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BIENVENIDO L. LUMBERA

THE eighteenth century in Europe was the Period of the Enlightenment, the Century of Light, the Age of Reason, the Neo-Classical Era. In the Philippines, there was hope among the missionaries that a totally different kind of enlightenment was finally breaking upon the natives. They were beginning to see evidence of fruition of their efforts in the pacification campaign. A good part of the particularistic society they found in the islands in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries had been finally coaxed to come down from the hills and emerge from the hinterlands into the *pueblos* built around the church, thus facilitating evangelization among the natives.

With the growing urbanization of the Philippines the character of Tagalog poetry was bound to undergo changes. The attempt of the early missionaries to replace existing songs with religious ones continued, but missionary poetry could not repeat itself indefinitely. The poems of San José, Herrera and Santa Ana were much too fragmentary to have any real impact on the faithful. In the Iloko language of Northern Luzon the story of Christ was told in verse by Antonio Mejía, a friar, as early as the first half of the seven-

teenth century.¹ The history of Tagalog poetry in the eighteenth century was to open with a Tagalog version of the Passion story. This fact illustrates, insofar as extant materials allow us to see, the continuity of the poetic traditions of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.

The life of Christ as material for narrative poetry had been popular in Spain as early as the fifteenth century. Epics, intended to compete for attention with profane medieval *chansons de geste*, were attempted by many pious writers who used the conventions of both popular and sophisticated poetry in recounting the events of the life of Our Lord, particularly His Passion and death. Among those attempts, *La Christiada* (1611) by Diego de Hojeda has been judged the most successful. In her edition of Hojeda's work, Sister Mary H. P. Corcoran accounts for the rise of poems like *La Christiada*:

Alarmed...at the enthusiasm with which many of the poets were devoting their talents to narrate the deeds of great worldly princes and *conquistadores* as well as the impossible feats of Orlando and Ruggero, there arose in Spain another group of poets, the avowed purpose of whose verses was to keep their country ever mindful of Christ, and to popularize the mysteries and saints of Catholicism.²

The Tagalog *pasion* is thus related to a huge family of Spanish verse accounts of the Redemption. In the fifteenth century, the following versions appeared: Iñigo de Mendoza's *Vita Christi* (Zamora, 1482), the Comendador Roman's *Coplas de la Pasion con la Resurrección* (Toledo, 1490), Bern Fenollar's *Historia de la Pasión* (Valencia, 1493), Ludolphus de Saxonica's *Vita Christi* (Valencia, 1496), and Sor Isabel de Villena's *Vita Christi* (Valencia, 1497). The sixteenth century produced Juan de Quirós' *Cristo Pathía* (Toledo, 1552), Juan Coloma's *Decada de la Pasión de Cristo* (Callar, 1576), and Francisco Hernandez Blasco's *Universal Redención* (Toledo, 1598). Among the works contemporaneous with Hojeda's epic were Francisco Durán Vivas' *Grandezas divinas, vida y muerte*

¹ Wenceslao E. Retana, *Aparato bibliográfico de la historia general de Filipinas* (Madrid, 1906), II, No. 736, pp. 588-589. Fr. Mejia died in 1659, but his work was not published until 1845 in Madrid.

² Introduction, *La Christiada* (Washington, D.C., 1935), xxxviii.

de nuestro Salvador Jesucristo (Madrid, 1643), Lopez de Zaraté's *Invencción de la Cruz* (Madrid, 1648), Juan Bautista Davila's *Pasión del Hombre Dios* (Leon de Francia, 1661), and Juan Francisco de Enciso y Monzón's *La Christiada* (Cadiz, 1694).³

Dean S. Fansler, writing about metrical romances in the Philippines, notes in passing that the Tagalog *pasion* is a direct translation from a seventeenth-century Spanish original.⁴ Fansler seems to have taken the similarity of subject matter between the Tagalog and the Spanish *pasions* as evidence of direct borrowing. Although the genre is undeniably Spanish in origin, available evidence points to the originality of the first Tagalog *pasion*, Gaspar Aquino de Belen's *Ang Mahal na Pasion ni Jesu Christong P. Natin na Tola* (The Sacred Passion of Jesus Christ Our Lord in Verse), which came out in 1704.⁵ The popularity that Belen's poem achieved is attested by the fact that it was on its fifth edition in 1760.

But with growing urbanization, it was inevitable that the people would crave for poetry other than what they sang in church during the *novenas* in honor of various saints and the Blessed Virgin, or chanted at home during the Lenten season. Secular poetry had, of course, always been a part of the life of the people in the form of folk sayings and songs. But it

³ Corcoran, xxxix. The Comendador Roman's *Coplas* does not appear in Sister Corcoran's list. It was reprinted in a facsimile edition in Valencia, 1955.

⁴ "Metrical Romances in the Philippines," *Journal of American Folklore*, XXIX, No. 112 (April-June 1916), 203.

⁵ This poem appears as part of Belen's translation of Tomás de Villacastin's *Recomendación del Alma* (1613), titled in Tagalog as *Mañga panalangin pagtatagobin sa cololova nang tavong naghi-hingalo* (Prayers in Recommending the Soul of the Dying [to God]). Bibliographers have usually assigned 1703 as the date of publication. Examination of the 5th ed. shows that the book was submitted for censorship on February 23, 1703, given approval on March 9. However, the Archbishop's preface, granting 40 days' indulgence to whoever reads the book or listens to it read, is dated January 23, 1704. It would seem then that the 1st ed. appeared a year later than is generally acknowledged.

was held in bad repute among the more pious folk. One can gather as much from the introduction to an eighteenth-century edition of Herrera's *Meditaciones*, where the editor, in recommending the poems appended to the book, says:

Sa cadolohan nitong Libro,y, mangararatig yaong mangā Dalit na quinat-ha din ng M.R.P. Lector Fr. Pedro de Herrera, na sucat ipalit, at inhalili doon sa ibang mangā masasamang auit at mangā plosang nacapanlolomay sa inyo,t, nacalolompo nang tanang cagalingan nang inyong mangā loob.⁶

Just as the first narrative poem in Tagalog was drawn from medieval Spanish religious epics recounting the Passion of Christ, the new secular poetry was modelled after Spanish ballads popular during the Middle Ages and caricatured in the sixteenth century in the first part of *Don Quixote*. The ones that became most popular among Tagalog poets were those dealing with the exploits of knights fighting for the Church and their ladies against the Moors. As escapist poetry laced with contemporary interest for the natives (the Muslims of the South continued to defy the Spanish *conquistadores* during the eighteenth century and their raids in the coastal towns in the Southern islands made them fearsome villains among the Christian Tagalogs), the *romance*-based secular poetry was deemed harmless enough by the parish priests.

"...The history of literature," says Levin L. Schücking, "is in large part the history of the beneficence of individual princes and aristocrats."⁷ Substitute "clergy" for "princes" and "*principalia*" for "aristocrats," and the statement applies to the literary situation in the Philippines during the eighteenth century. The *principalia*, composed of leading citizens

⁶ At the end of this Book are appended those *Dalits* composed also by the Very Reverend Father Lector Pedro de Herrera, which should replace and be substituted for the various evil *auits* and *plosas* that bewitch you and paralyze everything good in your soul.

(Although the quotation is from the preface in the 1843 edition of *Meditaciones*, the preface appears in the 1762 edition, the earliest extant edition of Herrera's book).

⁷ The *Sociology of Literary Taste*, tr. Brian Battershaw (Chicago, 1966), p. 10.

used by the colonial government as liaison officers in dealing with the native populace, was the literate part of the audience for Tagalog poetry. Their taste added to the "vested interests" of the parish priest and shaped the development of poetry at this point in its history.

The role of the parish priest as a literary dictator during the period was unchallenged. Governor Esteban de Marquina, reporting to the King in 1790, speaks with jealous hostility of religious control in the colony:

The religious orders and the audiencia between them control public opinion in the islands....

The influence of the religious orders cannot be overcome even by the authority of the sovereign. It will yield, gradually, only to the spread of enlightened ideas putting an end to the barbarism and ignorance which these vested interests seek only to perpetuate as the secure, and indeed the only basis of their power.⁸

The governor is concerned here with the political implications of the power wielded by the religious, but one can conclude from his statements that that power had a determining influence on the kind of literature that was to flourish among the natives. As an American observer was to note in his journal during a stopover in Manila in 1796, "No books are allowed to be imported here contrary to their religion."⁹ The remark must have been prompted by the questioning and search conducted by customs officials when his ship docked in Manila.

Little is known of the actual circumstances surrounding the emergence of the metrical romance as a major genre in Tagalog poetry. Dean S. Fansler, in his monograph on the subject, is inclined to believe that they began to appear as early as the seventeenth century, some of them probably written by Spanish priests.¹⁰ Fansler's dating seems rather early, for neither San Agustín's *Compendio de la lengua tagala*

⁸ *Readings in Philippine History*, ed. Horacio de la Costa, S.J. (Manila, 1965), pp. 135-136.

⁹ *Early American-Philippine Trade: The Journal of Nathaniel Bowditch in Manila, 1796*, ed. Thomas R. McHale & Mary C. McHale (New Haven, Conn., 1962), p. 35.

¹⁰ Fansler, 204-206.

(1703) nor Bencuchillo's *Arte poético tagalo* (ca. mid-18th century) says anything about these poems. The *Vocabulario de la lengua tagala* (1745) refers to *awit* but defines it in terms that fail to embrace narrative poems called *awit*, one of the two species of the Tagalog metrical romance.

The difficulty in fixing definite dates in regard to the evolution of the metrical romance lies in the fact that these were not printed until the nineteenth century. The earliest work that Fansler was able to find, for instance, is dated 1815¹¹ We do know, however, from the dates of the work of the poet Jose de la Cruz (1746-1829), a prolific writer of metrical romances, that these were standard literary fare long before the close of the eighteenth century.

Corrido has been used loosely by Spanish chroniclers as a generic term for the Tagalog metrical romances. There are two possible explanations for this inaccurate labeling of the Tagalog poems: first, these poems were sung as were the Spanish ballads called *corridos*; and second, the poems were thought to belong to the same poetic genre found in Mexico and popularized in the Philippines by Mexicans who had intermarried with natives. The first possibility needs no further comment, but the second requires clarification. What the Spaniards called the *corridos* of the Tagalogs were essentially different from the Mexican *corridos*. Where the former drew their materials from medieval Spanish ballads and hagiographical tales, the latter dealt with real events and people.¹² In talking about the Tagalog narrative poems, it is best to adopt Fansler's generic term "metrical romance," because these poems fall under two different species: the *corrido* and the *awit*. For this classification and clarification, we are indebted to Epifanio de los Santos, who pointed out that *corridos* are octosyllabic poems, which might be sung to the tune of the

¹¹ Fansler, 204.

¹² For a discussion of the Mexican *corrido* and its characteristics, see Merle E. Simmons. "The Ancestry of Mexico's *Coridos*," *JAF*, LXXVI, No. 299 (January-March 1963), pp. 1-15.

pasion, while the *awits* are dodecasyllabic narratives sung in "an elegiac and pleading manner."¹³

The *awit* and the *corrido* evolved in conjunction with the development of Tagalog drama. That drama antedated the metrical romances may be gathered from San Agustín's *Compendio*, where occurs a passage from "an old play" based on the life of St. Dionysus the Areopagite.¹⁴ The quatrain reproduced by San Agustín reveals by the awkwardness of its syntax the hand of a missionary poet. We can then conclude that the early plays were the works of friars who took the stories of the lives of saints and the Passion of Christ and made them into plays for the edification of their congregations during festive occasions.¹⁵ This was during the seventeenth century. In 1708 at the festivities honoring the newly-born heir of Philip V, one of the activities marking the celebration in Manila was "*un gracioso entremés al uso de la tierra*."¹⁶ The phrase "*al uso de la tierra*" affirms that native drama evolved as a distinct form before the close of the seventeenth century.

What was "the native manner"? A public occasion in 1791 was celebrated with a dramatic performance in the open air on Calle Real in Binondo. The play started at three in the afternoon and lasted till four o'clock the following morning.¹⁷ A friar-chronicler in 1800 describes the plays he had seen up to that time as a mixture of plots from various Spanish ballads about Christians and Moors, written in verse, focusing on love, emphasizing the spectacular and the fantastic, and their most popular feature being rambunctious humor that contained some form of social criticism.¹⁸

Because they made use of the plots of Spanish ballads, the native plays aroused interest in the ballads themselves.

¹³ Santos, Note on Tagalog literature, in Retana's ed. of *Sucesos, de las islas Filipinas* (Madrid, 1909) p. 479.

¹⁴ *Compendio de la lengua tagala*, 3rd ed. (Manila, 1879), p. 151.

¹⁵ Wenceslao E. Retana, *Noticias histórico-bibliográficas de el teatro en Filipinas desde sus orígenes hasta 1898* (Madrid, 1909), pp. 34-40.

¹⁶ Retana, *El teatro en Filipinas*, p. 45.

¹⁷ Retana, *El teatro en Filipinas*, p. 56.

¹⁸ Joaquín Martínez de Zúñiga, *Estadismo de las islas Filipinas*, ed. W. E. Retana (Madrid, 1893), I, pp. 73-75 & 139-140.

The ballads could be performed any time, by a single person, so that the deeds of daring and wondrous achievements of heroes fighting for love and the Church in lands with strange names might be savored more often. This process reversed what had earlier taken place in Spain where the ballads were transformed into plays. Tagalog dramas were performed during fiestas and other holidays. As such they were available only at certain times of the year. On the other hand, the singers of the *awit* and *corrido* could be heard any time the natives gathered to mark the birth, marriage or death of friends or relatives.

Who were the disseminators of the ballads that became material for Tagalog metrical romances? It does not seem likely that the friars were the sole source of *romances*. Those dealing with the lives of saints are certain to have originated from them, but the profane ones must have been brought in by other agents. It is not too difficult to identify those agents. The first half of the century was the period when the Manila-Acapulco trade was at its most lucrative. Until 1766, when direct trade with Spain was initiated with the voyage of the *Buen Consejo*, relations between the Mother Country and her colony were conducted through Mexico. The period of over 150 years brought into the Philippines, clerics, royal officials, soldiers and sailors who were natives of Mexico. The first groups, by reason of their respective positions, kept to themselves, apart from the *indios*. They were therefore in no position to exert a pervasive influence on the cultural life of the masses. It was the soldiers and the sailors, who, by inter-marriage, became part of the native populace, and Hispanic elements filtered through Mexican sensibility took roots in Tagalog popular arts.¹⁹ To them might be traced a good number of the garbled plots of Spanish *romances* that served as the materials of countless Tagalog narrative poems.

There can be no simple explanation for the tremendous appeal that the metrical romances had for Tagalog audiences.

¹⁹ For a detailed account of the influence of Mexico on the Philippines, see Rafael Bernal, *México en Filipinas* (México, D.F., 1965), pp. 109-125.

It is easy to see the fantasy world of these tales as a refuge for a people seeking relief from the rigors of foreign rule. Three revolts during the century dramatize the resentment and desperation that sometimes erupted in violence. In 1744 Francisco Dagohoy started in the province of Bohol an uprising that was not to be quelled until more than twenty years later. In 1762 Juan de la Cruz Palaris led a revolt in Pangasinan and Diego Silang led another in the Ilokos.²⁰ That same year Manila was invaded by the British. The turbulence created by the revolts was local in effect, but they emphasize the hardships that the natives had to put up with under Spanish rule. The invasion of Manila was the disaster that had a great impact on the Tagalog population. Aside from the physical damage it inflicted on the city, there was the more serious effect of undermining the Filipinos' awe and respect for Spanish military might, thus adding to the instability of the times. Escape from the problems and pressures of the period was offered by poetry and drama.

Another explanation was the growing urbanization commented on earlier. The formation of towns created a society of men and women living together in the same district, so that a person's mode of behavior came under the scrutiny of his fellow townsmen. Thus arose a search for norms by which one could live in harmony with other people. The norms they sought were those that would allow them to adopt to life in town; in short, there was a groping for sophistication. The society represented by the Spaniards offered a model that could be observed from a distance and whose mores could be aped when they suited the native temperament. Poems telling of an idealized society, from which the colonial masters descended, revealed a world from which the audience could acquire at least the veneer of urbanization that town life called for. Just as the town folk took care of their spiritual needs by chanting or listening to the lives of saints and the Passion of Christ, so they tried to acquire social polish through

²⁰ Onofre D. Corpus, *The Philippines* (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey, 1965), pp. 56-59.

metrical romances recounting the tales of courtly heroes and their ladies.

Related to the search for sophistication was the restoration of literacy to the natives who had lost it when they lost their syllabary. The loss of the syllabary seems to have been related to the illiteracy of the major segment of the population between the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. A Latinized Tagalog grammar published in 1742 illuminates for us the state of literacy among the natives towards the middle of the century when its author, Melchor de Oyanguren, refers to the syllabary: "*Oy dia se van olvidado de estas letras, porque los Españoles introdujeron las letras Gothicas, y los Operarios Evangelios ayudan con incessante desvelo, manteniendo en cada Pueblo su Escuela.*"²¹ One might conjecture that by mid-century, it had become some kind of status symbol to be able to read and write in the Roman alphabet, for the European manner of writing put within a person's reach knowledge (whatever was made available by the colonial administrators and the clergy) that the majority of the populace could not have.

While learning the Roman alphabet did not necessarily equip the native with perfect command of Spanish, it brought into being a group of Filipinos whose little learning fired them to produce (if they were poets) or crave for (if they were ordinary readers) poetry that was different in temper and diction from folk poetry. This phenomenon was abetted by the fact that during the early years of the century natives began to be admitted to the University of Santo Tomas and the Colegio de San José for studies leading to the priesthood. Both the men who finished the course of studies and were eventually ordained as priests, and those who dropped out before finishing would have come into contact with European literature, considering that the Dominicans at Santo Tomás and the Jesuits at San José led the students through such acknowledged classics as Virgil, Horace and Homer (in Latin).

²¹ *Tagalysmo elucidado, y reducido (en lo posible) a la Latinidad de Nebrija* (México, 1742), p. 220.

At mid-century the state of Tagalog poetry had two commentators. The first was Oyanguren whose remarks serve to confirm what San Agustín had said in 1703:

Sus especies son auit, diona, oyayi, talindao, dalit, soliranin, etc. Suelen constar de sei, siete, cinco, ocho, diez, doze, ó catorze syllabas; segun la canción, ó tono, aquién sirven los versos....²²

If these remarks are not simply repetitions of what San Agustín wrote in *Compendio*, then we might conclude that around 1742 Tagalog poetry still consisted largely of folk poetry. The second commentator was Francisco Bencuchillo whose *Arte poético tagalo* devotes a more extensive description to Tagalog versification.

Bencuchillo follows San Agustín in classifying rimes into *marin* and *mababao*, but departs from the *Compendio* in the explanation of riming with consonantal sounds. Where San Agustín had erred in claiming that Tagalog riming required only that the vowels or the final consonants be the same, Bencuchillo points out that certain consonantal sounds (e.g., *b, c, d, g, p, s, t*; or *l, m, n, ng*, and the diphthongal sounds created by a vowel coming before *o* or *y*) are considered as riming sounds when preceded by the same vowel. He also gives a slightly different classification of Tagalog stanza forms. Stanzas may be (1) of three or four heptasyllabic lines, (2) of four or more octosyllabic lines and (3) of four dodecasyllabic lines. The last is called *prosa* or *plosa*, used in courtship and wedding songs. There is no mention in his work of the fourteen-syllable line.

Like San Agustín, Bencuchillo provides samples to illustrate the rules of Tagalog versification. Judging by the awkwardness of the riming and diction in most of them, they are his own compositions. There are several, however, at least seven, that in theme and imagery proclaim their folk origin.²³

²² Oyanguren, pp. 219-220.

²³ The religious poems are the ones likely to have been composed by Bencuchillo. The folk poems are the following: "*Aco ang nanjongologui*" and "*Sampaga sapolong bato*" (p. 13); "*Ang buhai cong duahagui*" (p. 14); "*Tantongan catacataca*" (p. 15); "*Daliring nanhihinoco*" (p. 16); "*Magcapatid man pala*" (p. 20); and "*Nagtanim nang hiya*" (p. 18).

Clearly then, it is not as an anthology that *Arte* is of historical value, but rather as a glass through which we can see darkly what the Tagalog poets were doing between Gaspar Aquino de Belen's *pasion* and Jose de la Cruz's poems and plays.

At the turn of the century, the Augustinian friar Martinez de Zúñiga adds to the information we have about eighteenth-century poetry, but also contributes to the confusion created by the fragmentary comments of San Agustin, Oyanguren and Bencuchillo. His statements pertaining to Tagalog poetry may be gleaned from his account of a trip made by the Governor General in 1800 which was published as *Estadismo de las islas Filipinas*. The interest they have for the student of poetry is that they were based largely on personal observation since poetry declamations and dramatic presentations were part of the welcoming ceremonies for the Governor General.

According to Martinez de Zúñiga, Tagalog poets composed stanzas of three lines, four lines and five lines. In drama, lines of seven, eight or fourteen syllables were employed depending on the mood of the action. The dodecasyllabic line was invariably the measure for the *loa*, a species of native poetry with which a guest of honor was welcomed in high-flown language and elevated imagery.²⁴ Riming consisted in the use of a single assonantal rime for the lines in a stanza, changing to another rime only when a new stanza was started. The poems were lyrical, usually about love or "some minor matters pertaining to their farms."²⁵

From the reports of the three friars mentioned above and the evidence of the *Vocabulario*, one may reconstruct the profile of Tagalog poetry during the eighteenth century in the following manner: it was largely oral, traditional in form and subject matter, and if it got written at all, it circulated in manuscripts that have been lost to the twentieth century. Martinez de Zúñiga mentions reading the works of a certain Patato, supposed to have been the most famous poet of his time, but of this man's poems we have no traces.²⁶ One may

²⁴ Martinez de Zúñiga, I, 62.

²⁵ Martinez de Zúñiga, I, 513.

²⁶ Martinez de Zúñiga, I, 513.

dispute the sweeping remarks of the author of the *Estadismo* in asserting that before the coming of the Spaniards the Tagalogs had only lyrical poetry, but this summation of Spanish influence on Tagalog poetry is quite accurate:

Después de la venida de los españoles tienen comedias, entremeses, tragedias, poemas y todo género de composiciones trasladadas de la lengua española....²⁷

GASPAR AQUINO DE BELEN AND THE PASION

Aquino de Belen, a native of Rosario, Batangas, ran the Jesuit press in Manila from 1704 to 1716. He left no other literary work behind him, but *Ang Mahal na Pasion* is evidence enough of his considerable talent as a poet. Indeed, this long religious poem, the first of its kind in the history of Tagalog literature and the first written narrative poem, makes him the first great Tagalog poet.

Whether or not he made use of the Mejia *pasion* in the Iloko tongue is a question that future research should clarify. What is quite certain is that Fansler's claim that the Tagalog *pasion* was based on a Spanish original is not borne out by evidence. Aquino de Belen's *pasion*, which was to become popular in a garbled, watered-down nineteenth-century version known as *Pasion Pilapil*, bears little resemblance to the Spanish religious epics mentioned early in the chapter.

The *Pasion*, as Aquino de Belen's work defines it, recounts the events in the Passion of Christ beginning with the Last Supper and concluding with the Resurrection.²⁸ It opens with a recapitulation of the prophecies pertaining to the Redemption, and then relates in 22 episodes the events leading to the Crucifixion and finally the Resurrection. The episodes are interspersed with 15 *Aral* (Lesson) at irregular intervals, whenever the occasion offers a chance for a homily.

The poem uses consistently a stanza form of five octosyllabic lines having a single assonantal rime. The stanzas

²⁷ Martinez de Zúñiga, I, 63.

²⁸ Because the 1760 edition has no pagination, passages quoted from the poem will be identified by Roman numerals corresponding to the sections where they are found.

are usually independent units, but run-on stanzas occur every now and then. If Aquino de Belen had intended his *pasion* to be sung, he must have used an existing folk stanza form so that the lines could be sung to traditional melodies. There is a five-line stanza in San Agustín's *Compendio* (p. 150), but the measure is heptasyllabic:

Umulan man sa bundoc
houag sa dacong laot,
aba si casampaloc,
nanao nang dico loob,
ualang bauonang comot.²⁹

There is greater likelihood though that he was familiar with the Spanish *quintilla*, especially as employed in Iñigo de Mendoza's *Vita Christi* (1482). One of Mendoza's *quintillas* in *Vita Christi* is given below for comparison with a passage from Aquino de Belen:

Donde vas, apasionado
con diversas feridas,
con espinas coronado,
con color descolorado,
con lagrimas tan sentidas?³⁰

The octosyllabic measure of the *quintilla* is to be noted in this passage from *Ang Mahal na Pasion*:

Dugo,y, nagsisipamana,t,
di naampat, di masapa,
camucha,y, naguiguinbaha,
nangagdaranac sa lupa,
bangcay na manding mistola.³¹ (XXVIII)

If Aquino de Belen did in fact borrow the Spanish *quintilla*, he adapted the rime scheme (ABAAB) to the monorime of Tagalog folk poetry.

²⁹ Let it rain in the hill / but not in mid-sea, / for, alas, Old Man Sampaloc / has gone off without my consent / and didn't take a sheet with him.

³⁰ Quoted in Angel Valbuena Prat, *Historia de la literatura española* (Barcelona, 1960), I, p. 341.

³¹ Blood streaked out like arrows, / would not be staunched or stayed; / as if it were a flood / it flowed, soaking the earth / so that he was all but dead.

That Aquino de Belen was more or less familiar or had knowledge of some of the Spanish "lives" of Christ is evinced by certain devices in *Ang Mahal na Pasion* which had precedents in at least two Spanish Passion poems: *Cristo Pathia* (1552) by Juan de Quirós and *Coplas de la Pasión con la Resurrección* (1490) by the Comendador Roman.³² Quiros' work, consisting of seven cantos in *ottava rima*, opens with the Last Supper and closes with the Crucifixion. Aquino de Belen's *Aral* passages have their parallel in Quirós' poem which draws moral lessons from the episodes narrated. The difference is that Quirós does not present his "lessons" in separate sections. After the mob had chosen Barabbas over Christ, Quirós interrupts the narrative and apostrophizes the mob, and in his way indirectly addresses himself to sinners:

O pueblo bouo, o gente inaduertida
 Que tan sin tino, vas assi a perderte.
 Al que dio muerte, quieres te dar vida.
 Al que da vida, quieres dar la muerte:
 Que muera el sancto, y biua al homicidia:
 Mira que es escoger la mala suerte,
 Niegas al justo. eliges al culpado,
 En todo tienes, gusto deprauado. (pp. 98-99)

Aquino de Belen draws an *Aral* from the same episode, but in it he chides man for his pride, pointing to Christ's humility in contrast.

In *Cristo Pathia*, Quirós addresses his characters directly. For instance, after the betrayal of Christ by Judas, the latter is roundly reprovved in vituperative language:

O falso Iudas, o traydor maluado
 O crudo, sobre natural manera
 Mas que'l Leon de Mauro alanceado
 Onca ni Tygre, no es tan lastimera
 No es tan cruel, el jauali acossado
 Que si por dicha fueras bestia fiera
 Qualquier maestro, que de ti cuarara
 Tu natural fiereza ammansara. (pp. 43-44)

³² Citations from *Cristo Pathia* will be to the recent reprint edited by Antonio Perez y Gomez (Valencia, 1955); from *Coplas de la Pasión*, to the facsimile edition published in Valencia, 1955.

A similar reproof may be found in Aquino de Belen's *pasion*. It starts by pointing out to Judas that he has violated Mary's hospitality in betraying her son, reminding him of the many acts of kindness that Jesus' mother had done for him. Judas is then made to reflect on his wickedness and gently enjoined to repent:

Judas iyang iyong asal,
iyang masama mong lagay
cun di mo tambing bauahan,
tantong icao ay daraval,
calolova mo,y, masasayang.

Hayo na,t, magsaoli ca,t,
magbago cang alaala,
tomatavad ca capagdaca,
magava,t, quiquilala
sa nagsising maganda.³³ (VII)

In the Comendador Roman's *Coplas de la Pasión*, the poet invents dialogues between characters of the Passion story, making an otherwise drab poem come to life at certain moments. Among his most effective *coplas* are those in which Mary laments the sufferings of her Son:

Quando la virgen torno
dixo con dolor muy fuerte
o hijo que merecio
tu carne que no peco
para recibir tal muerte
o mi hijo de dulcura
vida para mis reposos
mas onestos
no es aquesta tu figura
ni tus miembros gloriosos
noson estos.
Tus cabellos y gualados
lianos prietos y luzidos
veolos despedacados
mesados y desonrados
desangre santateñidos
ve tu frente legada

³³ Judas, what you have done, / the evil into which you have fallen, / will surely lead you to a worse state; / if you don't change, / your soul will be lost. Go then and be your old self, change your mind, ask for forgiveness now, and she [Mary] will take pity and accept your sincere repentance.

y tus cejas diferentes
 sus cabellos
 tu cabeza ensangrentada
 y tus ojos ecelentes
 no ser ellos.

In Aquino de Belen we find a long passage on the meeting of Christ and Mary on the way to Calvary, during which they engage in a moving dialogue that goes on for 52 quintets. In his delineation of the various gory details of Christ's suffering, the Comendador Roman is following a tradition in medieval iconography and poetic "lives" of Christ in which realistic description compels the reader to confront the suffering of Christ for man's sins. Aquino de Belen reflects the tradition. While nailing Christ, the Tagalog poet's Roman soldiers find that Christ's hands cannot reach the ready-made holes on the arms of the cross. Instead of boring new holes, the soldiers simply use brute force, tugging Christ's free arm so that it would extend as far as the hole for the other nail:

May apat na malalacas,
 linalapac ang balicat
 nagsipangorong ang ogat,
 litid ay nagsipangalag
 niyong canilang pagbatac.³⁴ (XXVIII)

But if Aquino de Belen's *pasion* is of some value as the first great Tagalog poem, it is not because of the motifs drawn from Spanish poems. He towers over every poet before and immediately after him, not merely by the learning or the bulk of his preserved work, but principally by the intensity with which he has recreated the Passion story. This intensity is the combined result of his sensuous visual imagination and unfaltering psychological penetration. This last characteristic is what gives his poem its appeal even today.

The material of *Ang Mahal na Pasion* is familiar and predictable, but Aquino de Belen recreates the characters of the traditional story with a freshness that could have come only from a child-like faith in the reality of those people.

³⁴ Four strong men / wrenched the arm from the shoulder: / the veins pulled back at the strain, / the ligaments came loose / because of the violent tug.

Christ, Mary, Judas, Peter, Pilate and the other figures from the New Testament are portrayed by the poet as though he were the first man to tell their story. Without falsifying the portraits in the Bible, Aquino de Belen, whether by temper or art, avoids the stereotype characterizations created by pietistic tradition, and sees the characters as though they were his own countrymen.

The most memorable portrait in the poem is that of Peter whose denial of Christ receives extended treatment. Aquino de Belen follows the Gospels in narrating the circumstances leading to the denial. The third time Peter is accused of being a follower of Christ, fear overcomes him. He calls down a curse upon himself should it turn out that he has been lying. Peter's reaction is that of an *indio* who reverts to his pagan past in trying to prove his innocence:

Marorog (aniya,t,) pisanan
 cun aco,y, caalam-alam,
 at cun aco,y, caalagbay
 ni Christong inyong caavay.
 magmovang cayo,t, magnilay.³⁵ (XI)

Matthew, Peter and Luke relate that Peter, upon hearing the cock crow (in Aquino de Belen, gamecocks, *manġa sasabonġing manoc*, do the crowing), Peter broke down and wept. Aquino de Belen is not content to follow the Gospels, but pursues Peter like a hound in 32 quintets where the cowardly apostle is addressed directly by the poet, by Christ and by himself. Immediately after the denial, Christ turns His head and fixes Peter with reproachful eyes reminding him of the promise made earlier to stand by his Master at all cost. At this point, Peter rushes off to repent his sin in the wilderness where he lacerates himself with the memory of his betrayal:

Aco (a niya) Panginoon co,y,
 di na tapat turang tavo,
 lanġit ma,y, sucat tomampo,

³⁵ May I crumble to dust and die now / if ever I knew / or was ever a follower / of this Christ who's your enemy, / think upon my words.

nang cabandayan cong yto,t,
cabohongan co sa iyo.³⁶ (XI)

Aquino de Belen again demonstrates his exquisite ability to revitalize the Biblical episodes with psychological insight in the meeting between Christ and His Mother, an episode not mentioned in the Gospels but preserved in Church tradition through the Stations of the Cross. The meeting occasions a dialogue between Mary and her Son which is one of the emotional high points of the *pasion*. It begins with Christ lamenting his desolation, calling on the disciples that have deserted Him. Mary hears her Son, rushes through the crowd and offers to take Christ's place beneath the cross:

Aacoing co na,t, socdang
aco na ang papapatay,
at nang icao ang mabuhay,
di ano pang capacan-an
bongso, cun mavala icao.³⁷ (XXV)

Christ remonstrates, reminding Mary that it is the will of the Father that the Son should suffer. But like any hysterical mother, Mary refuses to be consoled; she even suspects that her Son is turning her away by reason of some unexplained grudge:

Caya ca gongmagayan
opan icao ay may away,
sa Yna mong lapastangan
iyo nang panhihimagal,
caayavan mong daingan.³⁸ (XXV)

Many times the psychological point takes on immediacy because of the homeliness of the details that the poet uses. This may be seen in the episode following Judas' betrayal of

³⁶ My God, he said, I am / no longer fit to be called a man; / heaven itself should turn away / because I am corrupt, / because I have no shame.

³⁷ I'll take your place / and even die in your stead, / so that You may live on, / for what use is everything / My Son, when you have gone?

³⁸ You say all this / because you want to put me off, / your uncouth mother; / this explains your coldness, / your refusal to be comforted.

Christ. The poet-narrator confronts Judas with his sin, but instead of indicting him on abstract theological grounds, the traitor is made to think back on Mary's hospitality:

Di cayo,y, nagsasangbahay
iysa ang inyong dulang?
cun icao ay longmiligao,
may laan sa iyong baha,
canin, at anoanoman.³⁹ (VII)

The poignancy of this reproach derives from the fact that it regards Judas' offense, not so much as an offense against an abstract concept like God's love, but as a trespass against a mother's hospitality. To the objection that his touch might tend to blur theological verities, it might be countered that Aquino de Belen's technique brings the Passion story closer to the life of his readers and therefore leaves a deeper religious impression on their lives.

In this connection, the *Aral* provided by Aquino de Belen may be cited as the weak spot of the poem. Following the introductory quintets on the prophecies is a "lesson" in six stanzas on the need to abandon worldliness for godliness. All the other *Aral* in the poem repeat this theme. The failure of these homilies serves to emphasize where Aquino de Belen's talent as a religious poet lay: not in abstract thought but in vivifying a dramatic situation with believable characters.

Gifted with a particularistic imagination, the poet writes in a language marked by vigor. This quality may be obscured for many contemporary readers by the brand of Tagalog the poet employs. It is a language now largely archaic both in syntax and diction, although many words in the poem have survived in various towns of Batangas, where they remain very much part of the daily speech of people living in the rural areas. Yet, in spite of the action of time, the language startles with its malleability in the hands of Aquino de Belen. At one point it can have a very colloquial ring, as in the following passage:

³⁹ Didn't the three of you / share the same board? / While you were out, roaming around, / didn't she set aside some food for you, / rice and whatever else there was to eat?

Aba, aya, sayang bapa!
 Pedro nang oban mong madla,
 ng̃ay-ong ycao ay tomandang
 vala ca nang magagawa,y,
 doon ca nagpacasira.⁴⁰ (XI)

At other times it can take on the stateliness of these lines from Mary's lament with seeming artlessness:

Dito, quita yniybig
 ng sinta cong valan patid
 yaring aquing pananañgis
 icao ang linao ng langit,
 baquit ng̃ayo,y, pavang dongis?⁴¹

Artlessness, in the best sense of the word, is a virtue that Aquino de Belen did not have to work for. From *Ang Mahal na Pasion*, we can deduce that at the turn of the eighteenth century, poets had not yet acquired the self-consciousness that would later in the century move towards the adoption of conventionalized poetic diction. The contact between poetry and common speech was still very intimate, so that the spoken language of daily life kept the poet's language precise, free of the euphemisms that were to plague Tagalog poetry in later times.

By the date of its publication (1704), it is clear that Aquino de Belen's *pasion* is, strictly speaking, a seventeenth-century poem. Compared, however, to the other versifiers of the seventeenth century, Aquino de Belen emerges as an expert in the use of rime and meter. Seldom does he fall into the expediency of riming vowel sounds with common particles like *ko*, *mo*, *na*, *ba*, *baga*, *pala*, etc. Belen has a richness of vocabulary that keeps him supplied throughout the long poem with the precise word whenever a line-ending demands a certain riming sound. When San Agustín and Martínez de Zúñiga remarked on the ease with which Tagalog poets

⁴⁰ Alas and alack, such a pity! / that your grey hair has been for naught, Peter; / now that you've grown old, / when you're already harmless, / then you chose to harm yourself.

⁴¹ In this way do I love you / with a love that is infinite / and this is why I weep— / you're the clearness of sky / but smeared with dirt now.

rime, they failed to note that combining sound and sense in Tagalog riming is as rigorous as in any other language. Perhaps the combination is even more difficult to achieve in Tagalog where assonances are so plentiful that the mediocre poet is often tempted to fill in with the first sound that comes to mind regardless of its contribution to the meaning of the stanza or the total meaning of the poem. This lack of sensitivity to the thematic value of riming was especially evident among the missionary poets. What is striking about Aquino de Belen's riming is, therefore, not so much its uniqueness, as the consistency with which the poet sustains their meaningful use throughout the length of the *pasion*.

To illustrate, a stanza from Herrera may be compared with one of Aquino de Belen's. The following is a *dalit* in *Meditaciones*:

Iyo ring alalahanin
ang paggawa mo sa aquin,
luad na tinipi mandin
na ooui sa lupa din.⁴² (p.336)

The lines rime, to be sure, but to what purpose? *Alalahanin* (remember) and *aquin* (me) are in meaningful juxtaposition because the two words establish the relationship between the Creator and the created. *Mandin* (an adverb meaning "it seems") and *din* (a particle meaning "also," but in the line meaning "the same") are no more than jingling sounds needed to round out the monoriming stanza.

Aquino de Belen creates this stanza as part of the re-proof against Judas:

Di ca inaanyayahan
sa mataas na loclocan?
agad cang hinahayinan
nang pita mo,t, caibigan
na para mong casangbahay.⁴³ (VII)

⁴² Remember also / how you created me— / clay that was pressed into a shape / that would become earth again.

⁴³ Weren't you invited / to take the seat of honor, / and, right away, served / everything you wanted and asked for / as though you were one of the family?

In this quintet, the riming words are the key words of the stanza—*inaanyayahan* (invite), *loclocan* (seat), *hinahayinan* (serve), *caibigan* (what is desired) and *casangbahay* (one of the family). These words belong together not only for the music they make but above all for the sense they create. Here Aquino de Belen demonstrates that he had a grasp of the secret of Tagalog riming as a means of stressing the key words in stanza, a necessity created by syllabic metrics in a language in which words are mostly polysyllabic. Unlike in English versification, where stress cues the audience on the key words, Tagalog metrics has to depend upon rime to emphasize crucial words, a fact that might account for the persistence of rime even in modern Tagalog poetry.

FELIPE DE JESUS AND THE TWO TRADITIONS

The history of eighteenth-century Tagalog poetry between Gaspar Aquino de Belen and Jose de la Cruz would have been a vast blank were it not for the appearance of two books, the first a prose biography of two saints, the second a Tagalog-Spanish dictionary. In 1712 a Tagalog version of the legend of Barlaam and Josaphat as told by St. John of Damascus contained two complimentary poems, one of them by "a leading citizen (*maguino*) in the town of San Miguel in the vicinity of Manila."⁴⁴ The poet was Felipe de Jesus and his poem bore the cumbersome descriptive title of "*Dalit na pamucan sa balang babasa nitong libro*" (a *dalit* meant to arouse the piety of every reader of this book). The dictionary was the *Vocabulario* whose contribution to written poetry of the century is a quatrain—the only one in the book attributed to a poet identified by name—by Juan de Arriola.

⁴⁴ *Aral na tunay na totoong pagaacay sa tauo, nang manja cabanang gaua nang manja maloulalhating santos na si Barlaan ni Josaphat na ipinalaman sa sulat ni S. Juan Damasceno* (Actual Lesson in Guiding Men to Truth, Based on the Holy Works of the Glorious Saints Barlaam and Josaphat Contained in the Writings of St. John of Damascus) is the full title of Antonio de Borja's translation. The edition used was that published in Manila, 1837. The other complimentary poem was written by Gaspar de San Agustín.

De Jesus writes 46 octosyllabic quatrains in praise of Antonio de Borja's book on Barlaam and Josaphat which is described as "a great light" (*isang daquilang banaag*) that cuts through the darkness of ignorance among the Christianized natives. Like Aquino de Belen's *pasion*, it clearly belongs in the seventeenth century; in form and theme, it hews close to the complimentary poems which I have discussed in another article ("Tagalog Poetry during the Seventeenth Century," *PS*, 16[1968], 99-130). Much of its imagery is borrowed, as a matter of fact, from Bagongbanta, Ossorio and the anonymous author of "*May Bagyo*."

De Jesus opens his poem, in the manner of Bagongbanta and Ossorio, with praise and thanksgiving for God's blessings, except that he takes four stanzas to do this. This pattern of expanding devices, ideas and images drawn from previous complimentary poems is pursued in the rest of the work, resulting in an inordinately long poem. A justification for the length may be the intention to produce a homily which exhorts the Tagalog faithful to cultivate the virtue of intellectual humility in matters of faith. This virtue is insisted upon as the chief lesson that may be drawn from the life of Josaphat. To drive home the need for humility, de Jesus reminds the readers with some asperity that they are but novices in the Christian religion:

Aba christianong tagalog,
na bagong pisa sa itlog
tanggap nang magandang loob
itong pangano,t, handog.

Di ca man bagong binyagan
inacay rin cun turan
ang di capa ngani paham
magdili dili,t, mag nilay. ⁴⁵

As a beginner in the Faith, the Tagalog Christian is prone to error: he inclines toward superstitions, materialism and car-

⁴⁵ Remember, Tagalog Christian, / that you're but a newly-hatched chick; / accept with an open heart / what is dedicated and offered to you.

Though you're not a new convert, / you're still like a tiny chick; / you haven't turned into a wise man, / so think and meditate on what is said.

nality. To overcome his failings, he should turn to the book being eulogized for it is like a mine from which one may secure the most precious gems:

Dulangán itong mistola
nang maniningning na mut-ya,
cun tiquis cang magtiyaga
yayaman ca,t, sasagana.⁴⁶

The book also serves to make the reader realize the wisdom of denying the needs of the flesh, for the story of Josaphat who gives up worldly pleasures for a life of holiness, functions as a mirror for those who are too much in love with the body. De Jesus then illustrates the transience and the vanity of the fleshly life:

Loob ninyong masilacbo
parang ningas alipato,
sa alapaap ang tongo
ay bago hamac na abo.

Cun mapugnao na,t, matotog
yaong nacapagdorooop,
ay cag yat ding matatapus
guidlap na ualang caropoc.

Ang isang hamog na hamac
na sa caniya mapatac
natutunao, nacacalas
naguiguing mistolang losac.⁴⁷

The borrowings from Bagongbanta, Ossorio and the poet of "*May Bagyo*" indicate that originality was not prized as a poetic virtue during the early years of written Tagalog poetry. At this point, the force of the folk tradition sanctioned a poet's free use of imagery from previous poetry. Since written poetry was still quite rare, a poet had nothing to fall back

⁴⁶ This is like a mine / full of bright gems; / if you persevere in working, / you'll prosper and grow rich.

⁴⁷ Your flammable hearts / are like flying sparks / heading for the clouds / but really no more than ashes.

When what was used for kindling / has crumbled and died out, / sparks which are most fragile / suddenly are gone.

When the merest drop of dew / falls on the burnt-out piece, / it dissolves and disintegrates / and becomes a mess of ashes.

on except what few poems had been written before. This would explain the echoes from seventeenth-century poetry in de Jesus' poem.

"*May Bagyo*" refers to *Memorial de la vida* as "light" (*liuanag*); Bagongbanta refers to it as "star that vanishes darkness" (*tala/macapagpanao ng dilim*); de Jesus refers to de Borja's book as "a great light" (*isang daquilang banaag*). The image of a book as a treasure-trove, "a chest full of fine silks" (*ang napoponong caban/nang manġa taloqueng mahal*), is in Bagonbanta's poem. In Ossorio the book is called "the holy mine" (*ang dulanġang mahal*). De Jesus repeats Ossorio's *dulanġan* image in "This is like a mine/full of bright gems" (*Dulangan itong mistola/nang maniningning na mut-ya*). "Harbor of rest" (*lalauigang mahimbing*) in Ossorio becomes "harbor of peace" (*lalauigang tahimic*) in de Jesus. Where Ossorio says "You are the lodestar/that we should follow" (*Icao ang paraluman namin/ang sucat nġa naming sundin*), de Jesus says "Use this book as a mirror/and make it your lodestar" (*librong ito,y, salaminin/siyamong paralomanin*).

But de Jesus' *dalit* is not a mere copy of the poems to which it has been referred. To the stock images that he repeats, he adds his own realistic imagery whose aptness mark him as poet with real talent. Certain stanzas may be excerpted from the poem and admired as independent units, in much the same way that folk stanzas may be admired as self-contained wholes. For example,

Mabouay capang mistola
biray mo.y, guiguilaguila
tomoay cama.y, di pa nga
bihasa, sa pamamangca.⁴⁸

Another quatrain that may be admired in isolation is the following:

Catao an mong marororog
ouori,t, maboboloc,

⁴⁸ As yet, you can't stand unassisted, / your tiny boat rocks from side to side: / you steer the boat, but it's obvious / you have yet to become an expert boatman.

siyang sinosonodsonod
hinihimas, inihirog.⁴⁹

That these sections of the poem may be taken out of the poem and admired in themselves points up the weakness of de Jesus' poem when judged by present standards. Because he has allowed the poem to grow too long for what it says, de Jesus fails to draw the diverse parts into a cohesive whole. The result is a poem in which the traditions of folk and of missionary poetry do not merge, so that the work is alternately lyrical and discursive, and ultimately diffuse.

THE VOCABULARIO AND JUAN DE ARRIOLA

The value of the *Vocabulario* in the study of folk poetry has been treated at length in another article ("Poetry of the Early Tagalogs," *PS*, 16[1968], 221-245). As an eighteenth-century document, the book has another value; it is a record of the state of the Tagalog language a little less than two centuries after the conquest. At this point in its history, Tagalog was a language eminently poetic for its primitive concreteness and specificity. The religious orders have been accused, and not without reason, of eradicating traces of indigenous Filipino culture. The missionaries who collaborated in putting the dictionary together wanted to penetrate the culture of the people they had come to evangelize. The *Vocabulario* was to lead them into the heart of that culture. The scholarly labors of Juan de Noceda, Pedro de Sanlúcar and the friars and religious who contributed to the dictionary are evidence that, perhaps in spite of themselves, the missionaries were also preservers of pre-Christian Tagalog culture. Without this book, it would be almost impossible now to understand and interpret Tagalog poetry before the nineteenth century.

Buried among the lexicographical entries in the *Vocabulario* is a hexasyllabic quatrain by a poet identified as "Don Juan de Arriola, tagalo." The poem appears under the word *pihá*, a now archaic term which was used to refer to a species of snails that gave off light to the bright moon and to anything

⁴⁹ Your body which will molder, / decay and feed the worms, / is allowed to rule your life / by petting and pampering it.

beautiful. Arriola's poem is short and simply written, but its simplicity is of the kind that baffles:

Bouang pinipiha,
toloyan ang gaua,
nang cami magsaua,
larong aming aha.⁵⁰ (p. 252)

Was this meant to be a children's song? The last line seems to indicate it was, but the editors do not give any comment that might help us interpret the poem.

The significance of this little poem in the history of Tagalog poetry should be clear when Arriola's quatrain is put beside all the written poems we have discussed so far. It was the first secular poem in Tagalog ever written and printed. Its inclusion in the *Vocabulario* reminds us that the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries were not exactly periods of great religious fervor as written poetry might lead us to believe. The greater bulk of the poetry of these centuries was secular in tone and content, and therefore circulated only either as manuscripts or as purely oral lore.

During Martinez de Zúñiga's trip with the Governor General in 1800, he was to describe some native dances, among which were the *cundiman*, the *comintang* and the *talindao*. All three dances involved singing by the participants. That the missionaries had objected to some of these dances and songs is reflected by Martinez de Zúñiga's remark regarding the *talindao*: "*Dicen que este baile es muy indecente cuando lo bailan los indios en sus casas; pero delante de los Padres no hacen cosa que de los límites de la modestia.*"⁵¹ "The limits of modesty" then explain to a great extent the absence of erotic poetry in the *Vocabulario* and the lack of published secular poetry can be gauged from the fragments that have come down to the twentieth century from the large body of unpublished works by Jose de la Cruz.

⁵⁰ Beautiful moon, / the work goes on / till [or when] we lose interest / in the game we made up.

⁵¹ Martinez de Zúñiga, I, 77.

JOSE DE LA CRUZ: DRAMATIC POETRY AND
METRICAL ROMANCES

Jose de la Cruz (1746-1829), better known as *Huseng Sisiw* (Jose the Chick), left no published works, although he is said to have authored a good deal of poetry.⁵² Taught the alphabet and the catechism by some neighbors, he broadened his education by teaching himself, so the story goes, philosophy and canon law, courses that served as the core of higher education during his time. The story cannot be pure legend, for the available works of the poet, as presented in fragments in Jose Ma. Rivera's biography *Huseng Sisiw*, lend credence to the claims for de la Cruz's learning. Among the poets in Tondo, then already a populous district of Manila, he was considered the best. His reputation brought to his home many aspiring poets who needed guidance or respectable poems. One of those poets, it has been claimed, was Francisco Baltazar.

He was a fastidious dresser according to stories, and the information tells us something about the income he made on the poems and dramas that were commissioned by individuals who needed to impress young ladies with love poems, or by committees in charge of town fiestas and other great public occasions. Rivera lists the following metrical romances as compositions by de la Cruz: *Clarita, Adela at Florante* (Adela and Florante), *Flora at Clavela* (Flora and Clavela), *Doce Pares de Francia* and *Rodrigo de Villas*. Rivera attributes ten plays to de la Cruz: *La Guerra Civil de Granada*, *Hernandez at Galisandra* (Hernandez and Galisandra), *Reina Encantada o Casamiento por fuerza*, *Los Dos Virreyes*, *Principe Baldovino*, *Conde Rodrigo de Villas*, *Doce Pares de Francia*, *El Amor y la Envidia*, *D. Gonzalo de Cordoba*, and *Jason at Medea* (Jason and Medea). Rivera provides excerpts, salvaged

⁵² *Huseng Sisiw* (Manila, 1933) by Jose Ma. Rivera, the source of all we know about de la Cruz, is actually no more than biographical notes based on interviews with descendants of the poet and on recollections by men who knew about the poet from their elders. The appellation *Huseng Sisiw*, said to have been given de la Cruz because he always asked for a chick in payment for his work or advice on other people's poems, is attributed by Rivera to the poet's love for chicks as a dish.

All quotations from de la Cruz's poetry are from Rivera's biography.

from termite-eaten scripts, only from the plays *D. Gonzalo de Cordoba*, *Principe Baldovino*, *Conde Rodrigo de Villas*, *Los Dos Virreyes*, and *El Amor y la Envidia*.

Of the metrical romances, nothing has come down to us to allow any assessment of the poet's contribution to the development of this genre.⁵³ What Rivera's biography allows us to glimpse is the poet's lyric and dramatic verse. The excerpts from the plays reveal an artisan who is not above grinding out pedestrian lines just to keep his plot going. Of interest in this connection is an anecdote recorded by Rivera. De la Cruz had an itinerant company of actors which gave performances in various towns celebrating the feast of their patron saints. One time he was invited to present one of his plays in Batangas, and he was taken to meet the parish priest as soon as he and his group arrived in town. The priest wanted a new play for the fiesta, something that had not been staged anywhere before. He handed de la Cruz a book which he wanted turned into a play. The playwright was not fazed. The following day when the play was scheduled to be presented, de la Cruz was ready although most of the lines had to be composed and dictated from the wings while the play was in progress.⁵⁴ No doubt, the circumstances of dramatic composition during the said fiesta were exceptional. Nevertheless, the anecdote, if we can accept its veracity, helps explain the desultoriness of much of the verse in the excerpts contained in *Huseng Sisiw*.

The excerpt which shows de la Cruz at his best is taken from act III of *Principe Baldovino*. The piece also gives us an insight into Tagalog playwriting at mid-century. Fansler has examined a metrical version of *Principe Baldovino* and traced its source to five Spanish ballads about Charlemagne and his knights.⁵⁵ A comparison of the excerpt from the play

⁵³ *Bernardo Carpio*, an *awit*, has been attributed to Cruz by writers who followed Rivera, but no evidence has been advanced to support the attribution. A version of *Doce Pares de Francia* available in print is not by de la Cruz, but by a writer whose initials are T. C. L. G.

⁵⁴ Rivera, pp. 13-14.

⁵⁵ Fansler, 209-210.

with the most complete of the five ballads mentioned by Fansler reveals that adaptation, rather than translation, was what usually took place whenever a Tagalog poet made use of Spanish sources. The ballad that could have inspired de la Cruz is one opening with the line "*Asentado esta Gayferos.*"⁵⁶ Gayferos has been dissipating himself at the gambling tables in Paris since his wife Melisendra was abducted by Moors and every attempt to find and recover her failed. Don Carlos, the emperor, reproves him, shaming him into a renewed search for Melisendra. Gayferos goes to his uncle Roldan to borrow a horse and battlegear. Roldan has grown to despise his nephew and, when they meet, he calls the young man a coward for allowing the Moors to hold Melisendra captive for seven years. Gayferos is incensed by the insult and challenges his uncle to a duel. Cooler heads intervene, and Gayferos finally gets the horse and gear he needs. The ballad goes on to tell of Gayferos' finding his wife, the rescue, and their glorious return to Paris.

Some discrepancies between the details in the Spanish ballad and those in de la Cruz's play are immediately striking. Roldan is the younger man in the play; he is Guifero's nephew. It is not merely Gayferos' name that has been changed; Melisendra has become Esmelecinda. These discrepancies suggest that de la Cruz must have gotten his material through an intermediary, not from the original ballad. A comparison of parallel passages from the play and the ballad shows how de la Cruz works as a playwright.

Guifero has come to borrow Roldan's horse without explaining why he needs it. Roldan refuses, on the ground that his horse may be ridden only by a man who has proved his mettle as a warrior. Guifero feels the insult and challenges Roldan to a duel that the latter may test his prowess as a fighter. Roldan taunts him by telling him to go look for

⁵⁶ *Romancero General*, ed. Agustín Durán, I, in *Biblioteca de los autores españoles* (Madrid, 1945), X, pp. 248-252. Durán gives eight ballads on Gayferos (Nos. 374-381), all anonymous but one (by Miguel Sanchez, el Divino, a famous playwright of the early part of the seventeenth century).

his wife first. Only then does Guifero reveal why he needs Roldan's horse. Roldan is mollified and even offers his own sword Durandal.

In the ballads, Gayferos spends 32 octosyllabic lines in asking Roldan to lend him battlegear and a horse. He begins his speech with elaborate politeness:

—Por Dios os ruego, mi tío,
 Por Dios os quiero rogare.
 Vuestras armas y caballo
 Vos me lo querais prestare,
 Que mi tío el Emperante
 Tan mal me quiso tratar,
 Diciendo que, soy para juego
 Y no para armas tomare.

He then recalls how he has searched for his wife "through mountains and valleys" to no avail, and explains that he now knows that Melisendra is in the kingdom of Sansueña where he proposes to go to her rescue.

De la Cruz makes Guifero speak with a bluntness that annoys Roldan:

Aco'y caya naparito
 Don Roldan sa harapan mo,
 Ang iyo sanang cabayo
 Ngayon ay hihiramin co.⁵⁷

Roldan's reply, in the ballad, is equally long-winded. He reminds his nephew of the seven years of captivity that Melisendra has endured, sarcastically remarking that the young man used to have horse and arms, but now that he is going to rescue his wife he suddenly finds himself without them:

Siete años vuestra exposa
 Ha que esta en captividade:
 Siempre os he visto con armas
 Y caballo otro que tale,
 Agora que no las teneis
 La quereis ir a buscare.
 Sacramento tengo hecho
 Alla en San Juan de Letrane

⁵⁷ The reason I have come, / before you, Don Roldan, / is to ask if I could / borrow your horse.

A ninguno prestar armas,
 No me las hagan cobardes:
 Mi caballo esta bien vezado,
 No lo querria mal vezare.

De la Cruz gives Roldan two quatrains which lash at Guifero with the same bluntness with which his uncle has tried to borrow the horse:

Namimili ng sasacay
 Cung ang cabayo ni Roldan,
 At cung sa para mo naman
 Hindi co maibibigay!

Sa may lacas, tapang, licsi
 At hustong pagcalalaqui,
 Ang cabayo cong narini
 Lalong nagbibigay puri.⁵⁸

That de la Cruz understood the demands of stage dialogue should be obvious after the above comparison. If he had read any of the Gayferos ballads, he must have realized that the expository parts of the dialogues in the ballads did not belong on the stage. Consequently, we notice that what exposition he creates is done in the course of the exchange of lines between the actors.

The comparison also sheds sociological light on the audience for which de la Cruz wrote. The diction of the Spanish ballads is characterized by courtliness that is noticeably missing in the Tagalog dialogue. Spain's *romances* were mostly about the nobility, so that the language of the characters was sophisticated, full of fanciful turns of phrase. De la Cruz was writing for the Tagalogs of the eighteenth century, a folk audience quite unaware of or unconcerned with the anachronism of having medieval kings and knights talk like contemporary merchants or peasants.

The use of verse in Tagalog drama was an established tradition before de la Cruz came into the scene. In *Principe*

⁵⁸ Roldan's horse / is choosy about its riders, / and if they're the likes of you, / then I can't lend it.

To the strong, brave and sprightly, / to those who are men all over, / this horse of mine / gives added honor.

Baldovino, we find that the octosyllabic and the dodecasyllabic measures were the standard meters employed in the plays. De la Cruz uses the octosyllabic meter for the quarrel scene between Guifero and Roldan, a fortunate choice of meter because the brevity of the lines captures the excitement and frenzy of the exchange between the warriors. The folk quatrain is the unit of dramatic verse, but de la Cruz avoids the stiffness of the stanza form by allowing the characters to share a quatrain. By refusing to confine one speaker within the quatrain, the playwright achieves a certain degree of flexibility in the versification. This is illustrated by the following passage:

Guifero. At anong iyong palagay
Aco бага ay alangan
Sa lalaquing sino pa man?
Roldan. Oo't icaу ay matapang.⁵⁹

The shift in speaker in the last line of the quatrain breaks down the rigid formality of the stanza, giving the dialogue the ring of actual speech.

A further variation in the use of the quatrain for verisimilitude in the dialogue may be observed in the conversation below:

Guifero. Cong ibig mo ring malining
Halica't iyong subuquin.
Roldan. Guifero, ica'y tumigil
At aco ay quilalanin!
Si Roldan, aco si Roldan.
Guifero. Huag icao at sino man
Magquilala na sa tapang....
Roldan. Infante huag duluhan!⁶⁰

Guifero has two lines of the first quatrain. Roldan completes it with the first two of his three-line reply. His third line

⁵⁹ Guifero. And what do you think— / Am I less a man / Than any adversary?

Roldan. But, of course, you're a brave man.

⁶⁰ Guifero. If you want to find out / Come forward and try me.

Roldan. Guifero, stop and consider / Who I am! / Roldan, that's who I am, Roldan.

Guifero. I couldn't care less who you are, / Let's see who is the braver man...

Roldan. Prince, don't press your luck!

begins the second quatrain, to which Guifero contributes two. Roldan's exclamation rounds up the quatrain. Because of the way the lines have been distributed between the speakers, the assonance becomes less obvious and the tension in the dialogue is sustained by the concealment of poetic artifice. In passages like this, de la Cruz is able to create "free"-sounding verse on the stage while keeping the dialogue in tight control through the set stanza form.

When the scene demands a solemn, contemplative tone, de la Cruz employs the dodecasyllabic line. Previous to de la Cruz, there had been no extended use of this meter of which we have any written record. It appeared for the first time in print in San Agustin's *Compendio* which quoted two lines from Pablo Claín's translation from the Latin:

Quita,i, sinasamba Dios na naliligpit,
na sa Sacramento,i, tantong sungmisilid.⁶¹ (p. 151)

Bencuchillo identifies the dodecasyllabic line as the measure of the *prosa* or *plosa*, a type of poetry implicitly condemned as immoral in the preface to the 1762 edition of Herrera's *Meditaciones*.⁶² As the meter of this secular poetic form, the dodecasyllabic line must have been a popular measure in oral poetry before the Tagalog dramatists took it over.

The caesura after the sixth syllable of the dodecasyllabic meter gives the line a languid lilt that creates melancholy music when the poem is recited. The quatrain below is from Esmelecinda's soliloquy in which she laments the neglect of her husband Guifero:⁶³

Langit na mataas, hulugui ng awa,
Sa lagay na ito ang palad cong aba,

⁶¹ I adore you, my God, who are enclosed / within the Blessed Sacrament where you repose.

⁶² Bencuchillo's example of the *plosa* is on a religious subject; its syntactical awkwardness indicates the poem is his own composition (pp. 20-21).

⁶³ The Spanish sources for this scene are ballads Nos. 380 and 381 in *Romancero General*, I, pp. 253-254.

Huag mong itulot mapasacania [sic]
Aco at tangain ang agos ng luha!⁶⁴

The change of meter as the scene moves from the quarrel between Guifero and Roldan to the prayer of Esmelecinda, shows that as a playwright de la Cruz did not cease to be a poet, one most sensitive to the effects of meter. At the same time, the change demonstrates the poet's awareness of theatrical effects made possible by a simple manipulation of speech rhythms.

As a creator of character, de la Cruz did not seem to have gone farther than the rudimentary characterization usually found in the folk plays of any country. In *Principe Baldo-vino*, which is again the only excerpt worth considering in investigating this aspect of de la Cruz's dramatic talent, Guifero and Roldan are flat characters easy for a simple audience to understand and empathize with. The scene between Guifero and Esmelecinda, however, reveals another facet of de la Cruz's art—that sense of humor which will be discussed later in reference to the lyric poems. The scene opens with Esmelecinda's prayer in which she unburdens herself of grief mixed with bitterness. When Guifero appears, her immediate reaction is to nag him for being such a slow-foot deliverer:

Lilong caballero!
Aba't icao pala'y si Guifero
Na cung aco pala'y pinutlan ng ulo
Sino pang daratnan iuan mo na, hayo!⁶⁵

The sudden change in tone must have been timed for laughs, and it is likely that it is for touches like this that the playwright was such a favorite among audiences of fiesta-celebrants. His popularity is attested to by the fact that during the closing years of his career, he was employed as a reader for the famous Teatro de Tondo, a position of some eminence

⁶⁴ Heaven above, let down your pity, / Let it touch this abject state of mine; / Keep me from losing my honor, / From being washed away by a flood of tears!

⁶⁵ Faithless knight! So here you are, my Guifero. / What if I had been beheaded; / Whom would you rescue? So go!

since it gave him the power of deciding which plays were to be accepted or rejected.⁶⁶

It is as a lyric poet that we get a somewhat fuller view of Jose de la Cruz. Three quatrains reproduced in Rivera's biography leave the impression that the charm of his verse lies in its whimsicality. In de la Cruz, whimsicality grows out of the poet's facility with paradoxical language, and the jocose wit of his fallacious reasoning is quite reminiscent of the wit of the Metaphysical and Cavalier poets of seventeenth century England, particularly the last group.

Consider the following poem:

Ah...!Sayang na sayang, sayang na pagibig
Sayang na singsing kong nahulog sa tubig
Kung ikaw din lamang ang makasasagip....
Mahanga'y hintin kong kumati ang tubig!⁶⁷ (p. 11)

The poet playfully exaggerates the disdain of a woman spurning a suitor through the repetition of *sayang*, a word expressing regret. The initial impression is that the regret is so great that the speaker would pay any price to have the ring retrieved. But the disjunctive third line leads instead to grand melodrama—the lady would rather wait for the sea to dry up than have a suitor she does not like do her a favor. Within the conventions of old-fashioned courtship in the Philippines, the vehemence of a woman's "No" is never taken as a sign that she has rejected the suitor's plea; it is nothing more than a sign that the object of the man's love is a woman of virtue and therefore worth winning. The "No" is often meant to test the man's power of perseverance, so that if he is sincere in his plea he will offer his love over and over again until the woman sees it fit to reciprocate. Thus within the compass of this short poem, de la Cruz has captured in memorable lines an ethnic gesture that is at once amusing and exasperating. For our time, the Freudian overtones (unintended, to be sure) make the poem almost contemporary

⁶⁶ Rivera, p. 13.

⁶⁷ Too bad, too bad for my love, ah me! / Too bad my ring fell into the sea. / If no one but you could get it for me, / I'd rather wait till the sea ebbs away.

in spirit; it becomes more humorous in a somewhat naughty way because we realize that the woman's ring, the act of diving for it, and the sea that wishing will not drain away have a comment to make on sex and the virtuous Filipino maiden.

The freshness of "*Ah...! Sayang na sayang*" in spite of its age is an affirmation of the chief virtue of de la Cruz's poetic practice. Ironic wit gives his love lyrics a resiliency of texture which is rarely found in Tagalog poetry, even in that written in more recent years. The syllogistic turn of mind seen in the previous poem appears in another quatrain:

Sa aki'y huwag nang matwimatwiranin
Na may magulang kang dapat sangguniin;
Di bakit si Kristo ay nakapaghain
Nang langit kay Dimas, di may magulang din?⁶⁸ (p.17)

The wit here depends upon the elusive fallacy hinting upon the analogy between the coy woman and Christ and what "heaven" each has to offer. Subsequent poets took up de la Cruz's fallacious reasoning in his poems but missed the humor of the eighteenth-century poet. The result was sentimentality, a failing that cannot be attributed to de la Cruz who used exaggeration, not to blow up a trivial sentiment, but to lighten the emotional load in a stanza.

Another facet of de la Cruz's wit may be seen in the quatrain below:

Kahati sa wika't kabati sa tingin,
At sa pagkatao, nama'y kabati rin,
Nguni't sa pagsinta, kung aking warii'y
Hindi na kabati't kusa pang katanim...!⁶⁹ (p. 16)

A lover chides his loved one about love gone. The implied situation is rife with lugubrious possibilities, which de la Cruz scrupulously avoids. He chooses to understate the emotional content by punning on the word *tanim* (plant). As

⁶⁸ Oh, don't give me that line / about consulting your parents; / Why, Christ was able to offer / Heaven to the good thief, and he had parents, too.

⁶⁹ We're acquaintances in words and in looks, / and in our manners, we're acquaintances, too; / However, when I ponder upon it, in love / We're no longer friends, but enemies even....!

an idiomatic term, *katanim* means a person against whom one harbors a grudge. On the literal level, the image created is that of two people planting in the same rice paddy or orchard, but behaving as strangers with each other. And then the sly humor of de la Cruz asserts itself again—the act of planting, in off-color banter, refers to the sex act. The *double entendre* turns what was originally an innocent complaint into a rake's boast.

The anti-romantic streak in de la Cruz finds expression in the full-length lyric poem "*Oh...! Kaawaawang buhay.*" The poem is another remonstrance with a woman who plays coy. Exaggeration is once again employed. Instead of fallacious reasoning, the poet this time creates humor by having the speaker refute the woman's reason for turning down his love: "Wait till I get to heaven to receive the boon I ask" (*Sa langit ang awa saka ko na hintin!*). Here the man is at the receiving end of a fallacious argumentation. De la Cruz sets the tone of the poem with the grand sigh in the opening line, followed by the self-pitying sentiments of the rejected suitor:

Oh...! Kaawaawang buhay ko sa iba,
Mula at sapol ay gumiliwigiliw na,
Nguni't magpangayon wakas ay di pa
Nagkamit ng tungkol pangalang ginhawa....!⁷⁰

In the second stanza, the poet uses the imagery of a sales transaction in describing the relationship between the lover, who has invested sighs and complaints, and the loved one, who has told him to wait for his profit in heaven:

Ano't ang ganti mong pambayad sa akin,
Ang ako'y umasa't panasanasain,
At ilinagak mong sabing nahabilin
Sa langit ang awa saka ko na hintin!⁷¹

⁷⁰ Alas, among men I lead the most piteous life: / From the very start, I've pursued my love / But up to now the end is nowhere in sight / When I'll finally find comfort...!

⁷¹ And how have you repaid me? / You urged me to hope and anticipate / And then, as collateral, these words: / Wait till you get to heaven to receive your boon.

The speaker tries to make the woman see reason by distinguishing between her pity and divine mercy. But he drops the argumentation, apparently sensing the futility of reasoning with her. The final stanza repeats in the first two lines the woman's insistence on the lover's looking to heaven for pity. The lover returns to his exaggerated sigh in the opening stanza:

Napalungi namang palad yaring palad,
Sa ibang suminta't gumiliw ng tapat.⁷²

In an argumentation where reason does not operate, the best recourse, as the speaker seems to have decided, is to resort to emotional appeal which is perhaps the only thing the woman will understand. It is this sense of irony, buoyed by the poet's verbal playfulness, that makes de la Cruz so appealing even after a century and a half.

In an age when the general run of poetry dealt with love and "some minor matters pertaining to their farms," de la Cruz had elegance, a quality that immediately marks his poetry as urbane. Thus, he looms large in the history of early Tagalog poetry. His works reflected the great change that was taking place both in the Tagalog audience and in the poetry written for them. In the course of half a century, which is the distance between de la Cruz and Gaspar Aquino de Belen, Tagalog poetry moved away from the earthiness of Aquino de Belen's diction towards the refinement of de la Cruz's language. The change was, of course, prompted by the emergence of a new breed of natives, those who grew up in the towns, Manila in particular, and were becoming, through the accumulation of wealth and the attainment of whatever education was made available to them, more aware of their own economic and intellectual powers. These natives, as the audience for poetry during the latter half of the eighteenth century, were reaching for respectability which seemed to be a requisite once a higher standard of living had been achieved. Respectability shied away from the language of folk-rooted

⁷² How unfortunate I am indeed / compared to those who loved and were loved back.

poetry, that reminder of their rural and agricultural origins. The search for poetic diction may be said to begin with the language of Jose de la Cruz. In this, de la Cruz was indeed the teacher—if not actual, at least symbolic—of Francisco Baltazar.