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Historical Notes on the Jesuits and Early Philippine Theater

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Historical Notes on the Jesuits and Early Philippine Theater

DOREEN G. FERNANDEZ

In the historiography of Philippine theater, one of the foundation stones is definitely Wenceslao E. Retana's *Noticias Histórico-Bibliográficas de El Teatro en Filipinas desde sus orígenes hasta 1898* (1909).¹ Although it is antedated by Vicente Barrantes' *El Teatro Tagalo* (1899),² it is of infinitely more value than the latter, not only because Retana took pains to correct the wrong notions and information propagated by Barrantes, but also and principally because of his scholarly method.

In his effort to determine first whether an indigenous, pre-Spanish literature and theater existed, and then how theater developed in the Philippines, Retana carefully sifted through the accounts of friars, the writings of such Filipinos as Epifanio de los Santos and Jose Rizal, government records, letters, published histories, *relaciones* and other books, rare manuscripts, periodicals — all carefully documented, and annotated as to nature, content and location. He eventually came to the same conclusion Barrantes had reached "with the force of logic rather than with documents,"³ that absolutely none of the available texts showed that the Tagalogs had "representación escénica" before 1571, the year Manila was established.

Later scholars, although appreciative of Retana's care and methodology, have shown that he was wrong, that an indigenous Philippine theater did — and in fact still does — exist. Retana and

1. Wenceslao E. Retana, *Noticias Histórico-Bibliográficas de el Teatro en Filipinas desde sus orígenes hasta 1898* (Madrid: Librería General de Victoriano Suarez, 1909).

2. Vicente Barrantes, *El Teatro Tagalo* (Madrid: Tipografía de Manuel G. Hernandez, 1889).

3. Retana, *Teatro*, p. 7.

the earlier chronicles did not recognize it because it was not identifiable to them as "representación escénica." The mimetic songs, dances, rituals, games, jousts, tribal customs, etc., which fulfilled all the functions of theater for the pre-Spanish Filipinos were not staged, costumed, and scripted, and were certainly far from the theater that Spaniards knew, a theater that had reached its *Siglo de Oro* before Magellan and his men reached Philippine shores.

In his study of the beginnings of staged, Western-style theater in the Philippines, Retana comes to the conclusion that:

From the examination detailed thus far, it seems that the initiators of theater in the Philippines were the Jesuits, and that, besides attributing to them this honor, to them too must be attributed the no less important one of having been the principal disseminators of literary culture. That [literary culture] which proceeds from the Colegio de San Jose, which they direct, is much superior to that which all the other [educational] centers together have been able to generate, including the College (later University) of Santo Tomas of the Dominicans which, initiated in the early years of the 17th century, was publicly inaugurated in August 1619.⁴

The examination that led to this conclusion consisted of a chronological review of accounts of events that featured some type of performance that could be said to have elements of theater in it.

THE SIXTEENTH CENTURY

LOAS, DECLAMACIONES, ORACIONES: THE PRE-DRAMATIC FORMS.

Retana starts by noting the royal *cedula* of June 8, 1585, in which Philip II recommended the establishment of a college for the sons of Spanish residents. Since this was especially directed to the Jesuits, the Colegio de San Jose was established in 1601, and it was here that "so many Filipinos received training, and it was precisely where theatrical representations originated."⁵

He sees these as having started "timidly, rudimentarily," and needless to say, in association with religious festivities. The first occasion was the arrival in Manila in 1595 of holy relics sent by

4. Ibid., p. 32. All translations from Retana were done by this writer.

5. Ibid., p. 17.

the Pope at the request of the Spanish king: "the bones of one hundred and fifty-five martyrs, among them those of twenty popes, and of St. Potenciana, patron of Manila." The installation of the relics and the corresponding festivities were held in January 1597. The solemn procession, richly constituted of *andas*, *relicarios*, and religious groups, started at the Convent of San Agustin, passed by the Cathedral and through the major streets, and stopped at the Jesuit college, which was decorated with tapestries, paintings, and poems. The nine-day celebration began and ended with *loas* in praise of the holy relics, and closed with a poetic joust or contest.

An account by Fr. Diego Sanchez, S.J., also cited, adds that the Jesuits composed many poems in Hebrew, Greek, Latin and Tagalog which decorated the church nave, and that the *loas*, or "declamaciones graves" were in good Spanish verse, and argued whether it was more expedient that God leave these glorious bones on earth, or take them up with the souls to Heaven.⁶

Retana points out that this was not theater but its germ, so to speak. Later in the study, he quotes Martinez de Zuñiga on the *loa* being the "minimal amount of theatrical expression, yet theatrical nonetheless," since it required a stage, a performer with some artistic skill and the recitation from memory of a poetic composition of praise.⁷

THE FIRST COMEDIA

What Retana considers the first truly theatrical presentation in the Philippines did not happen in Manila, but in Cebu, in 1598. There the Jesuits had already established in 1595 a primary school which, although originally intended only for Spanish children, apparently admitted Visayan and Chinese students as well. When the first bishop of Cebu, Fray Pedro de Agurto, arrived in 1598, he requested that courses in grammar (*latinidad*) be added not only for those who had already learned their first letters, but also for his nephews and the other boys in his household.

The grammar school "was formally inaugurated. . . with the presentation by the students of an academy in Latin and Spanish

6. Ibid., pp. 17-19.

7. Joaquin Martinez de Zuñiga, *Estadismo de las islas Filipinas* (1893), cited in Retana, *Teatro*, pp. 37-38.

in honor of Bishop Agurto," held in the Cathedral and lasting three hours. According to Pedro Chirino, S.J., then superior of the Jesuit residence in Cebu, this took the form of a *comedia*, a play in Latin and *romance*,⁸ and in verse and prose, which was composed by Francisco Vicente Puche, a scholastic, who had come from Spain with Agurto. He had started writing it during the boat trip from Manila to Cebu "to the measure of the oar stroke and the swing of the sailors' chanteys," and when he was halfway through, a sudden breeze blew his manuscript into the sea. Undaunted, he wrote it all over again "without hesitating over a single word," and when he arrived in Cebu a month later, the play was ready for rehearsals. Chirino concludes that it "proved most agreeable, learned, dignified, and devout, and gave extraordinary pleasure to all the citizens, who had never before seen such a thing in their city."⁹

THE SEVENTEENTH CENTURY

FUNCION TEATRAL

Nothing similar happened in Manila till the sixteenth century ended, notes Retana. In 1601, however, on the occasion of the inauguration of the Colegio de San Jose, he notes "a sign" of a *funcion teatral*, something almost possible to call a theatrical representation: the presentation by the students of "oraciones Españolas," which explained the nature, purpose and benefits of the new institution.

Fr. de la Costa's account allows the reader to visualize the event somewhat. Thirteen students, he records, were enrolled as boarding scholars (at a fee of 100 pesos a year), among them Pedro Tello, a nephew of the governor, and Antonio de Morga, son of the *Oidor Decano* of the Audiencia, and former legal adviser of the government. On the morning of the inauguration, the schol-

8. *Romance* generally refers to verse written in octosyllabic lines, rhyming assonantly, in pairs. The *comedia* generally designates a play in verse in three parts or *jornadas* (full-length).

9. Horacio de la Costa, S.J., *The Jesuits in the Philippines, 1581-1768* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1967), p. 166; Retana, *Teatro*, pp. 19-20; Pedro Chirino, S.J., "Relacion de las Islas Filipinas" (1604), translated by Frederic W. Morrisson and Emma Helen Blair, in Emma Helen Blair and James Alexander Robertson, eds., *The Philippine Islands 1493-1898*, 55 vols. (Mandaluyong, Rizal: Cacho Hermanos, 1973), 13:40.

ars arrayed themselves for the first time in the academic gown that was henceforth to be worn on all formal occasions. It was "a long robe of tawny-colored *husi* cloth with a scarlet hood." At the front door, they welcomed their guests: the governor-general, the administrator of the archdiocese, the cathedral chapter, the city corporation, members of the religious orders, their parents and friends. The inauguration began with investiture ceremonies at the chapel "symbolizing the admission of the scholars to membership in the college. This probably consisted in the rector placing the hood, previously carried on the arm, over the shoulders with an appropriate formula." After Mass celebrated by the archdeacon of the cathedral, Don Francisco Gomez de Arellano, and served by young Tello and Morga, came the Latin oration and the Spanish verses. There was open house all day, and in the afternoon the scholars, "accompanied by the rector and professors of the College of Manila, went in solemn academic procession up the length of Calle Real to pay the governor and audiencia a ceremonial visit at government house."¹⁰

DRAMA IN THE VERNACULAR

The next important event in the growth of "teatro español" in the Philippines, which, Retana reminds us, was always associated with religious feasts, is dated 1609. In the interest of chronology, however, it would be good first to record at this point two other historical notes of which Retana may not have been aware.

The first was chronicled by Marcelo de Ribadaneira, O.F.M., in a work published in 1601:

... [The young boys] present, in their own language, the lives of saints, with such interior feeling that the spectators, both Spaniards and Indios, are moved to many tears, to compunction and to change their lives. This was seen in the town of Sinaloa [Siniloan; Laguna] where the presentation of the Last Judgement made such an impression on many unbelievers that almost all asked with great earnestness and humility to be baptized, and this was done.

The second is Fr. de la Costa's documentation of the fact that in 1602, the Annual Letter of the Jesuits, speaking of the Antipolo mission, mentions the fact that

10. Retana, *Teatro*, pp. 20-21; de la Costa, *Jesuits*, pp. 196-97.

. . . a play in Tagalog, which is the language of this island, was performed by the boys of the boarding school of this town, to the great delight and satisfaction of the people. The boarding school makes great progress both spiritually and temporally, the natives helping to support it with sizable donations.¹¹

It is evident that not only the Jesuits had found the use of drama an effective audio-visual means for teaching religion. The Antipolo datum is further significant in that it shows the Jesuits not only writing theatrical and semi-theatrical material in Latin and Spanish for their students, or teaching them how to write and deliver such material; or even using theatrical methods and techniques for pedagogical, catechetical, and celebrative purposes; but also encouraging the use of the native language in these performances, thus initiating the meeting between Philippine language and Spanish theatrical styles and techniques, and the eventual indigenization of the latter.

DRAMA AS PEDAGOGICAL TOOL

One might also note at this point that Jesuit pedagogy has always included dramatics as an integral part of education. Chirino notes that in Manila in 1596 and 1597, "In the college we had begun . . . to study the Latin grammar and moral theology. Each of these branches was begun in the usual way, with public academic exercises and learned discourses," and a Jesuit commentator explains that:

. . . in ordinary colleges of the Society, with a complete order of classes, it was the custom, at the *solemnis instauratio studiorum*, for the prefect of studies or the professor of rhetoric to inaugurate the year's work by delivering a "learned discourse," before the whole academic body; and to this function the appreciative public was invited. Sometimes the students gave a public exhibition of their work and proficiency. This "solemn act" might be a dramatic presentation — an original play written for the occasion — or it might consist of literary exercises on the part of the scholars, music being also introduced. The technical name for these purely literary exercises was an "academy" or

11. Marcelo de Ribadaneira, O.F.M., *Historia de las islas del Archipielago Filipino y reinos de la Gran China, Tartaria, Cochinchina, Malaca, Siam, Cambodge y Japon*, originally published in 1601. The edition used was that published by the Historical Conservation Society in Manila, 1970, and titled *Historia del Archipielago y otros Reynos*, p. 68. The Antipolo play is recorded in de la Costa, *Jesuits*, pp. 188-89.

"specimen;" and naturally they would take place during the course of the scholastic year. Such was the custom of the age, in Spanish countries.¹²

Dramatic presentations also seem to have been used in the primary grades. Fr. de la Costa records mention made as early as 1609 of an elementary school attached to the College of Manila. The school children had a sodality of their own with a membership of about seventy, and included boys from the lowest form of grammar. The boys were given little exhortations (*hortaticunculas*) scaled down to their understanding, went to confession monthly, and were taught catechism and their first letters by a lay teacher. The Annual Letter of the following year notes that the boys presented a play to welcome Archbishop Vasquez Mercado, pleasing him so much that he asked for the script. Through subsequent Annual Letters, writes Fr. de la Costa, surely with a smile:

. . . we catch glimpses of these small but tireless infants marching at the head of processions, lustily singing hymns and chanting the catechism, keeping vigil with lighted tapers before the Blessed Sacrament during the carnival days, or suddenly popping out of contrivances on platforms to recite verses at some newly arrived governor or archbishop.¹³

By 1630 the enrollment of the elementary school had reached an amazing 600, a Jesuit headmaster had been installed, and the direction of the school assumed by the college. With this came the *Ratio Studiorum*, for we read that in addition to prayers and letters, the schoolboys now had to "exercise themselves in declamation and dramatics, whereby they acquired skill in public speaking." During the Christmas holidays, eight boys, all under eight years old, staged a play in honor of the newborn Christ, "which won golden opinions from everyone present." Everyone present, however, happened to be male, since only men were invited to the academies, disputations, and functions of the College of Manila. Doting mothers and other womenfolk raised such a protest that the governor's lady appealed to the Fathers to stage the play in the church rather than in the college hall, so that women might attend. Thus, the Christmas pageant of 1632 was attended not only by Archbishop Guerrero and Governor Cerezo

12. Chirino, "Relacion," in Blair and Robertson, *The Philippine Islands*, 12: 244. The commentator is E.I. Devitt, S.J., who is cited in the footnote on the same page.

13. de la Costa, *Jesuits*, pp. 360-61.

de Salamanca, but by "noble ladies in the entourage of the governor's wife," with everyone enthralled by "the unbelievable wit, grace, agility and understanding of the children."¹⁴

DRAMA IN BOHOL

Returning to Retana's chronology, we find a truly significant event: What he considers the first theatrical piece written by Spaniards in a native language, and thus the first religious play in a Philippine vernacular. The date was 1609, the place Bohol, where the Jesuits worked hard to draw the natives away from idolatry. At a loss, they turned, Retana writes, to the writing and staging of a play (probably with native actors) about the martyrdom of Santa Barbara. Vividly it showed the glory she ascended to, and the tortures that met her father, who was condemned to eternal flames. The audience is said to have exclaimed: "This will be, then, our end (eternal flames) if we separate ourselves from the true faith and from Christian life." They were then led to scoff at their *bailanes* (native priests), and hand over their idols, talismans (including crocodile teeth) and graven images (*dalongdones*), which the Jesuits promptly burned.¹⁵

Fr. de la Costa quotes the Annual Letter of 1610, showing the further use of drama in the teaching of religion in Bohol:

The boys of the boarding school presented a play on Saint Gregory the Great with such devotion and modesty that everyone was greatly taken by it and since the point of the play was the example of almsgiving which the saint gave, the people were greatly encouraged to do likewise. The natives derive great profit from these plays. They are an exceptionally efficacious means of teaching them our religion, not only because they come in vast numbers from all parts to see them, but also because they grasp more readily what is taught in them. Thus, in order to make them love the virtue of chastity and show them how in time of need, sickness, and danger they should have recourse not to their idols but to God, we presented another play on the life of the glorious virgin and martyr Saint Cecilia, in which the first lesson was brought home by the incident of the two crowns which the angel brought to the saint and to Saint Tiburtius, and the second by the prayer which she made to God.¹⁶

14. Ibid., p. 361.

15. Retana, *Teatro*, pp. 22-23 citing Gregorio Lopez, S.J.

16. de la Costa, *Jesuits*, p. 313.

The Annual Letter of 1611 records the mass conversion of thirty *babailan* from the village of Tubud who burned their altars and idols and joined the children's catechism class. There were similar conversions in other places.¹⁷

DRAMA AND RELIGIOUS FEASTS

The next religious feast cited by Retana is that held when notice of the beatification of St. Ignatius Loyola was received in Manila on June 20, 1611. There were artillery salutes, fireworks, the pealing of bells, poetic jousts, processions, and the participation of the other religious orders on June 20 and 21, the feast of Blessed Aloysius Gonzaga, and especially on July 30 and 31. During the high mass, after Archbishop Diego Vasquez de Mercado's sermon, twelve *josefinos*, *criollos*, performed a brief discourse "a lo pastoril y vizcaino." After mass verses were recited, gravely thanking the audience, and dances were performed. In the afternoon, a group from the parish of San Miguel did a "breve coloquio en lengua tagala" interspersed with three dances: one dressed in Spanish costume; a second done in the native manner, with lance and shield; and a third which showed the maimed, the halt and the blind staggering and falling over one another, then falling on their knees and asking the *beato* to cure them, and when cured leaping to their feet to "perform a Tagalog sword dance with great skill and agility." There were other dances, *dialogos*, recitations; still another *coloquio en lengua tagala* by the group from San Miguel; a *coloquio* on the life and virtues of the saint; and other celebrations.

Retana makes special note, however, of the literary contest concluded and judged on August 8 and 9, which attracted more than 250 entries in Greek, Latin, Italian, Spanish, Portuguese, Basque, Mexican, Tagalog, and Visayan. These were inscribed on illuminated scrolls and displayed to the public. Even after the winners had been chosen by the lieutenant-general of the Molucas, the vicar-general of the archdiocese, the chief-of-staff of the armed forces, and the commissary of the Holy Office and the prizes awarded, dignitaries like the Archbishop, the Royal Audiencia, the city corporation and the members of the other religious

17. *Ibid.*, p. 314.

orders came to view the poems, and to listen to a "breve y sentencioso coloquio" which presented the good which Ignatius of Loyola and his Company had done in the world by means of letters.

Retana comments that although most of those 250 entries may have been quite bad, it was clear that this small "deprived colony" had reached a level of culture that would have been difficult to equal in many populous European cities, and certainly in any city in the Orient at the time.¹⁸

This celebration in Manila was echoed in Jesuit missions in Cebu and in Tinagon (Samar), where literary and theatrical events were also held. In Cebu, on July 30, there was an "ingenioso coloquio" which presented a great eagle, sheltering under its wings the Society, with St. Ignatius above the wings. Another day there were dialogues and dances; and on the octave a coloquio in various languages, and a literary contest. In Tinagon, aside from the religious rites, there were various dances, comedias, and entremeses¹⁹ performed by the sons of datos or leaders of the town.²⁰

In 1619 when Pope Urban VIII's papal bull authorizing public celebration of the feast of the Immaculate Conception became known in Manila, there was a fifteen-day celebration. Apart from the secular festivities, like bullfights, masquerades, and fireworks, Retana records that the religious celebrations included a comedia on the beauty of Rachel, songs and dances of the *Indios*, a comedia on the sale of Joseph, and one on the Prince of Transylvania.²¹ The Jesuit portion of the celebration is described thus:

On Wednesday we of the Society began our festivities; and although we had no procession, as is our custom, the celebration at night was by

18. Retana, *Teatro*, pp. 23-27; de la Costa, *Jesuits*, pp. 364-65.

19. An *entremés* is a one-act sketch "deriving from the mime tradition and relying for its humour on some stock comic type" and used as an opener or intermission piece. See Margaret Wilson, *Spanish Drama of the Golden Age* (Oxford: Pergamon Press, 1969), p. 15.

20. Retana, *Teatro*, pp. 27-28.

21. "In the afternoon was presented the drama of the Prince of Transylvania, in which they brought out our Father Assistant, Alonso Carrillo, in a long taffeta robe and a linen frill with points. In order to announce who he was, a person who took part in the drama said, 'This is one of those who there are called Jesuits, and here we name Theatins.' " The source, "Relation of events in the Philippines Islands," 1619-20, is listed as unsigned in Blair and Robertson *The Philippine Islands*, 19:64. Retana, however, who quotes lengthily from the same account (pp. 28-30), cites it as "Estado, i successo de las cosas de Japon, China, i Filipinas . . . Escrito por un Religioso de la Compañia . . . a otro de Mexico . . . por Francisco de Lira. Año 1621."

no means inferior. On the contrary, there was burned a great quantity of illuminations — rockets, bombs, and other fireworks. Our people played a thousand musical instruments. During the day we held mass, in our impressive manner, and then had a sermon; and in the afternoon we presented a remarkable drama on the Conception. All the people said they had never seen anything like it.²²

The feasting went on, with opulent processions (“remarkable enough to have appeared in Madrid”) and with another feast held in the port of Cavite in which, the informant notes, as in Manila, all orders took part except one which never left its house, entered the cathedral, or displayed illuminations — and caused much gossip in the city.²³

More occasions for celebration followed for the Society soon after. In 1621, the faculty and students of the college of Santo Tomas helped the College of Manila celebrate the beatification of Francis Xavier by staging a play on his conversion.²⁴ In 1623, dispatches announced the canonization of Saints Ignatius and Francis Xavier, and Fr. de la Costa writes that “Manila, as the Spanish saying goes, ‘threw the house out the window’ to celebrate the event.” The statue of St. Francis was covered by devotees with more than 15,000 precious stones, 1000 of them diamonds; that of St. Ignatius with more than 20,000 stones, 800 of them diamonds. The resident students of San Jose, the day-scholars of the college, and the students of Santo Tomas, presented plays in Spanish; the parishioners of Taytay presented one in Tagalog. The city corporation contributed a bullfight, and petitioned the archbishop to declare the feasts of the two saints holy days of obligation for all Spaniards of the archdiocese. The petition was granted not only for Manila but for the diocese of Nueva Caceres, a declaration echoed by the bishops of Cebu and Nueva Segovia for their respective dioceses.²⁵

Retana mentions more feasting in 1623, to celebrate the accession to the throne of Philip IV; and in 1630, to celebrate the beati-

22. “Relation,” in Blair and Robertson, *The Philippine Islands*, 19:63; see Retana, *Teatro*, p. 29, for the Spanish original.

23. “Relation,” in Blair and Robertson, *The Philippine Islands*, 19:64-66.

24. Fr. de la Costa notes that the Santo Tomas faculty and students must have magnanimously forgotten “the affair of the hoods,” in which the Dominican and Jesuit rectors had gone to the courts in 1618 to settle the matter of the scholars’ hoods, which in both institutions were scarlet. The court judged that the Jesuit college had prior right to the color, having had it since its foundation in 1601. (de la Costa, *Jesuits*, p. 360).

25. *Ibid.*, p. 365.

fication of the Franciscan protomartyrs of Japan. He does not detail the participation of the Jesuit order in these events, but concludes this portion of his study with the evaluation earlier quoted, that the Jesuits were definitely the initiators of theater in the Philippines, and the disseminators of literary culture more importantly than all the other orders taken together.²⁶

THE GRAN COMEDIA OF 1637

The reason Retana cuts off the first portion of his study at 1630 is principally because the next major datum in the development of staged theater dated 1637, has been called by Vicente Barrantes "the first theatrical presentation of which we have notice . . ." ²⁷ In the light of all the data already detailed, examined, and evaluated, Barrantes was wrong, and Retana proceeds to correct him, firmly but courteously. Even on hindsight, however, it is the right time to close the period. The first steps towards staged drama, the declamaciones graves, coloquios, dialogos, and loas, which were only minimally theater, had gradually metamorphosed into and been joined by actual plays. In this first stage, however, short or long, minimally or maximally theater, whether used to catechize or to celebrate or even to display learning, the theatrical events were directly linked to religion, to religious festivities or at the very least to events directed by religious (e.g. the inauguration of a college).

The landmark play in 1637, although written by a priest, was called by Retana "palaciego y politico," political (civil or secular rather than religious) and pertaining to the palace, because it was to celebrate the victory of Governor-General Sebastian Hurtado de Corcuera over Cachil Corralat (Sultan Kudarat) of Mindanao.

When Corcuera arrived in the Philippines in 1635, he had express orders from Philip IV to punish the Muslim pirates severely, and stop their raids in the Visayas and Luzon. His victory over Kudarat in May 1637 climaxed a long campaign that had begun in February, and in which Jesuit missionaries and his chaplain, Fr. Marcello Mastrilli, S.J., played more than priestly

26. Retana, *Teatro*, pp. 30-32.

27. Barrantes, *Teatro Tagalo*, p. 30.

parts, bearing news, recruiting Visayan soldiers, and finally accepting the submission of the datus. With troops consisting of Spaniards, Pampangos, and Visayans, Corcuera's assaults caused Kudarat to withdraw further and further to a stronghold on a hill, (*cerro*) which was finally taken.²⁸

"Manila prepared a Roman triumph for the conquistador," writes Fr. de la Costa. When Corcuera entered the bay on May 24, his ship was met by gaily decorated sampans, and escorted to a special landing place. A triumphal procession passed through the royal gate, up Calle Real, past the Jesuit college, to the cathedral.

First came Nicolas Gonzalez's company, that had won the battle of Punta Flechas, carrying the captured standards of Tagal. Then came the seamen of the expedition, marching in two lines, with the Chinese and Filipino captives who had been liberated in the campaign marching between them. Then came the Maguindanau prisoners, the women and children walking free, the men in chains, and after them service troops carrying stacks of captured weapons. Next in order marched the Pampango troops, followed by a great rumbling and clattering as the horses of Corcuera's artillery dragged the guns captured at Lamitan and Maguindanau. But even the noise they made was drowned in the cheers that went up from the crowds that lined the street and filled the windows, for after them came Corcuera himself, preceded by six boys dragging in the dust in front of him the captured standards of Kudarat.²⁹

The Jesuits, "intimos de Corcuera," Retana calls them, made special preparations to receive the victor. A triumphal arch had been erected opposite the College of Manila, and as Corcuera approached it Josepito de Salazar, a student of the Colegio de San Jose, came forward from behind some screens to recite a poem written by Brother Liorri, S.J. extolling the victory, congratulating the governor, and saying that in accord with his name — that is, *corda*

28. For an account of the campaign, see Marcelo Francisco Mastrilli, S.J., "Conquest of Mindanao," Blair and Robertson, *The Philippine Islands*, 27: 253-305; and de la Costa, *Jesuits*, pp. 377-403. The triumphal entry described in the succeeding paragraphs did not actually mean the end of the campaign or the final defeat of Kudarat, who gained strength, and returned. By 1644, when Corcuera was replaced as governor, the gains of his Maguindanao campaign had been wiped out. However, Kudarat had been persuaded by Fr. Pedro Gutierrez, S.J., to make peace, and this held — albeit uneasily.

29. de la Costa, *Jesuits*, p. 386; see also Juan Lopez, "Corcuera's triumphant entry into Manila," Blair and Robertson, *The Philippine Islands*, 27:330-35.

quaerens — (seeking to win hearts) he had indeed won them in all who were there.³⁰

The event directly relates to theater history, however, because on June 6 some boys in the port of Cavite, having been let out of school early, started to play at *moros y cristianos*, enacting Corcuera's battle with Kudarat so enthusiastically that the boy who played Kudarat fell from the wall and had to have five stitches taken in his head. This may or may not have influenced what came later. In July there was held a formal celebration in thanksgiving for the victory, with the Jesuit provincial, Juan de Salazar, preaching. In the evening of July 15, in the Jesuit church, a *gran comedia de la toma del Pueblo de Corralat, y conquista del Cerro*, written by Fr. Hierónimo Perez, was presented. The play told of the events of the campaign, "not however without certain devices in which had their place the holy zeal, faith, and piety of the Society of Jesus." There was of course a loa, and then a *torneo* with prizes.³¹

This is the play that Barrantes erroneously calls the first theatrical event in the Philippines. Retana calls it instead the first play written in the country with Philippine subject matter. The incident of the boys playing at *moros y cristianos* he sees as significant too, being the first time in the country that the moro-Christian idea had been rendered in a theatrical manner. He wonders, however, why the later *komedya* or *moro-moro* did not deal with the Muslims of Mindanao or Jolo, but with the bearded, arrogant Moor of imported Spanish literature, the Moor of Morocco or of Turkey, the Moor unknown to the Filipino.

Drama researchers in the 1950s and 1960s and even as late as the seventies have called this *gran comedia* the first moro-moro. It is clear from Retana's account and comments, however, that the play about Corcuera and Corralat/Kudarat, although about an actual event in Philippine history involving Muslims and Christians, was a Spanish *comedia*, and not the ancestor of the Tagalog *komedya*.³² All that the two forms have in common, names notwith-

30. Lopez, "Corcuera's triumphant entry," Blair and Robertson, *The Philippine Islands*, 27:333.

31. *Ibid.*, pp. 335-40; Retana, *Teatro*, pp. 34-36. (The quotation is from Lopez p. 340). Neither Lopez nor Retana records whether Fr. Perez was a Jesuit; nor is he mentioned in de la Costa; but the occasion and slant of the play seem to indicate that he was.

32. The first scholar to recognize this was Nicanor G. Tiongson. See his "Mga Anyo ng Dulang Pilipino sa Dantaong ika-16 hanggang ika-18," *Kasaysayan I* (Nobyembre 1977): 175-209.

standing, are the Moro-Christian conflict, and perhaps the verse form. As Retana saw so clearly even in 1909, the Philippine *komedya* has never concerned itself with Philippine Muslims and Christians, but with those of foreign, far-away lands known only in the imaginative and literary realms of the *awit* and *corrido*.

Retana adds a further note about Corcuera and the Jesuits. In 1641, while Corcuera was still governor, on his feastday, the feast of St. Sebastian, the Colegio de San Jose, to celebrate his endowment of twenty scholarships (eighteen gentlemen's scholarships to be filled by the descendants of conquistadors; two servants' scholarships for the sons of Filipinos who had distinguished themselves in the royal service, all to be paid out of revenues derived from the residence tax of the Chinese) had a special Mass and sermon, with the rest of the day spent on religious plays, comedias, and music especially prepared for the occasion by the Jesuits and performed by their students.

The chapter ends with Retana's comment that up to this point theater in the Philippines was almost exclusively under the initiative and direction of the sons of Loyola.³³

INTO THE EIGHTEENTH CENTURY

OTHER JESUIT THEATRICALS

A few more stray notes on Jesuit-directed performances are found in *Teatro en Filipinas*. In 1653, Governor Sabiniano Manrique de Lara and Archbishop Miguel Poblete arrived together, the governor refusing to disembark unless the Archbishop disembarked first and thus blessed the land. The latter's solemn procession to the cathedral stopped at the Jesuit church, where a student of the Colegio de San Jose declaimed a loa explicating in elegant phrases the rejoicing at the august arrival. When the governor made his entrance the next day (July 25), another student greeted him on Calle Real "en poesias concertadas." In 1690, Governor-General Fausto Cruzat y Gongora "took possession" of the city, and was greeted with the usual pomp and solemnity, and with arches, loas, and salvos of artillery.³⁴ The Jesuits, Retana

33. Retana, *Teatro*, p. 37; Fr. de la Costa provides the information about the scholarships in his *Jesuits*, p. 400.

34. Retana, *Teatro*, p. 38, n. 49.

later comments, continued to celebrate feasts in their own way. The birth of Luis Felipe, son of Philip V, was much celebrated in Manila with theater, religious observances, bullfights, fireworks, etc. The Jesuits held a *novenario*, during which special *villancicos* were sung, in which "the birth of the Prince was seen as a gift to the King from St. Francis Xavier!"³⁵ (The exclamation point is Retana's). The learned Pedro Murillo Velarde, S.J., historian, geographer and cartographer, is discovered to have written a short theatrical piece entitled *No hay competencia en el cielo* in 1729, on the occasion of the canonization of St. Stanislaus Kostka and St. Aloysius Gonzaga. Retana's judgement: "es bien corta y vale poco."³⁶

THE BAPTISM OF ALIMUDDIN

Retana devotes much space to refuting Barrantes' account of the baptism of Alimuddin, King of Jolo, in Paniqui, Tarlac, and the ensuing war dance, which Barrantes called the "indisputable origin of the *Moro-moro*." This was supposed to have occurred in 1750, and the incident has been much quoted by later scholars and writers who had read only Barrantes and not Retana. The latter patiently explains that Alimuddin was indeed baptized in Paniqui in 1750, after there had been much argument among the religious about his sincerity. The baptism was authorized by Juan de Arechederra in his diocese of Nueva Segovia, "no doubt because [the Archbishop of Manila] did not participate in the optimism of . . . Arechederra . . ." Celebrations, including fireworks, bullfights, *Mogigangas* (masquerades) and three comedias, were held in Manila. The war dance was invented by Barrantes, as was the claim that the Jesuits had baptized Alimuddin and written a "politico-religious melodrama" (that supposedly included the war dance) presented in Paniqui after the baptism. The Jesuits, Retana points out, were precisely the ones who had doubted Alimuddin's sincerity, and so the Dominicans, who

35. Ibid., p. 45.

36. Ibid., p. 49.

believed in it, had baptized him. The Jesuits wrote no play, and were never even in Paniqui.³⁷

THE NINETEENTH CENTURY

The rest of Retana's history does not mention the Jesuits, since there was so much else to record: the growth of vernacular theater; the proliferation of theater buildings; the staging of plays by amateur "aficionados"; the coming of professional theatre groups, directors and actors from Spain; the writing of Spanish plays by peninsulares, then by island-born Spaniards, then by native Filipinos — more and more on Philippine subjects; and finally the end of Spanish rule and censorship, the coming of playwrights like Severino Reyes, and the beginning of "realism."

JOSE RIZAL

The final note on the Jesuits has to do with a student of theirs: Jose Rizal. He had been twice awarded prizes by the Liceo Artístico-Literario de Manila, when in 1880 his alma mater, the Ateneo Municipal de Manila, invited him to write a play especially for its yearly feast. "Knowing the tastes predominant in the Ateneo, where the actors could only be young boys, and the audience almost exclusively the students' families, with a large supplement of ecclesiastics," he wrote *Junto al Pasig*, which Retana judges as "infantil" and somewhat religious in character, but with the novel addition that in it took part the "diablo nacional," the *Diwata*. The play was first presented at the Ateneo on the evening of 8 December 1880. Retana concedes that, in spite of obvious defects, as the work of an eighteen-year-old, it had merits in its versification, plot and development.³⁸

This last note in Retana is proof of what the Jesuits were doing in the theatrical field in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries: continuing to use drama in their teaching, their catechizing, and

37. Ibid., chap. 8, pp. 50-54. Arechederra was acting governor-general at the time, a position received because earlier he had been acting archbishop of Manila, and thus automatically successor to the acting governorship. When the new Archbishop of Manila arrived, he would not allow Alimuddin's baptism, thus Arechederra's decision, and the choice of Paniqui, which was probably then part of Pangasinan, since no province of Tarlac existed at the time. Details added through the kind assistance of Fr. John Schumacher, S.J.

38. Ibid., p. 105.

their celebrations. Miguel A. Bernad, S.J., in his book on dramatics at the Ateneo de Manila from 1921 to 1952,³⁹ takes up the thread much later. The year 1921 saw the Ateneo pass from the control of Spanish to American Jesuits. Before 1906, Fr. Bernad records, almost all of the stage presentations at the Ateneo were in Spanish. After 1906, two full-length plays were staged each schoolyear, one in Spanish (the major production), and one in English. After 1921 the English play superseded the Spanish play in importance, and after 1925 the Spanish plays ceased to be presented altogether, and the Ateneo came to be known for the classics of Greek and English theatre.

The historical evidence makes one agree that Retana was not guilty of overstatement when he called the Jesuits the initiators of staged theater ("teatro español") in the Philippines. Not only was it a standard and important element of their pedagogy, but they used it with industry, versatility and imagination in the work of teaching and reenforcing the Catholic religion. When the need for catechizing became less urgent, dramatics continued to be used as a teaching tool, developing not only eloquence and the person, but an interest in drama and theater, both in writing and in performance.

Many questions arise. Did these efforts in some way lead to folk religious theater, the *sinakulos* and *panunuluyans*, the *Tibags* and *komedyas*? How and when? Did they predispose writers? audiences?

For the complete history of Philippine theater that someday must be written, it is important that the scholar and historian look further into this foundational work by the Jesuits. From the Jesuit archives — from the Annual Letters, histories, relations, accounts, individual letters and school records of the Spanish era, much can be learned: what plays were written, by whom, in what languages, to what purposes and for what audiences, how and when they were presented, how and when the transition began from teacher writers and directors to student writers and possibly directors. This should then be linked up to the data of the American era and then to the present. If and when an unbroken, data-supported development can be seen from the first declamaciones graves and

39. Miguel A. Bernad, S.J., *Dramatics at the Ateneo de Manila: A History of Three Decades, 1921-1952* (Manila: Ateneo Alumni Association, 1977).

coloquios, the Antipolo and Sta. Barbara plays, Hierónimo Perez's *gran comedia* on Corcuera and Kudarat; all the way through Jose Rizal, Henry Irwin, S.J., Wilfrido Ma. Guerrero, Lamberto Avelana, and James B. Reuter, S.J.; to Onofre Pagsanghan and Dulaang Sibol, Tanghalang Ateneo, Paul Dumol and Tony Perez, much more of what shaped both traditional and contemporary Philippine theater may be better seen in perspective, and understood.

The pilgrimage of San Jose Seminary

