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II. Theatre

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the Philippines and the University of Sto. Tomas, are now giving way to the vital new ideas of the moderns.

With the help of the press, which has been generous in allotting much space to art news, more and more laymen are getting used to the idea that what matters primarily in a picture is its design, its visual statement, not its literary "meaning", photographic realism, or illustrational values. Whether it uses the figure or discards it, modern art is no longer the subject of loud ridicule as it used to be ten years ago, nor is it the heap of completely incomprehensible ideograms or blobs which it used to be in the public mind, thanks to the growth of appreciation classes in colleges everywhere.

It is interesting to note that the big names of the fifties, Ocampo, Manansala, Legaspi, and Tabuena, for various reasons, dominate the art scene less and less. 1961 was definitely a year for relatively young artists like Aguinaldo, Chabet, Ang, and Jose Joya, who regularly exhibit new pieces at the Luz Gallery. Joya, the most dynamic and gifted of the lot, and certainly the most sophisticated, won this year's Outstanding Young Man Award in Painting from the Jaycees and the Manila Times Publishing Company and a Heritage Award for Painting. What is gratifying to see in all these young artists is their withdrawal from engaging in questions on Filipinism in the fine arts: their main concern is with their personal commitment to their vision and to their craft.

EMMANUEL TORRES

II. A THEATRE MISUNDERSTOOD

A friend of mine, historian by profession, asked me once how it was possible that people could still take the Theatre seriously in this age which is patently that of the Cinema. The argument was the obvious one: the almost infinite capacity of the motion picture camera to photograph life intimately or extensively, as you wish, cannot but show

up the relative vacuity of the affairs which transpire on the most prodigious stage; an audience accustomed to so much richness of authentic detail can no longer be engaged—as they once were—by people who live amid cardboard, canvas and cheesecloth. On another occasion, a second friend, this time a critic of note, asked if in the production of a continental play to which he had been invited the actors were going to wear false noses.

I cite these remarks because I think that they are indicative of the gross misunderstanding of the *métier* of the Theatre which the average Filipino playgoer entertains. I do not doubt that the misunderstanding has merely been transmitted from one side of the footlights to the other and, therefore, that if the Filipino Theatre has proved to be generally unsatisfying, it is ultimately because the artists have prompted their audiences to expect what the art of the Theatre is not meant to fulfill: the mirroring of life.

Conceding for the moment that this is the principle of our Theatre, the diagnosis of its present ill-health seems logical. But commentators on the cultural scene have, at one time or another, ascribed it to any or all of three factors: the lack of a national playhouse, the lack of substantial Filipino playwrights, the lack of sustained patronage.

A national playhouse would seem to satisfy two basic necessities without which our invincible theatre guilds have still managed to survive: a permanent residence for the Filipino Theatre as a whole and, more than that, a residence equipped with professional facilities. We are led to expect that, granting such a residence with such a machinery, the Theatre will easily become a permanent fixture in the cultural life of the average Filipino. Henceforth, our writers will feel the need to cultivate this aspect of our national life, will turn into competent playwrights and, dramatizing the Filipino soul with efficacy, will automatically draw to the Theatre Filipinos who, hitherto, have forsaken it.

Indeed, I have heard it said time and again that one of the essential drawbacks of our Theatre has been its pre-

occupation with Anglo-Saxon repertory. The criticism has been raised on two serious grounds. (a) The worlds of Shakespeare, Wilde and Williams are foreign to the Filipino sensibility. The Filipino soul can be truly gripped only by people and events which flow from its native history. (b) A Filipino cast is always miscast—at least in the last analysis—in any foreign play. The movies have been particularly unkind to them; the Filipino Hamlet and the Filipino Auntie Mame, even at their best, cannot but seem ludicrous when juxtaposed to our memory of Olivier and Russell. We shall always be bothered by the matter of the nose.

Since in effect our stages are constantly inhabited by people who neither look nor sound like the parts they impersonate—the movies, whether we admit it or not, are perpetually setting our criteria for us; or else, the productions we saw in London or in New York—and, moreover, since they must unfold their agonies amid scenery that cannot make a secret of its wretchedness, we cannot, no matter how indulgent we try to be, honestly say that we find in our Theatre a mirror of life. Hence, depressed by so much failure, we are driven to watching television, watching movie spectacles or playing golf with real people on real fields of grass.

Unfortunately, in all this furious attempt to hunt down the culprit who weighs on the life spirit of our Theatre, it is usually the playgoer who gets nabbed, sometimes for his lack of sympathy and understanding, sometimes for his lack of nationalism in general. This seems ironical to my mind, for audiences have always been the innocent bystanders in the development of crafts and arts anywhere in the world. I cannot see how they might be expected to behave as policemen directing the traffic in our theatre world. It appears more reasonable to regard them as automatons who come and go depending on the way they have been wired. I think that, for the moment, our Theatre has taught them only to listen to a story being told and, perhaps, to inspect how *real* the story becomes in the process of telling. If the Cinema tells more exciting stories and authenticates them

with more exciting photographs, it is just too bad for our Theatre which has taught them to look for this.

Neither do I imagine that it will ever be possible for the Utopian Theatre to have one and all at its feet, an error of conjecture which some of our optimists entertain. Ours is an age of specialization, which means that even our tastes have become specialized. I find it difficult to imagine that, transposed to our times and Shakespeare's magical powers notwithstanding, the Lord Chamberlain's Players could count on the raucous patronage of the groundlings. I feel certain that they would subscribe more heartily to the arts of vaudeville and the variety show unless they decided to take up horse-betting or mahjong. If we speak of an unsatisfied clientele, I think we speak of the audiences who have lent themselves to the operations of our Theatre, waiting to be ravished, being frustrated time and again, giving the Theatre another chance *ad nauseam*.

The situation of the missing playwrights resembles that of the missing patrons. The position that the Filipino Theatre will come to itself as soon as the Filipino playwright arises is an uncomfortable one. I think that history has attested enough to the fact that it is a dynamic theatre climate which spawns a dynamic playwright. It is, in fact, the quality of the Theatre which will measure how much its dramatist can produce; perhaps, *limit* is a more accurate word. At any rate, theatrical renaissances have always been precipitated on the stage, not the typewriter.

Finally, the matter of the missing playhouse. There is no denying, I suppose, that the erection of such a building in our midst would do somebody some good. However, I seriously wonder how much of a milestone it would represent in the history of our Theatre. The art of the Theatre, like all other arts, hinges, after all, on the prodigiousness of people, not of places. Nor has the Theatre ever been found, at any time in history, to be selective of its environment. Its adaptability is known to be chameleon-like; it has been known to feel perfectly at home in the drawing room of empresses as much as in open countrysides. The Theatre can take roots

wherever it is made to stand for some time; ours, which has not learned to develop roots, can profit little from transplantation.

I feel that what our Theatre really lacks at the moment is the ability to surprise. I mean, to surprise its spectator with what it can do with what it has to make-do.

It can no longer content itself with the vocation of mirroring life. Like painting, its original ambitions are, here and now, being better served by other instruments of culture. It can no longer tell stories merely, nor display amid ornaments attractive personalities. Fiction and the variety show have taken over those careers which, granted, were once its own.

If the Theatre is to stay healthy, it must find for itself an objective which no other craft or art is able to fulfill. These are the materials of which theatre consists: the human actor, the words of the playwright, the scenery, the costume and the music. I think that it is precisely by re-composing these materials together in perpetually changing and perpetually engaging designs—as in a kaleidoscope—that the Theatre can still surprise and—like the juggler—entertain. I am, perhaps, asking for a Theatre which does not regard itself as an illusion of reality, though it may allude to people and events from our world of real things; hence, a Theatre which is, to put it crudely, preoccupied with being clever, completely irresponsible about its bonds to nature, concerned only with its own internal intricacies. But I think that this is, in our age which is patently that of the Cinema, the sort of enterprise which can still hold our attention precisely because we are asked to concentrate upon it in relation to nothing else.

ROLANDO TINIO

III. THE TAGALOG FILM AND THE LOGIC OF IRONY

The Tagalog film, among the performing arts in the Philippines, stands apart as a scorned stepsister. The so-