magsalita sa ganyang himig,
 Karangalan,
 Ikaw, Ina,
 Kuwalta'y tanggapin na
 Pinagsakitan: Hindi, Ualang-Hinayan,
 Kami'y huwag mong ipagbili;
 Lumayas ka! ...

Ualang-Hinayan: *Hindi ako namamali,
 Pagkat nais kong tayong lahat
 Ay magkamal ng salapi;
 Kapag napakasal ka sa kanya
 At sa bayan ay siya ang maghari
 Tiyak kong ang paggalang ng lahat sa ati'y
 isusukli (Act 1, 560-561; emphasis mine).*

In literally handing over honor, and thereby breaking the heart of Pinagsakitan, the suffering mother, and removing them to the margins by having them live a hard-scrabble life in the mountains in their attempt to flee from Macamcam and Maimbot to the mountains, Ualang-Hinayan becomes a literal fool in the absence of Reason, who in this play is personified too by Katuiran (a literal voice of reason). More than this, the foil is rendered comical and is most reviled in his unawareness of his villainy. Ualang-Hinayan sells his sister to Macamcam, son of the wealthy Maimbot, persisting in the thought and thoroughly convinced that Pinagsakitan would have a much better life if Karangalan were to marry money. Ualang-Hinayan pursues this forced engagement of his sister to someone she does not love, but this becomes even more blackly humorous when he himself sees nothing morally iniquitous about this corrupt exchange, when every one else sees how depraved a decision it is, or worse in the face of Karangalan's and

Pinagsakitan's pain. Again and again, Ualang-Hinayan's stubbornness in believing that Macamcam's wealth will bring him all good, and that Karangalan's marriage to Macamcam is all that is needed to get at this. This adamant conviction is almost gleeful, and at times so blindly inwardly preoccupied, such that he does not even see the immorality of what he is doing. Ualang-Hinayan is so unseeing that even Macamcam is able to get his mettle, despising him even as he is a supposed ally, for being worse than the actual oppressors are:

Ualang-Hinayan: (sa sarili) Sa kasalukuyan kong kalagayan

At sa suwerteng tinataglay,

Sa aki'y wala nang makakapantay

Macamcam: (sa sarili) *Wala nang higit pang masama/
sa lalaking ito,*

Ualang-Hinayan: (sa sarili) Kaya nga ako ngayo'y
tuwang-tuwa.

Macamcam: (sa sarili) *Sarili niyang kapatid ay itinataya.*

Ualang-Hinayan: (sa sarili) Sa salapi'y sagana ako.

Macamcam: (sa sarili) *Wala nang
kahihiyang ang taong ito.*

Ualang-Hinayan: (sa sarili) Mayamang-mayaman na
ako. (Act 2, 567; emphasis mine)

We are fascinated by Ualang-Hinayan as a villain because he degenerates before our very eyes. We begin to despise him as an unfeeling monster whose greed overcomes all supposed ties of love. But we are as exasperated because he is so narrowly obsessed by the "rightness" of his decision: that indeed life will be better for his mother and sister with Macamcam's and Maimbot's wealth. His response to this is so rigidly adhered to. In so doing, despite the repetitive and almost treacherous pleas of Pinagsakitan, Katuiran, and Tangulan, Ualang-Hinayan's response ranges from obstinacy and sullenness, to cunning and cupidity. Ualang-Hinayan moves from being a reprehensible brother as Karangalan reproaches him. His response to this was to pretend to accept this admonition and pretend to change ("Kunwa'y mababago na ako"), only so that he could escape from Kauri and Kakulay who have apprehended him, with the opportunity to repeat everything to Macamcam.

Moreover, another motive for this was his cravenness, in his fear that his peers and former friends wish to “bury him alive”: “Gusto nila akong ilibing na buhay! / Kung makakatakas lamang ako, / Tiyak na sila ang mahihirapan / Lalu na kapag ang magtatagumpay / Ay si Macamcam / Kapag ako’y nakatakas / Magsihanda kayo / At kay Macamcam ay magsusumbong ako” (Act 2, 575-576). We see Ualang-Hinayan’s misplaced bravado and tone of sniveling cowardice. On the other hand, when he confronts Karangalan and his mother Pinagsakitan in the mountains, in order to force Macamcam’s proposal to Karangalan, he changes from a tone of authority, virtually invoking a stature of a family figurehead,

Ualang-Hinayan: Ikaw, Ina, na labis nang naghirap,
At ikaw, Karangalan—
Sa aki’y sumunod kayong dalawa;
Tayo’y uuwi na.

Pinagsakitan: Sa anong dahilan, walang-awang anak?

Ualang-Hinayan: Upang ayusin ang kasal ni Karangalan
Kay Ginoong Macamcam, gaya ng
Aking salitang binitawan...
Karangalan, tayo nang umuwi.
Karangalan: Sa anong dahilan?

Ualang-Hinayan: Dapat ay hindi ka na mag-alinlangan
Dapat mong alamin ang pagpapakasal
Kay Macamcam ay hindi
mo mauurungan....
Masusunod ang aking kagustuhan,
Halika na Karangalan.

(Hihilahin at ipagtutulakan si Karangalan.)

Karangalan: Lubayan mo ako, Ualang-Hinayan!
Ikaw—
Na maging ang sariling kapatid
Ay ipinangangalakal... (Act 2, 582-583)

This act on the part of Ualang-Hinayan leads to a gunfight duel between Macamcam and Tangulan. Tangulan is hit on the chest, leading everyone to believe him dead. However, Tangulan recovers in secret and writes a letter to spread the word that Tangulan is dead in order to have his corpse brought to Karangalan, and thereby stop

Karangalan's wedding to Macamcam. Even in the end, Tangulan's comic deception supported by his uncle Katuiran, falls rather flat when faced with the comeuppance meted out to Ualang-Hinayan himself. He finds out that his friend Macamcam and his father Maimbot are not as benevolent as they seem, nor are they as willing to part with their wealth. He is made to measure out a plot of land, which he is then asked by Macamcam to pay for. Tangulan, on the other hand, pretends to be a corpse and is brought to Karangalan's and Macamcam's wedding feast, as a last request by his kin; during which he rises and makes his objection to the wedding. This is taken as a sign of revolt by all the others in the feast, and Macamcam and Maimbot are overpowered by Kauri and Kakulay. Ualang-Hinayan is finally revealed for the coward and the unprincipled boor that he is:

Ualang-Hinayan: Tangulan, ako'y kapatid ni Karangalan,
 Kaya huwag mo akong isama
 sa inyong ngitngit
 At kaparusahan;
 Kauri, at ikaw, Kakulay...

Tangulan: Hahaha!
 Ngayon at tinatawagan mo si Tangulan
 Pagkat ikaw ay nagdurusa;
 Kahapon lamang, at maging nitong
 Nagdaang araw, ang *pagkanulo mo ay*
Gayon na lamang;
 Nais mo pang ipapatay
 ang kabalat mong
 May ugaling mainam, at may hangad
 Na ipagtanggol ang bayang mahal;
 Isipin mo ang lahat, Ualang-Hinayan!
 (Act 3, 606; emphasis mine)

Here we see the final underscore of Ualang-Hinayan's error, that he is exposed for the traitor that he is, and while he is not physically harmed or punished in the end, to be asked by Tangulan to "think things over" ("Isipin mo ang lahat, Ualang-Hinayan"), points to his real folly. In fact, compared to the actual

foreigners Macamcam and Maimbot, Ualang-Hinayan is even more unreasoning, pointing to this villain as reverse instruction in all that is un-Filipino: an individual who has no virtue worthy of being emulated within this microculture; one who demonstrates no love of family, no common sense, and puts no value on neighborliness (vide his treatment of Kauri and Kakulay).

It may also point to the substratum of this patriotic zarzuela, that even more bitter to accept is the Filipino who renounces all literal love of the land, and ultimately finds it easy to betray this by ceding this to the Other (Macamcam and Maimbot). Ualang-Hinayan is transformed into no more than a pimp, rendering sullied all that he touches. This depiction is not without basis, as “the opponent to the hero’s wishes, when not the father, is generally someone who partakes of the father’s closer relationship to established society... a rival with... more money... and in Plautus and Terence, he is usually the pimp who owns the girl...” (Frye 1958, 462).

Ualang-Hinayan may not have the money here, but he certainly thinks he has prospects for much in the person of, and by his friendship with, Macamcam. Finally, he does not see how degenerate he has become. This has turned him into a truly pathetic fool in front of our very eyes. This, indeed, is the very project of the zarzuela, to underscore what it meant to be Filipino; Ualang-Hinayan’s unseeing folly is emphasized in *The Filipino Drama* by the American writer Arthur Riggs when he noted, in considering the play and the charge of sedition leveled against it by the American government “that the accused,” referring to Cruz and company,

thereby meant ... that America and the American (insular) government were seeking by force to unite the Philippine Islands with the American government... that he said Philippine Islands refused the offer and were supported in that said refusal by the loyal sons of the archipelago...*that the Filipinos who supported the American government were cruel and traitorous, and that said class... are loyal only to*

*strangers...*That the defenders of the Philippine Islands as aforesaid are the only true sons of the islands, and that they are to understand by the play that they are to fight to the last gasp; that all others are traitors. (Riggs 1981, 229; emphasis mine)

Aurelio Tolentino's *Kahapon, Ngayon at Bukas*

The use of parodic characters in Aurelio Tolentino's *KNB* depicts oppressors and enemies of government as laughable. In this play, these characters portray even more grotesque, disproportionate, outrightly monstrous characters, seen in the animalistic creatures. Again, note the names used by Tolentino for this zarzuela's antiheroes: Halimaw (monster), Dahumpalay (a poisonous, viridian snake usually found in farmlands and familiar to Filipinos), Asal Hayop (behaving like an animal), Dilat na Bulag (wide-eyed blind man), Matang Lawin (eagle-eyed), Malay Natin (who knows?). Even the inoffensive characters depicting the ordinary Filipinos and Filipinas are pejoratively named: for example, Walang Tutol (one who does not object to orders) (Bonifacio 1972, 27).

Here, we find similar treatment of characters as these have been portrayed in Cruz's *HAP*. On the one hand, we see the clear binary of patriotic characters and treacherous ones, not much differently from Cruz's zarzuela. Tolentino's work, however, mines the allegorical naming and adheres this to the zarzuela's very structure, that of tracking how the Filipino, Ynangbayan, and Tagailog/Tagalog (river-dweller) face monstrous characters that portray the worst of Filipinos themselves, or of the foreigners who parasitically defraud and betray Ynangbayan, Tagailog, and all other sons and daughters of Ynangbayan.

Act One, titled *Kahapon* (Yesterday) begins with Asal Hayop leading a pack of Filipinos led by Masunurin and Walang Tutol in a drinking spree to celebrate the Chinese occupation of Balintawak, "feasting on top of the gravestones of their fallen

countrymen” (ibid., 27). Ynangbayan admonishes them most bitterly:

Mga walang loob,
 Mga walang damdam,
 Kayo’y masasaya
 Bago’y nagluluksa
 Ang kawawang bayan.
 Mga walang puso,
 Mga walang dangal,
 Nahan ang pangakong
 Kayo ay dadamay
 Sa mga pumanaw?
 Mga walang kalulua! Ang inyong mga kasayahan ngayon
 ay pagdustang tunay sa libingan ng ating marangal na lipi.
 Ano? Hindi baga ninyo nararamdaman sa ibutod ng inyong
 mga puso ang lamig ng kamatayan ng bayan? Hindi baga kayo
 nangahihiya sa sarili, ngayong kayong nangagsasayahan sa
 ilalim ng talampakan ni Haringbata, ang masiging na anak ni
 Hingiskang? (Act I, 608-609)

Asal Hayop, true to his name, turns against her, and even calls her “buisit na manggagaway” (irksome witch) (Act I, 608). More than this, Asal Hayop taunts Ynangbayan for preaching to them, and when she curses them, he slaps her.

Tagailog arrives to lead his brothers to arms against Haringbata. Asal Hayop, on the other hand betrays them to the Chinese king in exchange for money. Asal Hayop then pretends to join Tagailog’s cause, so he could get at their battle plans, but Ynangbayan points out Asal Hayop’s perfidy. When he is found out with the bribe money from the Chinese king, note how he enjoins Bayang Tagalog to avenge themselves on Asal Hayop:

Tagailog: (kay Asal Hayop) Oh! Walang pusong
 kapatid! Walang dangal! ... Pagmasdan
 ninyo’t kumikislap sa kanyang mata
 ang alipato ng kaniyang paglililo.
 Bayang Tagalog, tandaan ninyo yaring hatol.

Dapat mahalín natin ang ating mga kapatid, ang ating mga magulang, ang ating sariling buhay, ngunit lalu pa nating dapat mahalín ang dangal ng kahambal-hambal na Ynangbayan.... Bayang Tagalog... magkaroon man lang tayo ng kaunting tapang sa pagkitil ng sariling buhay. Ybubu natin ang ating dugo, lamurayin natin ang ating laman, iwalat natin ang ating mga buto, huag na lamang kumakalat-kalat sa lansangan ang mabusilak na dangal ng liping Tagalog, huag na lamang tayo ring ito ay maglublub sa putik ng lagim, ng kagalang-galang na mukhang tumatangin ng ating kahabag-habag na Ynangbayan. (Act 1, 614; emphasis mine)

Tagailog's speech here is not just exhortation, but standard-setting for Bayang Tagalog. Laying down for it the ideals of Filipino life and culture, the characters he addresses, and the audience he reaches, are made to understand how virulent and violent the price for treachery should be, as one's principles for loving one's country is no less "bodily" compromised and marked, by "taking one's life, spilling one's blood, mashing one's flesh, expose one's bones..." When he says, "... si Asal Hayop ay nagtaksil," the punishment is no less harsh: "sunugin siyang buhay!" (roast him alive!) (Act 1, 614).

Haringbata, the Chinese king is stabbed by Tagailog, but he is supplanted by Dilat na Bulag (Spain) and Matang Lawin (Spanish government), who pretend to be allies of Ynangbayan and Tagailog. Nonetheless, the two-faced nature of Dilat na Bulag and Matang Lawin surfaces even before their first encounter with these characters end:

Ynangbayan: Sinu kayo?
 Dilat na Bulag: Ako'y si Dilat-na-Bulag.
 Matang Lawin: Ako'y si Matanglawin.

Tagailog: Kalaban ba kayo?
 Dilat na Bulag: *Kami ay kaibigan.*
 Ynangbayan: Ano ang inyong nais?
 Matang Lawin: *Ang kayo'y iligtas sa
 pagkapanganyaya... (Act I, 619)*

In Act 2, however, Tagailog is forced by Matang Lawin, Dilat na Bulag, and Halimaw (Friars), to pay tribute to the Spanish king, which he, refuses. For this he was thrown into prison, and As al Hayop is replaced by another villain, Dahumpalay, who proceeds to servilely appease the new oppressors, offering his services to Matang Lawin, Dilat na Bulag, and Halimaw again for money. Halimaw virtually steals Ynangbayan's shawls and jewelry, in apparent exchange for Tagailog's freedom. Tagailog, in prison, realizes that it is Dahumpalay who has betrayed him to the Spanish government, and like in his earlier outburst, his language betrays the nature of the punishment he wishes to mete out:

Tagailog: Mga kampon ni Satan!
 Naringig [sic] kong lahat. Sa makatuwid
 ay si Dahumpalay ang nangapanganyaya
 sa akin; ninakaw ni Matanglawin ang
 salaping lahat ng aking Yna at mga
 kapatid; hinubaran sila halos ng halimaw
 sa pangakong ako'y kaniyang pawawalan,
 ngayon ay siya rin ang paroroon kay
 Dilat-na-Bulag upang ako'y ipabari...
 Asahan ninyong may Diyos, ang Diyos
 na iyan ay humahatol nang walang kibo.
*Darating ang araw na kikinig ang inyong
 matataas na loklokan, manlolomo ang
 inyong mga katawan, duduwapang kayo
 at maglulumuhod sa paanan ng aking
 kahabag-habag na Ynangbayan... (Act
 II, 625; emphasis mine).*

And indeed, Dahumpalay's downfall is his very greed, as he is persuaded to remove Tagailog's binds in exchange for a costly

diamond, and in doing so, ends up being stabbed. Worse, he is not only “roasted alive,” as Asal Hayop was, he was burned unto literal oblivion, burned until he was unidentifiable.

Tagailog: Patay na ang soail. Ah!... Ylulugso ko ang baling oslak na matisuran ng masugid kong nais, ilulunud ko sa daluyong niaring poot, susunugin ko sa lagablab ng aking marubdub na pag-ibig sa lupa kong tinubuan. ... *kapag ako’y pinukul ninyo ng bato, kayo’y sasabuyan ko ng kamandag... Susunugin ko ang mukha ng upan ding huag nilang makilala...*
(Act II, 626; emphasis mine)

Tagailog, at this point, hatches a plan to feign death, knowing that Dahumpalay will be mistaken for him. Ynangbayan is charged of revolt by Matang Lawin, and is forced to admit that her offspring are up in arms. In the end, it is Halimaw who ends up wanting to kill her, using a similar rhetoric to Tagailog’s description of the enemies’ punishment:

Halimaw: ... *Ybaon nating buhay si Ynangbayan.*
Matanglawin: Huag.
Halimaw: *Ybaon mo siya. Kapag hindi mo siya ibinaon ay ikaw ang ibabaon ko... Ytulak mo sa hukay iyan. Madali... Ytulak mu na...* (Act II, 629; emphasis mine)

While the rhetoric is similar, the exaggerated language here turned the other way, used by the alien to detail his plans against Ynangbayan, uses explicit violence apparently to emphasize the depth of their anger, but this only serves to underscore their own villainous character. The effect here is not so much chilling, as it is comically despicable—Matang Lawin and Halimaw end up rivaling each other in their iniquity, with Halimaw becoming more vicious than Matang Lawin himself. The fact that Halimaw is supposed to stand for what are supposed to be holy friars is effaced, as we note how Halimaw’s

punishment is for Ynangbayan to be buried alive, symbolic of the destitution the mother country, which, in fact, they have already effected. We compare this to Tagailog's revenge on Asal Hayop and Dahumpalay, which is to burn them to remove their flawed identities. The "dead" Tagailog ends up leading an army defeating Matang Lawin and Dilat na Bulag.

The repetition in the dramatic structure replaces the characters representing Spain with those that now represent America: Bagong Sibol (America), and Malaynatin (US government). In like manner, Bagong Sibol and Malaynatin enter the scene by pledging friendship with Ynangbayan and Tagailog:

Bagong Sibol: Balang abutan ng aming lawin
Ay lumiligtas sa pagkakaalipin,
Balang sikatan ng bituin naming
Ay lumalaya't di nilalagim.

Malaynatin: Alin mang bayan ang sumailalim
Sa aming bandila'y magluluningning.
Kayo'y aming sasamahan
Sa ituktok ng kalayan
Upang inyong makaulayaw
Mga lipi sa daigdigang...

Tagailog: Tayo'y magsama, ako'y yakapin.
Ari mong tunay ang pusu namin.
(Magyayakapan) (Act II, 632)

Act 3 (Bukas) begins with more hope as Ynangbayan with her children sew the flag that they mean to unfurl in the coming days (Bonifacio 1972, 28). In this act, Malaynatin is asked by Ynangbayan for independence. While on the surface, Malaynatin is not portrayed as cruelly as earlier antiheroes were, he is equally cunning, and in this exchange, employs a tone that is patronizing and supercilious, no better than Matang Lawin and Dilat na Bulag

Malaynatin (addressing Ynangbayan):

*Sa iyong pakiramdam
Ay kaya na ninyong tunay
Ang sariling pamumuhay,
At di na lubos kailangan
Ang kayo pa'y abuluyan?...*

Sa panahong niraranas,
Ay tunay na hindi sukat
Ang katapangan, ang lakas,
Ang dunong, ang yamang lahat
At pagkakaisang wagas.

*Kailangan ngang magkaroon
Ng pangharang sa lingatong;
Ang armas ni Bagongsibol
Sa inyo, upang umabuloy.
(Act III, 635; emphasis mine)*

Tagailog and his siblings brace for another battle with Bagongsibol. While at first Bagongsibol persists in his stubbornness, in thinking Filipinos backward and unable to defend themselves, and therefore unfit for independence, Bagongsibol is persuaded by Ynangbayan to grant Filipinos their freedom. This “rosy” ending, in which Bagongsibol and Ynangbayan come to an amicable understanding:

Ynangbayan: Di baga pangaku mu sa amin
Nang kami ay iyong tawagin,
Na ang maluningning
Na bandila'y siyang lililim
Sa kalayaang nais naming?...

Batang Lalaki: Kung di mu po itutulot
Itong aming iniluhog
Lipulin na kaming lubos
Huag na kaming tibubos
Kaming lumaking busabos.

Batang Babayi: Kung hindi mu po didingin,
Itong aming mga daing,
Buhay namin ay iyong kitlin
Huag lamang lumaking tambing
kami sa pagkaalipin.

Bagongsibol: Ah!
Hiningi ni Ynang bayan
Itong inyong kalayaan,
Ay hindi ko ibinigay
Gayong may lakas din naman.
Nguni't ang humiling ngayon
Ay kayong halos ay sangol,
Ako'y hindi na tututol,
At inyo na ang kalayaan ninyong layon,
Lumawig habang panahon.
(Act III, 648-651)

This amity is one that satisfies the demands of censorship that Tolentino faced. He “was forced to reverse entire scenes and alter the sentiments expressed by his characters” (Bonifacio 1972, 28). Like Cruz, Tolentino was charged with sedition in Manila in 1906, pardoned posthumously by Governor General William Forbes in 1911 (ibid., 28-29).

Severino Reyes's *Walang Sugat*

WS by Severino Reyes (1902) is called by Amelia Lapeña-Bonifacio (ibid., 30) as a “chameleon play,”

...belong[ing] to that elusive group of dramatic presentations which changed hues, so to speak, as soon as it became apparent that immediate independence was not forthcoming and back again to its original state whenever dangers of arrests became imminent... plays which started out as anti-friars and anti-Spanish government

became strongly anti-military and anti-American rule and conversely, when dangers of arrests became imminent, those plays which started out as anti-military and anti-American rule, circumvented the prohibition to stage by changing into plays that are anti-friars and anti-Spanish.

Bonifacio credited this change to the “bitter lessons” the Filipino playwrights of the period had experienced, and these were seen in the uses of setting, period, and antiheroic characters (*ibid.*). This explains why, of the three plays that employed disguise and deception as a main comic device in the play, WS deals with anticolonial sentiments not truly covered by the “seditious” plays of the turn-of-the-nineteenth-century American period.

We see, though, that while the major villains of the piece consisted of the religious (*Religioso*), the friars (*frailes*), Spanish officials and soldiers, and upper class Filipinos coopted by Spanish authorities, all of them are depicted as abnormal compared to patriotic Filipinos like Tenyong and Julia. The comic rests on abnormality here, and humor is engendered by the very presentation of the villains of the piece. Amid the sweet romance of Julia and Tenyong, marked by their courtship attended by Julia’s act of embroidering a handkerchief for Tenyong, the real conflict of the play emerges, as Tenyong’s father, Kapitan Inngo, is imprisoned by the Spanish authorities in Bulacan (*cf.* Tiongson 1985, 28). Tenyong rightly exclaims:

Tenyong: Oh, mundong sinungaling. Sa bawa’t sandaling ligaya na tinatamo nang dibdib, ay tinutugunan kapagdaka nang matinding dusa. Magdaraya ka. Ang tuwang idinudulot mo sa min ay maitutulad sa bango nang bulaklak na sa sandaling oras ay kusang lumilipas. (Act I, 92)

Tenyong bitterly verbalizes the pathos of time fleeing in the midst of ephemeral joy, but he also hints here at the sad condition of the country as it impinges on his own life. “Matinding dusa” (abject suffering) is, in fact the real milieu in which they lived, given the

time of strife, and the actual struggle they waged against the Spanish overlords, but the more personal suffering came in the form of Kapitan Inngo's death at the hands of the Spanish friars. Ironically, this is also what creates the "comedy of ideas" here, in which we find the ridicule of a social problem, as we find a "comedy of darkness and absurdity," which shows a "mixture of bizarre comic events with serious action" (Berkowitz in Roeckelein 2002, 55).

We find in the portrayal of the Spanish religious, the Mayor Marcelo, the Spanish guards, one of the keenest descriptions of incongruity in these zarzuelas. On the one hand, the friars and religious are depicted in a manner similar to the presentation of antiheroes in *HAP* and *KNB*, showing them ridiculously greedy, selfish, and decidedly inhuman/animalistic. However, the religious are depicted as abnormal in this zarzuela because of the departure of their characters from the ideal expected of them, we find foregrounded the juxtaposition of hateful ruthlessness and almost macabre cruelty, against the expectation of kindness and mercy. In dealing with Kapitan Inngo, Religioso Uno is quick to denigrate a prisoner named Capitang Luis, dismissing him right off as "masaman tao" (a bad person) (Act I, 93). The supposedly holy man continues:

- Religioso 1: Kun hindi man mason, marahil filibustero, sapagka't kun siya sumulat maraming K, kabayo ka.
- Marcelo: Hindi po ako kabayo Among.
- Religioso 1: Hindi ko sinasabi kabayo ikaw, kundi kun isulat niya an kabayo may K, an lahat nan C pinapalitan nan K. *Masaman tao iyan, mabuti mamatay siya.*
- Religioso 2: Marcelo, si Capitan Piton, si Capitan Miguel at an Juez de Paz, ay daratdagan [sic] nan racion.
- Marcelo: Hindi sila makakain eh.
- Religioso 2: *Hindi an racion ang sinasabi ko sa iyo na dagdagan ay an pagkain, hindi, ano sa akin kundi sila kumain? Mabuti nga mamatay silan lahat. An racion na sinasabi ko sa iyo ay an palo, maramin palo an kailangan.*

- Marcelo: Opo Among hirap na po ang mga katawan nila, at nakakaawa po naman mangagsidaing. Isang linggo na pong paluan ito, at isang linggo po namang walang tulog sila.
- Religioso 1: Loco ito. *Anon awa-awa? Nayon walang awa-awa, duro que duro... awa-awa.* Ilan kaban an racion nayon? An racion nan palo, ha?
- Marcelo: Dati po'y tatlong kaban at makaitlo sa isang araw na tinutuluyan. Ngayon po'y lima nang kaban at makalima po sa isang araw.
- Religioso 1: *Samakatuwid ay liman veces 25, at makaliman 125, ay hustong 625.* (Binibilang sa daliri) *Kakaunti pa...* (Act I, 93; emphasis mine)

This exchange is blackly funny as it details an anatomy of cruelty, and this coming from a religious, exposes many levels of incongruity here. First, the religious are stereotypically depicted as heartless here, and this “typification” becomes even more strangely acceptable in that the religious are unnamed and are given a general title, which, again, is almost a sardonic acknowledgment of the “type” of people these are, and is not at all meant to treat them in the personal. This “typification” also alludes to the acceptance of these characters as types familiar to the Filipino audience of the time, thus making of this scene both a laughable one when we think of these characters as stock ones, but also as a pathos-filled one because we are able to laugh at these characters only as contemptible ones, and in doing so, we acknowledge the pain this cruelty has meted on to a personal and national body.

This exchange, which also places Alcalde Marcelo in a position similar to that of Ualang-Hinayan’s in *HAP*, and Asal Hayop and Dahumpalay in *KNB*—as native supporter and enabler of an alien regime—corroborates too the depiction of the friars as no less bloodthirsty. The religious here, Uno and Segundo, literally verbalize

the dearth of wisdom and compassion that makes them so inapt for the title they carry. On the part of Religioso Uno, his prejudgment of the prisoner as “bad” stems from the orthographic disparity the latter demonstrates (spelling with a K instead of a C), and while this is truly ridiculous, it does underscore the wedge between the mainstream alien colonial culture and its standards, and the defiance, however puny, of a native Filipino culture, alluded to in this complaint made by Religioso Uno.

The second religious betrays his own ruthlessness when he speaks of delivering an alternative “ration,” not now of food, as the meaning we expect to give to it, but as he puts it, of stripes or beatings for the prisoners. The misdirection here by way of the play on words certainly consolidates his stance as an unfeeling, merciless one, but it also generates a laughter of almost awed disbelief because this cruelty is magnified when placed side by side Marcelo’s temporary misgiving, when he states that the prisoners are suffering terribly.

The friar exhibits an almost insatiable desire to mete out suffering, and later, this almost exaggerated cruelty, will be rendered almost unbelievable when Religioso Uno talks to the alcalde about Kapitan Inggo, who is about to die. Marcelo ascertains that Inggo is in a dire way,

Marcelo: Mamamatay pong walang pagsala; *wala na pong laman ang dalawang pigi sa kapapalo at ang dalawang braso po’y litaw na ang mga buto, nagitgiit sa pagkagapos.*

Religioso 3: May buhay pusa si Kapitan Inggo. Nariyan po sa kabilang silid at tinutuluyan uli nang limang kaban.

Religioso 1: *Mabuti, mabuti. Marcelo huwag mon kalilimutan na si Kapitan Inggo ay araw-araw papaloin at ibibilad at bubusan nan tubig an ilon, at huwag bibigyan nan mabutin tulugan ha?*

Marcelo: Opo Among. (Act I, 93; emphasis mine)

This inhuman injunction is almost parodic, as it presents comically the extreme even of inhumanity itself. Rendering this almost a caricature of evil unrelieved by any touch of reality, but again, the extreme irony is that this cruelty is existent. Juxtaposed against the friar's two-faced nature later on, as he speaks to Kapitana Putin, Inngo's wife: "...nayon makikita mo na an tao mo, dadalhin dito, at sinabi ko sa Alkayde na huwag papaluin, huwag nan ibibilad, at ipinagbiling ko na bibigyan nan mabutin tulugan... Kami ay aakyat muna sandali sa Gobernador, at sasabihin namin na pawalan lahat an mga bilanggo, kaawaawa naman sila" (Act I, 93).

The cunning nature of the friar is so evident here, as he lies so glibly in the face of the atrocity that he just ordered earlier. The tragedy of Inngo's subsequent death is overshadowed by this episode of overt oppression, because "senseless cruelty and pandemic injustice, in becoming the norm, [has] become preposterous; if whole classes of people can be arrested and liquidated for no reason, the world is a madhouse" (Gerould 1978, 11). Inngo's death becomes an expected rallying point for Tenyong's and other Filipinos' revolt. This is watered down by the interweaving of the romance of Tenyong and Julia with the communal struggle against an abstract Spanish oppression, now enfolded by the friars' ethical and spiritual lack. Julia and Tenyong's romance reaches its happy conclusion, even after Julia is promised by her mother Juana in marriage to the weakling Miguel. Tenyong's comic pretense pays off, and it is this romantic end that is later celebrated in the play.

In the zarzuelas that we have looked into—*HAP*, *KNB*, and *WS*, these comic portrayals of villainy are supported by, and were made manifest, in the very rhetoric of violence, in which the language of cruelty and gore characterize and personify the villains as rogues, their very utterances betraying and inscribing them as "spies and informers... demented charlatans" (ibid., 5), complimenting their "metamorphosis into brutes and beasts" (ibid., 6), of which we saw many examples in these zarzuelas. This rhetoric of violence is symbol of the way the tyrant

“invents himself and his realm,” and the tyrant is himself “the creation of his own perverted rhetoric” (ibid., 19). The deployment of comic language based on this depiction of tyranny shows a tyrant’s language as “a grotesque debasement of normal speech, constantly approaching utter nonsense... the tyrant’s torturing of language is his most extreme form of action...” (ibid., 19).

As comedies of tyranny, these zarzuelas showed how these comic villains are “perpetrators of an oppressive system” (ibid., 5), but who are also, in the course of the zarzuela as nationalistic aesthetic form, themselves doubly victimized by their own despotic acts. While “metamorphosis is the modus operandi of dictatorship, in and by which nature and human society are remade” (ibid., 5), the comic antiheroes we noted in these zarzuelas are themselves changed into comic buffoons; their evil pretenses and stances are not rendered extraordinary, as they would be in a tragedy, but are reduced to the banal, petty, and vulgar everyday plane (ibid., 8-9), to which the audience responds by making them, not now the object of fear, but the butt of laughter.

In these zarzuelas, by drawing these comic villains in this manner, the colonial powers of the turn of the century Philippines are unaware of their “discredit through comic deflation,” and that by being so written, the tyrant as character is not just maligned and revolted against; the tyrant ironically “reveals his extraordinary ability to galvanize and transform the community by giving the people a purpose in life, no matter how bogus that purpose may be” (ibid., 8-9). Laughter now rests not so much only in acknowledging unexpected abnormalities, but in locating the humor seen not now as “tame” or “harmless” depictions of Philippine life, but as instances of tendentious humor, categorized by Freud as the “baring obscene, the aggressive or hostile, and the cynical,” the “common denominator” of which is to “enable the satisfaction of suppressed desire, the suppressing force being the society or its internalized norms” (ibid., 11).

Zarzuelas and the Comic Structure

Perhaps less familiar to us in the discussion of the zarzuela as a popular revolutionary art form is its power to engender community, within the Philippines that the characters inhabit, and the defense of the motherland with which the Filipino audience of the time is familiar. While we have discussed the effect of creating laughable antiheroes earlier, I add to this, now, that these zarzuelas' very use of the comic structure provide the "self-preservation and self-assertion" (Langer 1958, 460) toward which the plays' characters and audience find their joyful impetus allowing them to view the zarzuela as an occasion and an opportunity for dissent. Gerald Berkowitz (in Roেকেlein 2002, 55) speaks of comedy "as a form of drama that deals with humorous or ridiculous aspects of human behavior, has a playful mood, and which ends happily." While this can not quite be applied to the zarzuelas we are examining here, these zarzuelas nevertheless "end happily." However contrived, it is a major consideration in relegating these texts in the realm of the comic.

Northrop Frye's (1958) discussion of the structure of comedy also posits a pattern that comic plays follow, harking as far back as the structure employed by Greek New Comedies. Frye (*ibid.*, 461) says,

In the first place, the movement of comedy is usually a movement from one kind of society to another society to another. At the beginning of the play the obstructing characters are in charge of the play's society, and the audience recognizes that they are usurpers. At the end of the play the device in the plot that brings hero and heroine together causes a new society to crystallize around the hero, and the moment when this crystallization occurs is the point or resolution in the action, the comic discovery, *anagnorisis* or *cognition*.

This, in effect, is a very succinct description of what we have seen in *Hindi Aco Patay*, *Walang Sugat*, and *Kahapon, Ngayon at Bukas*. We do not quite label these plays as "comic" as they are "patriotic." These zarzuelas make complicit the comic action which consist of "the

obstacles to the hero's desire, and the overcoming of them the comic resolution" (ibid., 462) with a greater nationalistic cause. In *HAP*, and *WS*, the surface conflict is the need for the hero (Tangulan in the former and Tenyong in the latter), to win the heroine's love. This he may achieve easily enough, but the antiheroes in these plays are either the usurpers—Macamcam and Maimbot in *HAP*, and the friars and Padre Teban in *WS*—who also are in pursuit of the heroine. We also find as part of these obstacles the presence of characters who are sympathetic to the usurpers themselves, and who help advance this suit, such as the infamous Ualang-Hinayan, or the timid Miguel and ambitious Tadeo. We may also observe that in these zarzuelas, the heroine's virtue is conflated with the value of "motherland" itself. In *WS*, lovers Julia and Tenyong end up together, with Tenyong resolving bravery and love of country at the same time as he wins Julia by his comic pretense, feigning severe woundedness so that he could ask to be married to Julia as a last act before he expires. Julia then is rendered a widow, and is free to marry Miguel without any obstruction. The weakling suitor Miguel has misgivings about this, but his doubts are allayed by his own father, who just wants an expedient wedding so he too could take Aling Juana to wife. Even this is an exercise in trickery, as Tenyong virtually cuckolds Miguel on the latter's planned wedding to Julia. In the end, of course, Tenyong stands up and declares himself "walang sugat!" to the delight of Julia and the whole community. That he is "unwounded" is not just the resolution of his comic ruse, as it is comeuppance on Miguel and Tadeo's parts, but it is, more significantly, a hero's most evident triumph in the war he waged against the vicious Spanish "fraile and religioso," and the Spanish authorities, that he remained unscathed in this valorous fight for country.

HAP's end is in the overpowering of Ualang-Hinayan, Macamcam, and Maimbot at the end of the play by virtue of Tangulan's comic pretense, emphasizing respect for, and the restoration of Pinagsakitan's land. Like Tenyong, Tangulan finally wins Karangalan by pretending to be dead and allowing Ualang-Hinayan, Macamcam, and Maimbot to think they are victorious,

only for Tanguan to surface in the end, ready now to do battle with these villains. We note here the beginning of Ualang-Hinayan's recognition that his comeuppance is coming, as he Macamcam, true to his name, asks him to measure out a piece of land which Ualang-Hinayan thinks is to be his reward, only to find out that what he measured turns out to be a measure too of his folly. With this, *HAP* among the zarzuelas specifically underscores the Philippines' agricultural roots, in the same manner that it made a parallel of the hungry crows that fed off Pinagsakitan's, Karangalan's, and Tanguan's crops as they stayed in the mountains, providing a metaphor for the greedy Macamcam, Maimbot, Ualang-Hinayan, who are as avid for the Philippines as land and territory. Tolentino continued this trope by using other devices, such as the empty rice mortar, and the mortar Karangalan sits on while contemplating Tanguan's apparent death.

The possession of Filipinas/Ynangbayan, or the virtues therein (Karangalan) becomes a prize that in these zarzuelas is won by Filipinos themselves. This happy resolution fulfills the continuing trope of the body (personal/politic/national) as territory, thus underscoring the stature of the hero not just as lover but as conqueror. This we see most clearly in *HAP* and *KNB*. Indeed, in *KNB*, we do not quite see the hero/heroine mode as we see the character of Tagailog fighting not for the love of a maiden, as he is for his mother and his siblings who are victims of a continuing tide of usurpers of the land—the Chinese represented by Haringbata, the Spanish in Dilat na Bulag, Matang Lawin and Halimaw, and the American in Bagong Sibol and Malaynatin. While the comic resolution here is not in the form of the hero winning the heroine by overcoming the blocking character, we see another facet of the comic resolution, which is “to throw the main emphasis... on the scenes of discovery and reconciliation” (ibid., 464; emphasis mine). At the play's end, Ynangbayan is “rescued” by Tagailog and her other children from all other villains, but they are all still mired in the treachery of a new oppressor, Bagong Sibol and Malaynatin. The zarzuela's censored version shows Bagong Sibol changing his mind about granting Filipinos their independence as he listens to the pleas of the children. We may never know what Tolentino

may have used as a more rebellious ending, but this conclusion, at least, is comic because it “move[d] toward a happy ending... the normal response to [which] is ‘this should be’, which sounds like a moral judgment. So it is, except that it is not moral in the restricted sense, but social” (ibid., 465). The characters celebrate in the end because the comic action has ended with the “recovery of the protagonist’s equilibrium,” by “wit, luck, personal power” (Langer 1958, 458), but more than these, by provoking “thoughtful laughter” (cf. Meredith), laughter which “presents... the ways of wisdom and of folly,” making “comedy... valuable for what it revealed concerning the social order,” exposing foibles and holding common sense to an ethical standard (Frye 1958, 459).

Hermogenes Ilagan’s *Dalagang Bukid*

Ilagan’s *Dalagang Bukid* (1917) as exemplar of a comic zarzuela, having for its background an already transformed Philippines, as visibly evident in its opening scene, a “night club,” in which the play’s comic characters begin their more familiar engagements, set against American popular music (“Singing in the Rain”) and new colonial / “progressive” values. *Dalagang Bukid* (hereon, DB) is apparently more familial and light-hearted in the situations it delineates, where the comic conflicts, and thereby the comic action, are contained literally within a community of poor or struggling Filipinos. In the first act, we are privy to the situations of transition that occur among stock characters who happen to meet at the night club, and we see these stock characters depicting the comic disparity of the “backward” Filipino and the more progressive American ways. Tano and Teroy are the quintessential provincial, country bumpkins, except that Tano is now more well-versed in city ways, thus when Teroy is awed by the new night club and says “Ala eh... kagaganda pala ng cabaret dine” (Ilagan 1987, 379), Tano quips that Teroy is “nobatos” (stupid). Teroy responds by actually referring to the novelty of the city:

- Teroy: Ala eh... hindi sa nobatos, *nababaguhan lamang ako*, pagka't doon sa amin eh ang sayawan ay sa madilim, kung minsan sa mga kamalig lamang ng palay e nagkakatapos na.
- Tano: *Ibahin mo dito sa amin, dine kuwalta ang pinaguusapan*, pag may kuwalta ka iduduyan ka sa kaligayahan. (Act I, 379; emphasis mine)

The characters we find in the night club all illustrate this tussle between the old and the advent of new ways, of rusticity and innocence/ignorance and the urban vices brought by the pleasures afforded by lucre, as Tano has earlier asserted. Thus, we see Teroy wanting the native alcoholic drink lambanog, only to choose beer and whisky and club sandwiches, as taught by Tano; we see Andres and Bastian remarking upon Senador Balubad and Congresista Saluyot dancing with the club's entertainers, and showering them with money. We are also introduced to John, an American patron of the club and Petra, his Filipina girlfriend. In Andres and Sebastian, the ordinary Filipino is seen admiring holders of power in Philippine society, but these powerful personages are as generally and ridiculously drawn, as they are given names based on fruits and vegetables recognizable to poor folk, and worse in certain versions, are said to heads of unnamed committees in the Senate and in Congress, in which the blanks could be filled with any title possible. This pithy device points to the allusion that all senators and congressmen stereotypically earn well ("malaki ang sahod") and spend even more ("malakas ding gumasta") (Ilagan 1987, 380). John the American sings drunkenly, with Tano and Bastian poking fun at his condition. Petra loses her temper at the latter, thinking that they are laughing at her, and belittling her for being with an American: "Bakit ninyo kami pinagtatawanan...? Ngayon ba't ang tingin ninyo sa akin ay ganito lamang, kami'y inyong uuyamin at papalibhasain. Dapat ninyong malamang ako'y isang Pilipina, at isa rin ninyong kabalat at kababayan, na nalalaang pumatay at

magpakamatay!” (Act I, 382). We also find the “bailarina Miling and her admirer Parlong, a married man,” and later Cobang, Parlong’s wife, who brings along her admirer Paco to keep tabs on Parlong whom she suspects of infidelity (Tiongson 1985, 30).

It is in this apparently trivial opening scene that we find the crux of the play: the status of Filipinos in a Philippines that is rapidly modernizing, the bewilderment of country bumpkins in the face of this modernity, the new alliance between America and the Philippines so pruriently sealed in John and Petra, and domestic squabbles that form the comic perversion that contrasts with the idealized romance of Angelita and Cipriano. Angelita, true to her name, is the beautiful flower vendor, beloved of Cipriano, a young new lawyer. Angelita is both Cipriano’s muse and goddess—“Oh! Angelita ko, tanging ginigiliw... ikaw lamang ang Banal kong Birhen! (Act I, 385)—and an icon of Filipino womanhood. We note, however, that even this ideal is marked with the flaw of poverty—she sells flowers to help her parents out, and this becomes an entry point by which she becomes valued in the play. However pure and pretty and beguiling Angelita is, it is her lack of money that drives her parents Sabas and Maria, both of whom have a penchant for gambling, to welcome the attentions of a rather mature but wealthy suitor, Silvestre. Don Silvestre fulfills the role of the “old man in the New Comedy,” providing a foil to youth, and is typically seen as “utilitarian... peevisish, censorious, calculating, mistrustful, cold... shameless... garrulous... irascible in violent but feeble outbursts” (Herrick 1964, 154). While Silvestre woos Angelita because of her beauty, he does so even more because he knows he can, given that Sabas and Maria owe him any big amount of money. Taunting Cipriano, he crows: “Ha... ha... ha...! Talagang bata ka pa nga, dapat mong matalos na ang mga magulang ni Angelita, siyang mapunyaging maging asawa ako ng kanilang anak... At lalo nang dapat mong malaman na ang magulang niya’y may pagkakautang sa king dalwang libong piso, na ni tubo’y hindi nahuhulugan” (Act I, 386). Silvestre is a veritable senex, “living not for the noble, but for the useful” (Herrick 1964, 154), and here he shows how Angelita is just another object he could acquire with his

money, thus extending and illustrating the earlier trope of country, both in the sense of the provincial, and in the sense of nation (cf. Williams) giving way to the urban privileging of capital, allied now to “American” ways. The incongruity that Angelita would choose him over Cipriano is laughable enough, but that he proves to be an insistent suitor is even more ridiculous, and his acquisitive pursuit proves to be the obstacle to Cipriano and Angelita’s romance. In addition to this, he deludes himself that Angelita’s kindness is a sign that she, too, has feelings for him, and he acts like a besotted lover, even to the point of acting like a callow youth when asking Sabas and Maria, Angelita’s parents, for her hand in marriage, instead of the wealthy old landowner to whom they owe money. Sabas and Maria, in their eagerness for Angelita to be married to a wealthy man, also ridiculously treat him as a youth, even to the point of calling him “Ihong” (Son), and Silvestre calling them “Papy” and “Mamy” (Act III, 419). This appellation contradicts Silvestre’s very age, and makes him the comic buffoon here. Cipriano, on the other hand, is the quintessential “juventus” or young man of Roman comedies, known for “his amorous quality, for he is always in love... ambitious for honor, but not for money... are good-natured, confiding, hopeful, brave, sociable and fond of laughter...” (Herrick 1964, 150). He is the ideal that Silvestre inverts, in the same manner that he is the ideal of fidelity and devotion for which Parlong, Paco, Sabas comically provide a foil.

The major virtue privileged in this zarzuela is purity and loving devotion that we see personified in Angelita and Cipriano. We see this value being perverted by Silvestre’s ignoble reasons for wanting Angelita to wife. Similarly, we see the reversal of this devotion in the marital peccadilloes of Parlong, the husband of Kobang, who frequents the night club in his escapades. Even Parlong’s wife, Kobang, is a parodic foil of Angelita here. While she suspects Parlong of being unfaithful to her, to the point of dogging Parlong’s tracks, she too flirts with infidelity as she encourages Paco, her admirer, and makes use of his fancy to help her follow Parlong around, even in the early hours of the morning. Parlong and

Kobang are the antithesis of the patience and temperance of Angelita and Cipriano, because as Kobang is impatient to prove that Parlong is womanizer, so is Parlong eager to prove that Kobang is unfaithful, such that he threatens her with a bolo when she returns home after a night looking for him. Even Sabas and Maria, Angelita's parents, fall very short of the ideal, as they are shown to be interested mainly in gambling, playing *pangguingue* and getting into debt because of this, as they are as testy and ill-matched as Parlong and Kobang are—Maria calls Sabas "...buisit na tao...nakamumuhi. Ang hitsura lang, mukhang paniking dinaing..." and Sabas returns the insult by calling her, in turn "...At ikaw, ano ang mukha mo—mukhang tutang bagong panganak" (Act II, 409), among many other insults.

Even Angelita's song, "Nabasag and Banga," "undoubtedly the most famous song of all Tagalog *sarsuwela* songs" (Tiongson 1985, 30), underscores these Filipino virtues, as it is a naughty allusion to the consequences of passion, imaging the Filipina and her virtue as a precious and fragile vessel:

May isang Dalagang nasalok ng tubig;
Kinis ng ganda niya'y hubog sa nilatik;
Ano at kapagdaka'y biglang lumapit
Ang isang Binatang Makisig.
Wika ng Dalaga'y huwag kang magalaw;
Sagot ng Binata'y ako'y kaawaan;
Tugon ng babai huwag kang mamuisit;
Sambot ng lalaki ako'y umiibig...

Nabasag ang banga
Pagka't ang Lalaki ay napadupilas;
Kaya ang babai nandoon umiiyak
At ang sinasabi'y siya'y napahamak.

...Ako ay tinakot ng isang asuwang.
At ng sabihin kong huwag magalaw
Agad na inagaw ang banga kong tangan;
Kaya nga po umuwing walang dalang tubig
At pati na ang baro'y napuno ng putik (Act I, 394-395).

On the other hand, Angelita is not shown here merely as a passive perfect character, as it was she who helped her parents out by giving them money for their card games, money that she earned from selling flowers. In the same manner, her earnings were her support when she asked Cipriano that they push through with an early wedding, given Silvestre's suit. Cipriano is insulted that Angelita would offer her own money as it shows him as "being bought" (Act II, 412), and he declares his love pure and without guile (*ibid.*, 413). Angelita explains that this is money that she saved for herself and for no other purpose, and that she offers this to him now with no other reason but because she loved him. Cipriano has misgivings but falls in with her plan. Angelita, unknowingly, echoes what Petra earlier affirmed, that a Filipina is ready to "kill and be killed," and while this is not what she literally does, Angelita proves to be as resourceful and as strong—"ako'y isang Pilipina, at isa rin ninyong kabalat at kababayan, na nalalaang pumatay at magpakamatay!".

The comic ending here is more classically wrought than those we have seen in the other zarzuelas, because here we see that the play fulfills its comic end, in marriage, "that satisfies two contrary impulses at once: (1) the anarchic and insistent urge for pleasure, in which love and sex, beautiful girls, food and drink ... play an integral role, and (2) the integration of the comic hero into the society... and the war between youth and age... now ceases" (Charney 1978, 88-89). The party scene in honor of Angelita partly satisfies this happy ending, as did the ceding of Silvestre to Cipriano, evincing sportsmanship and generosity toward Angelita and Cipriano at the same time. The secret wedding of the lovers is now revealed, and this provides the "feasting and revelry that take place... to celebrate the natural culmination of youth... so the end of comedy is also a ritual ending, which makes it a beautiful and nostalgic moment that more than justifies any grossness or any excess... the promise of offspring assures the stability and continuance of the society (*ibid.*, 89), redounding too, to the

promise of fecundity in this new Philippines, and the possibility that there may yet be a chance to maintain the Philippines they have in their memory, untouched by new alien ways.

Humor as Sensus Communis

This paper embarked on the project of examining the turn-of-the-nineteenth century / early twentieth century Tagalog zarzuelas (particularly Juan Matapang Cruz's *Hindi Aco Patay*, Severino Reyes's *Walang Sugat*, and Aurelio Tolentino's *Kahapon, Ngayon at Bukas*) primarily as comic texts interwoven with the nationalistic desires of a fledgling nation that used this hybrid popular cultural form as a way to demarcate ideologies of heroism versus colonization and oppression. We tracked these plays as nationalistic plays whose "seditious" brand initially rested on the penchant for centering recognizable Filipino heroic or symbolic characters who propounded the need to literally wrest "las Filipinas" as community, to forge a common bond among characters and audience and to advance the goal of national sovereignty. We posited that these zarzuelas, much of what forged this identity as Filipinos rested on the agentive power of humor and comedy. We showed how the comic vilification of characters used tendentious humor—the comedy of tyranny, to examine the political import of these plays and to function to "deepen communal bonds through shared moments of laughter" (Stebbins 1979, 95). Thus, these plays has been transformed into effective tactics to define national identity and to disseminate, overtly and covertly, protest and revolutionary fervor in early twentieth century colonial Philippines. The deflation of the "enemy" is most successfully achieved in these zarzuelas. In departing from what could have been the tragic overtones of these usurpations and pointing to the ridiculous in them, these playwrights must have meant the audience to see how laughter could be used as a common weapon, to which the playwrights expected them to react. In these plays, I have asserted that the powerful are now rendered powerless, which redounds to the virtual victory of the colonized.

Thus, the plays are suggestive that we have reached into our *sensus communis*, our common sense, and expressed sociality amid an otherwise alienating and isolating historical era.

Sensus communis is better translated as “sociableness” rather than common sense. Anthony, Earl of Shaftesbury, looked upon humor as *sensus communis*—a mark of reason, “a *freedom of raillery*, a liberty in decent language to *question everything...*” (in Critchley 2002, 80-81; emphasis mine). Humor in these zarzuelas creates community by defining what it means to be Filipino through the creation of a template of what a Filipino is not. And comic villainy here is a significant depiction of this rupture between the incongruous and the ideal.

I mentioned earlier that the choice of these zarzuelas is dependent too on their depiction of *communitas*. We also saw how the laughter engendered by these zarzuelas rested on shared values of love of country, love of the land, reverence for parents and elders, respect for women, abiding love and devotion, purity in love, and loyalty in comradeship. It is this movement toward a happy resolution that makes these zarzuelas structurally comic, but it is also in this desire for a national “happy ending” that common laughter is directed toward the recognition of stronger bonds based on shared beliefs and mindsets as they are based on everyday life. Raymond Williams (1973, 165) talks about this not so much as real space, as it is “an underlying stance and approach... that show people and their relationships in essentially knowable and communicable ways.” A knowable community, he says, is “not only a function of objects—of what is there to be known. It is also a function of subjects, of observers—of what is desired and what needs to be known” (ibid.). Whether ultimately this refers to the nation as literal land and territory, as *HAP* and *KNB* meant it to be, or as identity, as we see in *WS*, the Philippines as knowable community in these zarzuelas is activated by the shared impulse to laughter, providing a porous consciousness in which the characters, audience, and the playwrights feed off one another’s cognitions and points of view. The sociability of laughter “normally arises out of

real and imagined dialogue between people” (Mulkay 1988, 108), and these zarzuelas, in deploying humor and laughter the way they did, show us that in the midst of literal, figurative, forced and imposed isolation, “we are not alone psychologically” (Chapman in *ibid.*, 108).

In the same manner, a zarzuela playwright opens up for the audience ways by which to find nodes of “knowability,” and humor here becomes a potent dowsing tool enabling the Filipino audience then, and now, to share these stances of *communitas*, allowing all of us to re/interpret Filipinas as knowable community, allowing the zarzuela to carry more meanings than just as “seditious,” propagandistic theater form past its prime.

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