

# philippine studies

Ateneo de Manila University · Loyola Heights, Quezon City · 1108 Philippines

---

## Juan Atayde and “Los Teatros de Manila”

Nicanor G. Tiongson

*Philippine Studies* vol. 30, no. 1 (1982) 59–69

Copyright © Ateneo de Manila University

---

Philippine Studies is published by the Ateneo de Manila University. Contents may not be copied or sent via email or other means to multiple sites and posted to a listserv without the copyright holder's written permission. Users may download and print articles for individual, noncommercial use only. However, unless prior permission has been obtained, you may not download an entire issue of a journal, or download multiple copies of articles.

Please contact the publisher for any further use of this work at [philstudies@admu.edu.ph](mailto:philstudies@admu.edu.ph).

<http://www.philippinestudies.net>  
Fri June 27 13:30:20 2008

## Texts and Documents

### Juan Atayde and "Los Teatros De Manila"

NICANOR G. TIONGSON

Juan Atayde's work on Philippine theater, entitled "Los Teatros de Manila," is a series of sixteen short, personal essays, first published in the illustrated weekly, *La Ilustracion Filipina*, from 21 August 1892 to 7 September 1893. For the first time since their original date of publication, the essays are now reprinted, compiled, and translated into English, to serve the needs of a wider, contemporary audience.

To introduce the present edition of Atayde's work, our evaluation shall: first, show its significance in the context of its own historical period; and second, underscore its importance to contemporary Philippine scholarship. To answer the first need, this brief essay will interpret a) the life of Juan Atayde, and b) the dilemma of Hispanism and Filipinism, which confronted the *ilustrados* of the last two decades of the nineteenth century. To clarify the work's relevance to the present, on the other hand, the evaluation will highlight Atayde's contribution to the writing, in our own time, of a) the history of Filipino theater, and b) the history of the other arts.

#### JUAN ATAYDE: THE AMBIVALENT ILUSTRADO

Juan Atayde was born in Manila in 1838, of Filipino parents who had Spanish and Aztec blood. An intelligent, well-informed and interesting conversationalist, Don Juan was supposed to have been such a quiet, punctilious and affectionate gentleman, that it is difficult to think of him as the military man that he was. As a cadet, Atayde was immediately conferred the title of *alferez (segundo teniente)*, in honor of his father who had died fighting

the Muslims of Balanguingui. As a *capitan*, Atayde served under Ramon Blanco (later governor-general of the country) in Jolo.<sup>1</sup>

Given Atayde's origins and profession, the problem of conflicting loyalties surfaced early enough in his life. In Madrid, the "progresista" Atayde spearheaded the establishment of the *Circulo Hispano-Filipino*, and its newspaper, the *Revista del Circulo Hispano-Filipino* (1882), which Wenceslao Retana notes had a "markedly liberal and reformist character."<sup>2</sup> Here he also frequented the centers of Liberalism, where he praised the "triumphs of freedom of conscience and thought" in America. In this, however, as in everything else he did, he was always "subject to military discipline and to the laws of honor," for he never took part in conspiracies or did anything against the "public peace."<sup>3</sup>

It was in his career as *periodista*, however, that the conflict between Hispanism and Filipinism matured, with Filipinism winning out in the end. Zealously viewing the periodical as his particular apostolate, Atayde founded or co-founded and/or edited more publications of a popular nature than any other Filipino of his time. For the establishment and popularization of Filipino culture and the spread of reformist ideas, Atayde "went to the extreme of sacrificing, as nobody else has, his own capital."<sup>4</sup>

Atayde's liberalism first found expression in the anti-friar newspaper *La Opinion* (founded 1887), which Retana calls the "first eminently political newspaper in the Philippines."<sup>5</sup> But it was in *La España Oriental* (founded 1888), which Atayde bought in 1889 and with which he merged *La Opinion* (after he bought the latter in 1890), that Atayde's conflicting interests became more apparent.

Thus, the 6 January 1890 editorial of *La España Oriental* proclaimed the assimilationist shiboloth of "All for the sake of Spain, and all in the interest of Spain," and stated that the newspaper

<sup>1</sup> These, and subsequent data, are gathered from the biography of Juan Atayde, in Manuel Artigas y Cuerva, *Galeria de Filipino Ilustres* (Manila: Imprenta Casa Editora, 1917), pp. 882-83.

<sup>2</sup> Wenceslao E. Retana, *Aparato Bibliografico de la Historia General de Filipinas* 3 vols. (Madrid: Imprenta de la Sucesiva de Minuesa de los Rios, reproduced in offset, Manila: Pedro B. Ayuda y Cia., 1964), 2:949.

<sup>3</sup> Artigas, *Galeria*, pp. 882-83.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 881. <sup>5</sup> Retana, *Aparato*, 3:1631.

would work ceaselessly "for all progress which may advance the glory of the fatherland in the Far East, like the immigration of peninsulars who will go into commerce, agriculture and industry, the surest way of attaining the Hispanization of these islands, of spreading among these the Castillian language, of improving education, and developing the sources which the land contains, through the propagation of work, of knowledge, of the condemnation of habit, and the introduction of modern progress."<sup>6</sup>

But while the newspaper flaunted its loyalty to Spain, Atayde nevertheless strove to make the periodical "more Filipino" by putting everything Filipino above all else, and more especially, by lowering the price of the paper (to a mere *peseta* a month) and by making it bilingual, so that it could reach the native population.<sup>7</sup> Unfortunately, the paper did not make money, and it had to be merged once again with a third newspaper called *El Eco de Filipinas*, also founded in 1890 by Atayde and Camillo de Millan.<sup>8</sup>

Again following the assimilationist tendency, Atayde likewise founded the *Revista Mercantil de Filipinas* (1892), which presented to the reading public the statistics of prices and jobs which would be of "great use to commerce."<sup>9</sup> Similarly, he published and contributed to, and most probably also founded, *Ang Pliegong Tagalog* (1896), a newspaper which sought to answer the "absolute need for a Tagalog publication" (since Spanish was not yet understood throughout the archipelago), which would spread among the people a clear understanding of the "decisions and rules" effected by Maura's municipal reforms.<sup>10</sup>

On the other hand, and in pursuit of the propagation of Filipino culture, Atayde became more and more involved in publications enunciating not only patriotic but outrightly nationalistic ideas. *La Ilustracion Filipina*, the weekly founded by Jose Zaragosa in 1891 in order to project Philippine life, was eventually bought and edited by Atayde in 1893, and finally merged with another *revista* likewise founded by Atayde in the same year, called *La*

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 1637.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 1636-37.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 1671.

<sup>9</sup> Artigas, *Galeria*, p. 885.

<sup>10</sup> Retana, *Aparato*, 3:1757.

*Moda Filipina*.<sup>11</sup> Pursuing the Filipino orientation of *La Ilustracion Filipina*, but orienting itself mainly to women, *La Moda Filipina*, on the outside, seemed to be concerned only with the Filipina's toilette and frivolous activities, but in reality succeeded in being the venue for teachers and young writers seeking a forum for their nationalist ideas. In fact, the publication was, according to Retana, "eminently Filipino," being concerned with "Filipino types, costumes and pictures," to the point that the "Filipino society" it upheld seemed more and more to be equated with those born in the country, who had more "pure, Malay blood" (as opposed to *mestizo* blood) running in their veins.<sup>12</sup>

Ambivalence, then — or the love for and desire to be assimilated to Spain on the one hand, and the fervent love for Filipino life, culture and interests, on the other — is the key to the understanding of Atayde's life and works. In pursuing this ambivalence and maintaining in himself a balance between Hispanism and Filipinism, Atayde, ironically enough, ended up being unpopular with both the reactionary Spaniards and the truly progressive Filipinos. As Retana would put it, in relation to Atayde's management of *La Opinion* and *La España Oriental*:

Because of their markedly democratic character, the latest publications of Atayde [namely, *La Opinion* and *La España Oriental*] did not please the Spaniards; and because of their conciliatory nature, respecting everyone, including the "religious institutions" [and we may add, civil and military authority], neither did they please the Filipino avant garde.<sup>13</sup>

This basic conflict Atayde lived with for as long as he could, reconciling within himself the "duties of the soldier" of Spain and the "aspirations of an ideologue" who loved his native country,<sup>14</sup> until this quiet gentleman was "branded a conspirator, put under surveillance, harassed," and finally afflicted with paralysis in 1898.<sup>15</sup> Only in 1901, according to Artigas, when the two interests could no longer be reconciled, did Atayde retire from the military.<sup>16</sup>

<sup>11</sup> Artigas, *Galeria*, p. 885.

<sup>12</sup> Retana, *Aparato*, 3:1700-1701.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 1638.

<sup>14</sup> Artigas, *Galeria*, p. 883.    <sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 886.    <sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 883.

## HISPANISM OR FILIPINISM?

Far from being unusual, the attitude of ambivalence found in Atayde was, in fact, typical of the progressive *ilustrados* of the period, for it was a phenomenon born of the reform movement itself.

It will be recalled that this movement sprang up and grew in the 1880's among Filipino writers, artists and intellectuals, who asked the Spanish government to grant the reforms which in their estimation would improve the Spanish administration of the Philippines — notably, representation in the Spanish Cortes, freedom of speech and the press, the teaching of Spanish all over the archipelago, and the secularization of the parishes.<sup>17</sup>

To obtain these reforms, the Filipino reformists realized that they had to, first and foremost, expose the true conditions of the country — through scientific essays, like Jose Rizal's "Sobre La Indolencia de los Filipinos" (1890),<sup>18</sup> Marcelo H. del Pilar's *La Soberania Monacal en Filipinas* (1888),<sup>19</sup> and Gregorio Sancianco's *El Progreso en Filipinas* (1881),<sup>20</sup> and even through realistic novels like Jose Rizal's *Noli Me Tangere* (1887),<sup>21</sup> and *El Filibusterismo* (1891).<sup>22</sup>

But aside from directly exposing the conditions of the country, the reformists also felt obliged to disprove many of the Spanish prejudices against Filipinos, which were actually being advanced as "reasons" for withholding reforms (especially that of representation in the Cortes) from the Philippines. Most pernicious of these prejudices was the belief that the Filipinos belonged to an

<sup>17</sup> See "Our Aims" and "The Teaching of Spanish in the Philippines," and Jose Rizal's "The Philippines a Century Hence," in *La Solidaridad*, I, 1889, trans. Guadalupe Fores-Ganzon (Quezon City: University of the Philippines Press, 1967), pp. 2-5; 9-13; 582-85, 658-71, 768-83, respectively.

<sup>18</sup> Translated by Guadalupe Fores-Ganzon in *La Solidaridad II, 1890* (Quezon City: University of the Philippines Press, 1973).

<sup>19</sup> Translated by Encarnacion Alzona, as *Monastic Supremacy in the Philippines* (Quezon City: Philippine Historical Association, 1958).

<sup>20</sup> Translated by Encarnacion Alzona, as *The Progress of the Philippines* (Manila: National Historical Institute, 1975).

<sup>21</sup> Translated by Leon Ma. Guerrero, as *Noli Me Tangere* (Suffolk: Longmans, 1961).

<sup>22</sup> Translated by Leon Ma. Guerrero, as *El Filibusterismo* (Hong Kong: Longmans, 1965).

inferior race, in a backward country with no culture of its own to speak of.<sup>23</sup>

To prove that Filipinos were in no way inferior to the Spaniards, Filipino writers, first of all, highlighted Filipino achievements, especially in competitions involving Spaniards. Thus, Graciano Lopez Jaena, like the whole Filipino community in Spain, was beside himself with joy, when Juan Luna and Felix Resurreccion Hidalgo won the gold and silver medals respectively, at the Madrid Exposition of 1884, because they proved with this victory, that "the ability and genius are not the exclusive patrimony of the castes that call themselves superior."<sup>24</sup>

More than this, however, Filipino reformists endeavoured to prove through their works that Filipinos did have a civilization of their own, even before the coming of Spain (thus Rizal's 1890 annotated edition of Antonio de Morga's *Sucesos de las Islas Filipinas*, 1609, which described in detail the advanced culture of that indigenous Filipino civilization).<sup>25</sup> Most of all, the reformists strove to prove that the Philippines, at that very period, still had a culture that was *identifiably Filipino*. From the latter stemmed the *ilustrado* preoccupation of this period with anthropological subject matter, as evidenced in Pedro Paterno's *La Antigua Civilizacion Tagalog* (1887),<sup>26</sup> Isabelo de los Reyes' *El Folk-lore Filipino* (1889),<sup>27</sup> and even Pedro Paterno's costumbrista novel, *Ninay*, (1885).<sup>28</sup> This is the preoccupation as well which provides the context of Atayde's essays on the theaters of Manila.

Clearly then, it was the movement towards Hispanization and assimilation, which led Filipino reformists to emphasize the ability and the identity of the Filipino. In short, it was Hispanism that led to the formation of a Filipinism, which later developed into a nationalist identity separate from that of the mother country.

<sup>23</sup> See, for example, Graciano Lopez Jaena's "Tribute to Juan Luna and Felix Resurreccion Hidalgo" in his *Speeches, Articles, Letters*, trans. Encarnacion Alzona (Manila: National Historical Commission, 1970), p. 28.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 29.

<sup>25</sup> Manila: Comision Nacional del Centenario de Jose Rizal, 1961.

<sup>26</sup> Madrid: Manuel Hernandez, 1887.

<sup>27</sup> 2 vols. Manila: Imprenta de Santa Cruz, 1889.

<sup>28</sup> Translated into Tagalog by Roman Reyes, as *Ninay (Ugali nang catagalugan)* (Maynila: La Republica, 1908).

The horns of ambivalence sprang from the same head of reformism.

What then is the significance of Atayde's series on the theaters of Manila? First, the essays, aside from being Atayde's principal contribution to scholarship, are the best example of his Filipinism, and his zeal for studying and projecting Filipino culture among his contemporaries. Second, and in macrocosm, Atayde's essays are another important document of the reformist endeavour to prove to the Spaniards that the Philippines had a culture of its own, specifically, a drama of its own, that was "legitimate" enough (ironically, according to Spanish standards) to merit the Filipino's pride, and, of course, the Spaniard's concession of important reforms. In this light, Atayde's essays are best seen, therefore, as an answer or sequel to Vicente Barrantes' *El Teatro Tagalo* (1889),<sup>29</sup> which "studied" Tagalog theater for the purpose of proving that the Indio belonged to an inferior race.

#### CONTRIBUTIONS TO THEATER HISTORY

The importance of Atayde's work to contemporary theater scholarship cannot be overestimated.<sup>30</sup> First, like any other important document of history, these essays are valuable because they constitute primary materials for the study of our theater, having been written by a person who actually witnessed the rise and fall of the theaters of Manila through part of his life, from 1838 to 1893. Furthermore, as with other first-person accounts, Atayde's reminiscences have the added advantage of presenting us events *related* to each other, clearly showing the inter-action, interdependence, and cause-and-effect relationships, between the various theaters found in Manila. Especially enlightening is Atayde's explanation of how actors and impresarios transferred from one theater group to the other, opening or closing down theaters and companies in the process.

Second, Atayde's essays become even more significant to contemporary theater historians because of the Filipino point of

<sup>29</sup> Vicente Barrantes, *El Teatro Tagalo* (Madrid: Imprenta de Manuel G. Hernandez, 1889).

<sup>30</sup> Subsequent studies of Filipino theater, notably Wenceslao E. Retana's *Noticias Historico-Bibliograficas de el Teatro en Filipinas Desde sus Origenes hasta 1898* (Madrid: Libreria General de Victoriano Suarez, 1909), used this work as a principal source.

view that informs the work. Far from being colonial or Spain-oriented, the memoirs present and discuss drama as performed by Filipinos, including those performed in Tagalog, from a point of view that obviously takes pride in these evidences of Filipino culture,<sup>31</sup> defending them against the Barranteses who would dismiss them as proofs of Filipino inferiority.

Third, this work may be considered as one of the most important sources of data on nineteenth century "legitimate" theater in Manila. It presents us with the sequence of theaters in the city (from the Teatro de Arroceros, to that of Binondo, Gunao, Sibacon, Bilibid and Principe Alfonso), describing their architecture, stage, sets, lights, and sometimes, even seating arrangement and capacity; and explaining how they were built and destroyed (mainly by earthquakes or fire).

Not only the physical theaters but the people and organizations as well that gave life to these theaters are found in Atayde's opus. Thus, he traces for us the various troupes that performed in the Teatro de Binondo, from Valdes and company, to the 1848 political deportees Alvaro Carazo and Narciso de la Escosura, to Manuel Lopez Ariza and his Cadiz company.<sup>32</sup> Atayde likewise tells us of the artistic organizations, like La España, the Casino Español, La Alianza and La Confianza, which either founded theaters, or provided venues for presentations, financed plays, or trained theater artists.

Moreover, "Los Teatros de Manila" pinpoints for the contemporary theater historian the exact sources of Tagalog theater, which would be difficult to identify if the historian merely relied on the "internal evidence" found in the few extant 19th century plays available. Atayde clearly identifies these three sources as the Spanish *autosacramental*, the *libros de caballeria*, and the Filipino's love for battle (the latter obviously referring to the Filipino's addition of extended *moro-moro* dances to the European narrative). Aside from pinpointing these sources, Atayde further names the presentations of his own period, which were derived from or influenced by, these sources, e.g. the custom of having little children dressed as cherubs deliver verses on stage, which

<sup>31</sup> Although one may question now the validity of considering these plays in Spanish as prime evidences of Filipino theater.

<sup>32</sup> Atayde, "Los Teatros de Manila," nos. 4 and 5.

Atayde traces to the *autosacramentales*; as well as the old custom of the *pantominas*, which had *moros* and *cristianos* carrying castles and fighting on the streets, which he believes was influenced by the *libros de caballeria*.<sup>33</sup>

Furthermore, Atayde enumerates the titles of dramas actually presented in Manila, going as far as classifying these into various types, namely, the *comedias de magia* (mainly those presented by Narciso de la Escosura, like *Conjuracion de Venecia*, *La Pata de Cabra*, *La Redoma Encantada*); and *sainetes* (mainly those of Ramon de la Cruz, and other "Andalusian" plays); and the "modern plays" (mainly those of Echegaray, Ayala, Selles, and Tamayo, and the social dramas and high comedies of the Teatro de Principe Alfonso.)<sup>34</sup> Needless to say, the identification of these various types of theater is indispensable to the theater historian who would study the sources and influences of Filipino theater, in the nineteenth as well as in the twentieth centuries.

Finally, Atayde mentions details of presentations which become significant because they seem to be the origin of certain conventions found in folk theater of our century. For example, Atayde's detail about the replacement of the convention of huge artificial mountains at the Teatro de Tondo by the stage wings and drop curtains of European theater, explains to us when and how the convention of mountains change,<sup>35</sup> and why there are two conventions — of literal sets and of stylized drop curtains — which now co-exist in *komedya* presentations to our day (e.g. in Dongalo and San Dionisio in Parañaque.)

#### DATA FOR THE OTHER ARTS

But it is not only theater historians who stand to benefit from Atayde's essays on the theater. Because drama is the most eclectic of all the arts, works on theater necessarily make mention of the related arts of music, painting and dance.

Thus there is a wealth of data on musical presentations in Atayde. Here the opera enthusiast finds a detailed list of the various Italian singers who performed in the country then, like

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, no. 1.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, nos. 3, 4 and 5.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, no. 7.

the soprano Bouche, the tenor Sabatini, the contralto Ferrari; and of the operas presented here (including *Fausto*, *Lucia de Lammermoor*, *Macbeth* and *Roberto*).<sup>36</sup> One even discovers in the essays who introduced the saxophone into the country — a French “charlatan” who pretended to be a turk and called the instrument a “turcofon.”<sup>37</sup>

The art historian discovers some intriguing and enlightening data from the essays as well. For instance, Atayde mentions that a certain Lozano painted the scenes for the presentations of Escosura and Appiani.<sup>38</sup> If this is Jose Lozano (as he most probably is), we will have discovered another facet of Pepe Lozano, who was first described as a manuscript illuminator by Dominador Castañeda, and then recently, as a painter of “letras y figuras” by Santiago Pilar. Likewise, Atayde mentions the name of a certain Divela, who introduced backdrops with perspective into local theater, and had a co-painter named Alberoni.<sup>39</sup> If this is the same Alberoni who painted the interiors of the San Agustin and Betis churches, then we might understand where Alberoni got his training for creating the fantastic *trompe l'oeils* and perspectives that he did for these churches.

Finally, the dance historian finds in Atayde a treasure trove of data on the origins of choreography in the country. Atayde devotes several pages to a certain Maestro Appiani, whom he credits with the introduction into the Philippines of the theory of dance, of ballroom dancing (including the *gavotte*, *redowa*, *minue* and *rigodon*), and of formal choreography (his most famous opus was entitled *La Mariposa Encantadora*).<sup>40</sup>

While Atayde's contributions are here underscored, the defects of his essays should nonetheless be pointed out. The first and foremost defect of this series is that mentioned by Retana himself in the latter's study of Philippine theater, namely, that these essays are mere “reminiscences of a writer” and “enumerations of the dramatic spectacles of Manila during the second half of the 19th

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, nos. 11 and 12.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, no. 7.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, no. 5.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, no. 12.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, nos. 5 and 6.

century, so that they cannot be classified as legitimate "historical investigation."<sup>41</sup>

Retana was surely right. For while Atayde's narrative is first-hand, it still does exhibit the usual defects of first-person accounts, namely, the lack of specific dates of foundations, arrivals, departures, etc. and other hard data, which a truly historical work would include and emphasize.

Secondly, one would sometimes wish that Atayde were more consistently detailed in his description of sets, costumes, and general production, in the same way that Alvarez-Guevarra was in his description of the *Komedya* in Albay (1887).<sup>42</sup> Atayde's descriptions are, as will be noticed, very uneven — sometimes flaunting a wealth of detail, sometimes extremely skeletal and general.

### CONCLUSION

Faults notwithstanding, however, the significance of Atayde's series as a document of both the personal as well as the politico-cultural concerns of his time, and its importance to the contemporary theater and art historian, qualify it as "one of the most respected fruits of Atayde's intelligence," an achievement which is "on every point, indispensable to anyone who wishes to study this subject matter."<sup>43</sup>

<sup>41</sup> Retana, *El Teatro en Filipinas*, p. 8.

<sup>42</sup> Juan Alvarez Guerra, *Viajes por Filipinas/De Manila a Albay* (Madrid: Imprenta de Fortanet, 1887).

<sup>43</sup> Retana, *Aparato*, 3:1681.