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Notes and Comments

Folk Drama and Social Organization

RESIL B. MOJARES

What goes into the making of a popular theater tradition? A great deal of recent theater history is characterized by an attempt to recapture that value of folk drama which theater has lost through the years: drama as communal enterprise, drama as communal experience. What we see to be the special strength of folk drama lies in the fact that it is so firmly embedded in a culture and so much a part of the experience of the people that there does not seem to be a break or an interruption between the order of theatrical experience, on the one hand, and the order of social experience, on the other. Theater is *in* society and society is *in* theater, and the two seem to constitute a seamless whole.

How can theater today recapture such unity? How does one create a popular theater tradition? These questions are involved in current attempts at reviving folk dramatic forms and at creating, at one end of the scale, "community theater" and, at another, a "national theater tradition." The questions then have immediate, practical consequence. They are however large questions and this essay does not presume to provide all the answers.

THE MAKING OF TRADITION

What shall be done here is to consider the dynamics of a particular theater tradition in a specific community and try to abstract

This paper draws material from a research project entitled "The Valladolid Linambay, 1860-1940: The Social History of a Cebuano Village," which I am carrying out under the auspices of the Philippine Social Science Council (Modern Philippine History Program) and the University of San Carlos. It was prepared for the Fourth National Folklore Congress, July 1980.

from it some laws concerning the nature of a popular theater tradition. The subject is the tradition of the *linambay* (the Cebuano term for the *moro-moro*) in the barrio of Valladolid, a municipality of Carcar in southern Cebu, in the period from roughly 1900 to 1920.

Valladolid is set on an alluvial plain on the east coast of Cebu, some forty kilometers south of Cebu City and three kilometers outside the poblacion of Carcar. In 1903, the village had a population of 2,689 persons.¹ It is primarily an agricultural community, with fishing as an important though now declining secondary source of subsistence. Corn, sugar, and coconut have been its primary crops, with the distribution and relative proportion of these crops varying according to the various phases of the barrio's history.

Available archaeological and historical data indicate that Valladolid was already a semipermanent or permanent settlement in pre-Spanish times. Something of its history is preserved in the name by which it is also known today: Daang-Lungsod (or "Old Town"), for this was the site of the main settlement of the area, known as Sialo in the sixteenth century, until Muslim raids forced the settlement in the early 1600s to move inland. The new settlement came to be known as Kabkab (and later Carcar) and the old site declined to the status of a barrio called Valladolid.²

The beginnings of the *linambay* tradition are dim though it is safe to assume that the theater tradition of the village must have begun to take shape in the late nineteenth century.³ The growth of the *linambay* tradition in the area is tied to the transformation of the countryside of Cebu (beginning with the southern towns of Talisay, Naga, and Carcar, in the 1850s, and then the northern towns of Bogo, Medellin, and San Remigio in the 1880s) into a cash-crop producing region in the wake of the expansion of the world market to Philippine agricultural crops and

1. *Censo de las Islas Filipinas* (Washington: Oficina del Censo de los E.U.A.), 2:166.

2. This research project makes use of diverse sources: interviews, archival materials from the Carcar Parish and the Philippine National Archives, extant *linambay* scripts, and Cebuano periodicals of the period 1899-1940.

3. The oldest extant *linambay* manuscript ("Alimpatar") that the Cebuano Studies Center, University of San Carlos, has recovered from the Carcar area is dated 1876 and tradition has preserved the memory of a *moro-moro* production of "Don Pelayo" in Carcar in the same year, 1876. (Epifanio Alfafara, "Ang Kabkab sa Karaang Panahon," *Babaye*, 22 November 1930, p. 15.)

the opening of Cebu to foreign trade in 1860. The urban elite of Cebu City, which was constituted of a core of some thirty *mestizo sangley* (Chinese *mestizo*) families, responded to the new economic opportunities by moving into the towns and villages and acquiring lands, accelerating the process of changing the subsistence economy of villages into a monetized, export crop economy linked to a large external market.⁴ It is against this background that the linambay of Valladolid flourished in the period from roughly 1880 to 1920 and waned in the years that followed until the Second World War brought it to virtual extinction.

LINAMBAY AND VILLAGE LIFE

What made the linambay of Valladolid a popular tradition? First, consider two dimensions to this tradition: its persistence in time, and the degree of village participation in the tradition, or, put differently, its temporal depth, and the amount of social space it occupied.

Available sources indicate that from approximately 1890 to 1930 the linambay had a vigorous existence in the village. Linambay productions were put up "almost every year" of this period. It was the centerpiece of the celebration of the village fiesta in August, which coincided with the harvest of the year's first and best corn crop (*panu-ig*). The fiesta was the high point in the village social calendar, and the fiesta was "not complete without a linambay." In popular thought, the linambay came to be invested with religious values: it came to be essential to the "proper" celebration of the village fiesta, which in turn insured the "sanctification" of the village.

Facts of another order also contributed to the importance of the linambay in the life of the village. Valladolid had a highly dispersed settlement pattern owing to a combination of ecological, economic, and historical factors. Around 1920, Valladolid had five or six focal points, marked by such nexuses of activities as the location of chapels, junctions of roads, and the residences of

4. For historical data on Cebu Province, I have drawn from Bruce L. Fenner, "Colonial Cebu: An Economic-Social History, 1521-1896" (Ph.D. diss., Cornell University, 1976) and Michael Cullinane, "The Changing Nature of Cebu Urban Elite in the 19th Century" (Ms., Ann Arbor, Michigan, USA, 1978).

elite families. The village had no permanent market and, outside of the main barrio chapel, it did not have a clear center. Furthermore, the practice of a fragmented, nonirrigated agriculture did not provide much occasion for village-wide cooperation. The linambay then was the only occasion during the year for the village to congregate and experience the physical and moral sense of being a community.

The production called upon the resources of the entire village. The linambay, after all, was a lavish spectacle: the play itself took all of nine or ten nights to perform (from eight in the evening until midnight or early dawn) and rehearsals took several months of weekends. A full cast consisted of from fifty to a hundred persons, all exotically dressed as personages from historic or imaginary European or Middle Eastern kingdoms, the lavishness of the costumes ascending according to the role of the players. It was reported of a production in 1919 that the costumes alone cost a thousand pesos.⁵ (At the time, this would roughly be the equivalent of one hundred cavans of corn, enough to feed a family of six for five years.)⁶ For a village production the logistics was impressive: costumes and sceneries, food for an average of a dozen rehearsal sessions and nine nights of performance, fees for musicians and other specialists, a roofed wooden stage, and *tramoyas* (stage machinery) like three-headed serpents, lions, and giants.

In addition, the linambay was part of a fiesta complex which lasted the nine nights of prayers (*novenario*), reaching its climax with the fiesta itself. To the fiesta and the linambay came people from the poblacion and the neighboring towns and barrios. From one to two thousand people congregated in the village plaza, coming on foot, carabao-drawn carts, and *flechas* (horse-drawn carriages), to watch the presentation, with those who could not be put up in the houses of the barrio setting up lean-tos and makeshift shelters where they could cook their food, rest, and sleep in the course of the festival.

The linambay was a communal creation. The play itself was woven out of traditional material, of elements familiar to the villagers, so that the experience of the play was, for both players

5. "La Fiesta de Carcar," *Nueva Fuerza*, 12 November 1919, p. 1.

6. The market price for corn in Cebu in 1919 was ₱10 per cavan. See "Carcar Protesta Tambien," *Nueva Fuerza*, 7 October 1919, p. 1.

and audience, a patterned sharing in the knowledge of coded signals. Though the script was usually penned by a single person, the village bard, it was traditional drama form constituted of conventional oral-formulaic lines, themes, and motifs, loose enough to allow for spontaneous elaborations, substitutions, and emendations by the players themselves.

Rehearsals were usually held by rotation in the homes of a number of families. The cost of production was distributed among the village residents: the landed families "sponsored" the costumes of performers and contributed food for the cast and money for various expenditures; and the common villagers themselves contributed various services, their labor for the construction of the stage, or part of their produce or fishing catch to feed the performers.

Talents were pooled: the *sa-op* (tenants) were conscripted to play the roles of soldiers and maids-in-waiting; various members of the village elite shared time and talent in directing the play, managing the rehearsals, supervising the stage construction, and playing roles themselves. The village association — in Valladolid, the *Kapunongan ni San Roque* (an association of the leading citizens of Valladolid, then a sub-parish or *visita* dedicated to San Roque) — planned and supervised the whole production, as well as the entire fiesta celebration itself. (The Carcar parish priest, who resided in the poblacion, had virtually nothing to do with the planning of the fiesta.) Behind the linambay then is the mobilization of the resources of an entire community. In terms of temporal depth and social space occupied, the linambay of Valladolid was popular tradition.

There are however other dimensions to what constitutes a popular tradition. A closer consideration of the linambay — of both its ideological and material aspects — shows that it was expressive of facts of social differentiation and economic stratification. These social features were in fact part of the conditions that made the linambay tradition possible.

On the level of symbolization, we saw that the society dramatized in a linambay play was a hierarchical, feudal society peopled by kings, dukes, princesses, petty generals and ambassadors, and common servants and soldiers. It celebrated the conservative values of custom and ceremony in a world that revolved around the axis of obedience to divine and secular authority. The linambay then expressed an elite vision of the world.

Such ideological superstructure had its basis in a two-level sub-structure: (1) the organization of the linambay production and (2) the social organization of the village itself. On the first level we saw that the leading, active functions in the tradition were generally performed by members of the village elite. They were the *diputados* (deputies or representatives) who composed the Kapunongan ni San Roque and as such made decisions on the celebration of the fiesta and the staging of the linambay. They generally composed the scripts, assigned the roles, directed the plays, paid for the costumes, and supplied the food (or organized its supply). They often performed the leading roles themselves (kings, princes, and princesses) and had the most speaking lines and best costumes.

Their prominence was to be seen in the arrangement of the linambay audience itself: the leading families of the village occupied *palcos* or specially-built sheds from which they could have a vantage view of the play, close to the stage or over the heads of the "groundlings." In their *palcos* they could offer special seats to their guests and have room and leisure to eat or even sleep as the play progressed.

This was reflective of the social organization of the village. During the most vigorous period of the linambay, Valladolid had the structure of a peasant village in which the inhabitants could be mainly classified according to their relations to the land: big landlords, medium-sized farm owners, small landholders, and tenants. There was a great deal of differentiation and movement within these groups or classes. For our purposes however and for the period we are considering certain classificatory observations can be drawn.

The inner core of the Valladolid village elite in 1900-1920 was constituted of just two interrelated clans or families (Regis and Gantuangco) with origins in the mestizo sangley district of Parian in Cebu City. These two mestizo families moved into the Valladolid area in the 1870s in response to the economic opportunities opened up by the commercialization of Philippine agriculture in the nineteenth century. They purchased and leased lands in the area, growing corn and sugar, and by 1900, these two families owned between the two of them at least half of the lands in Valladolid. These two families (which, by 1900, can be broken into six or seven nuclear familial units) formed a relatively com-

pact core inasmuch as they were linked by multiple affinal, ritual, and economic ties.

The outer core of the Valladolid elite was constituted of about ten families (Watin, Oacan, Navasquez, Tanudtanud, Lapinid, Laña, and a few others). Most of these families were older residents of the area, compared to the Regises and Gantuangcos, and might have been earlier mestizo in-migrants or *indio* families native to the area who probably managed to hold on to fair-sized landholdings in the face of the mid-nineteenth century encroachment of Parian merchants. The combined holdings of this group of ten-or-so families (which again, by 1900, formed a loose complex of around twenty nuclear units) may have accounted for some 30 percent of the total lands of Valladolid in 1900.

The rest of the population of approximately 400 families formed the outer circle, or base, of the community. These were either small landholders or disenfranchized peasants who either tilled their own plots, worked as part-time or full-time tenants or fishermen, or engaged in a wide range of marginal economic activities (palm wine-tapping, maguey gathering, weaving, petty trading, and others) depending on what resources were available and according to existing market or subsistence demands.

This social hierarchy was reflected in the linambay. The participation of the villagers in the linambay can be graded according to their position in the social organization. The table below shows the correspondences that can be drawn among the three levels we have considered.

Level 1: Social Organization	Level 2: Organization of Linambay Production	Level 3: Organization of Symbols
Inner Elite	Primary Sponsors Directors Scriptwriters	Kings Princes Princesses
Outer Elite	Secondary Sponsors	Dukes, Generals, and Supporting Roles
Tenants and Small landholders	Suppliers of Labor, Goods, and Services	Soldiers and Servants

The schema is a simplification and one should be warned against concluding on this basis that there was a mechanical, mirror-image, one-to-one correspondence between the economic activities of the community and its ceremonial or symbolic life. The cultural life of a community cannot be reduced to a mere epiphenomenon of its social structure.⁷ Valladolid society, too, was not a closed system: on the plane of actuality, there were departures from this schema (e.g., the son of a small landholder who played Alexander the Great and other principal roles because of his natural skills: a resonant voice, martial grace, an aptitude for the delivery of traditional verse, called *ditso* or *luwa*; in addition to looks and bearing). However, a quantitative analysis of the assignment of roles in both the production and the play itself will show that the scheme we have presented is accurate as a general configuration of the three levels of the tradition.⁸

The linambay then is a feudal form both in its system of production as well as its order of symbolic values. It celebrates and perpetuates the existence of an elite and its vision of the world.

How and why then did it become a popular theater tradition? The question carries us to the heart of this paper. Why did the people (specifically, the lower peasantry) of Valladolid take the linambay as their own? The answer to this question is many-sided but it is clear that at the root of the popular acceptance of the linambay are the objective conditions of Valladolid society during this period. Underlying such a tradition as the linambay is the level of social integration achieved by the village: the existing social arrangements satisfied the villagers' economic and moral needs, and the elite was held legitimate.

7. For a concise discussion of this point, see Clifford Geertz, "Ritual and Social Change: A Javanese Example," *American Anthropologist* 59 (February 1957): 32-54.

8. Our initial findings show that of fifty-two persons so far identified as primary or secondary players in the Valladolid linambay of 1900-1940, thirty-two belong to the village elite, five are non-barrio residents who were brought in as "guest players" by one or the other of the elite families, and fifteen can be said to come from the village poor. Most of the fifteen however are small landholders and six of them have affinal links to elite families. By "primary or secondary players," we mean those who played any of these roles: emperor, king, princes and princesses, dukes and counts, governors and generals.

COMMUNITY WHOLENESS AND CONFLICT

Valladolid in the period under study exhibited marked class inequalities and disparities of wealth. However, the economic and social relations obtaining in the community invested the village elite with a fairly high degree of legitimacy. The major landowners of the area (Regis, Gantuangco, Watin, and others) had the image of paternal landlords: they resided in the village, often joined in the work in the fields, dealt with their sa-op on a face-to-face basis, even occasionally married into tenant families, followed an "equitable" crop-sharing arrangement with their tenants, gave cash and crop loans with liberal terms or even without interest, allowed tenants free access to subsidiary forms of subsistence, and were generous with their surplus, "redistributing" it through such channels as church contributions, public feasts, and the linambay itself. In short, the Valladolid elite did not violate what James Scott has called "the moral economy of the peasant."⁹ There was then in Valladolid at this point of time a fair degree of vertical integration, a sense of wholeness and community. The linambay tradition then is both expressive and constitutive of this wholeness even as it already carried within itself elements of social conflict.

This brings up the main point, and returns us to the problem with which this paper opened. A theater tradition becomes a popular tradition on the basis of its relation to the structure and organization, balance and drift, of society. It becomes popular to that extent that it expresses, satisfies, and is nourished by, the sentiments, aspirations, and mood of the people. The Valladolid linambay of 1900-1920, in both its content and form, was thus sustained.

We consider here however a specific congruence of social forces at a particular point of time. Tradition, after all, is less a system in balance as a system in process. In describing the linambay of Valladolid I have tried to "freeze" it at a point of time when it seemed to reflect a "wholeness" in the community. Such wholeness, however is neither seamless nor durable. No society is. The later history of Valladolid itself shows this. In fact, a closer and more detailed view of the local situation may show that in the period

9. James C. Scott, *The Moral Economy of the Peasant* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1976) and "The Erosion of Patron-Client Bonds and Social Change in Rural South-east Asia," *Journal of Asian Studies* 32 (November 1972): 5-37.

we are considering (particularly the later years), the linambay may have been less a celebration of communal wholeness than a defense, on the symbolic level, against the centrifugal tendencies at work in the society of the barrio.

By 1920, the cracks began to be more manifest and the linambay tradition began to break down. Material resources for the production declined, dissent began to surface as to its value, many turned from active producers to passive observers, and presentations came to be staged more infrequently until they stopped altogether.

The linambay play itself manifested corresponding changes: it became shorter (from nine to three to four nights), its ritual actions were replaced with more "realistic" and mundane stage movements, its chanted verse gave way to a more prosaic language, and its themes came to be gradually emptied of meaning and power. The magic slowly dissolved, hostile realities were intruding into the lighted stage. There was beginning to be a bitter edge to the old village joke: *Prinsipe magabi-i, ma-adlaw mananguete* (A prince by night, a palm wine-tapper by day).

Underlying the breakdown of the theater tradition is the erosion of the old village economy by the combined action of various forces: the closer integration of Valladolid to a large and impersonal market economy, rendering the village more and more vulnerable to fluctuation in market prices as well as to the new and frequently hostile economic and political demands of the larger system; the pressures of population growth; the competition of large and more efficiently managed estates outside of the barrio; the fragmentation of landholdings through inheritance; and the ecological deterioration of the district (a less and less fertile land and sea). One considers too the growing influence of urban culture as the relative isolation of the village was broken down by improvements in roads and transport. Under such pressures patron-client relations became strained and the legitimacy of the village elite declined.

An old man of Valladolid has lamented of the years after the linambay: *Maora'g nabungkag, nahikatulog ang baryo* (It's as though the village has gone to pieces or has fallen into lethargic sleep). A tradition has vanished from its midst and none has taken its place. What dreams of communal wholeness do the villagers now dream? There is none to tell.