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Notes and Comments

Salubong in Angono, Rizal

DOREEN G. FERNANDEZ

A constellation of religious dramas and dramatizations shines through the Philippine liturgical year — observances of different lengths and degrees of religiosity; of varying derivation or fidelity to liturgy; of a wide range of performance types, from simple little enactments of Scriptural passages to full-length *komedyas* of mostly apocryphal material. Most, if not all of these, were quite obviously instituted by some imaginative parish priest in the Spanish era as an “audio-visual” means of driving home the meaning of a religious feast or observance, then copied or adapted either by other parish priests or by their parishioners, and thus propagated as a folk practice in or beyond a region.

These religious dramas and dramatizations may be classified, according to their origin, into three types. First come those rooted or actually called for, in the liturgy. An example of this would be the washing of the feet, which was part of the old liturgy for Maundy Thursday, and which, in many parishes, was further embellished by costuming the apostles, or by cooking a special bread for the Last Supper at which the washing would take place, or by having a special procession around town, or by choosing men from among the poor to play the apostles, and then having the rich families play host to them, etc. The root, the germ is in the liturgy; the rest is dramatization.

The second type would include those dramas that are not called for in the liturgy, but are spin-offs from it or from scripture. In this classification falls the *Panunuluyan*, which springs from one line in the Christmas gospel: “And there was no room for them in the inn,” (Lk 2:7) a line that escalated into a procession with

carrozas of Mary and Joseph, and singers representing them and innkeepers, going from house to house (in the Pasig *kabayanan* in 1979, the costumed singers went to twenty-five houses, with Mary riding sidesaddle on a horse), seeking shelter and being refused, till refuge is finally found in the Church at midnight Mass.

The third type would be those dramas and dramatizations that have no relation to liturgy, but only to the feast listed in the liturgical calendar, such as the komedya called *Tibag* which recounts how St. Helena fought infidels in order to find the true Cross; or the Bicol *dotoc*, which has nine nights of performance dedicated to Christians locating the true Cross in order to venerate it. In both cases, the only link to the Church is the May 3 feast of the "finding of the Holy Cross."

The Salubong is certainly one of the most popular of the dramatizations of the second category. It spins off from the Holy Week liturgy, yet has no basis in this or in scripture. It has Christ and his grieving mother meeting after the Resurrection, a fact not recorded in any of the four gospels. Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John only record that after the Resurrection Christ met with Mary Magdalen, with the two disciples on the way to Emmaus, with Peter and the band of apostles, first without Thomas then, eight days later, including Thomas, who had doubted.

When and where did the belief that the Risen Christ met Mary, his mother, originate? In the *Spiritual Exercises* of St. Ignatius, written in the sixteenth century, it is mentioned that when Scripture says that "He appeared to many others," we can take it to mean that he appeared to the Virgin Mary, for "Scripture supposes that we have understanding, as it is written, 'Are you also without understanding?'"¹ It could therefore be from Spanish folk belief or from Jesuit teachers that this belief came.

It is also quite possible and plausible that it is from Filipino folk understanding that the belief came. The Filipino mind would find it most logical to reason: If he appeared to Mary Magdalen and the apostles, could it be possible that he would not appear to his own mother, in order to show her that he had risen, and she should no longer grieve? To the folk mind that created the *pasyon*, which focuses so strongly on the human-ness of the Mary-Christ rela-

1. *The Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius*, trans. Louis J. Puhl, S.J. (Manila: St. Paul Publications, 1949), no. 299.

tionship, this meeting would in fact seem imperative and of primary importance. And thus the Salubong.

The basic "dramaturgy" of the Salubong is the same all over the Philippines, but details vary according to budget, the availability of cast and materials, and the range of the planners' imagination. There are the two statues on carrozas or andas (borne on men's shoulders), the one of the Risen Christ, clad in white and holding up a triumphal standard; the other of the Mater Dolorosa, heart pierced, and covered with a mourning veil. They take different routes through town, Mary usually accompanied by the carrozas of Maria Salome (carrying a whisk broom), Maria Jacobe (carrying an incense burner), and Maria Magdalena (carrying a flask of perfume), they being the three women who had been to Christ's tomb. In Malolos town, the statues of St. Peter and St. John, who had also been to the tomb, accompany the four; but in the barrio of Sta. Isabel, San Pedro is not taken along, to punish him for having denied Christ. In Silay, Negros Occidental, Mary goes alone, the procession being called *Soledad*, a pilgrimage of sorrow and solitude, accompanied by old women dressed in black, chanting the pasyon. In Marinduque, only women follow Mary's procession, and only men follow Christ's, and when they meet, there is a dance of greeting, symbolic of the meeting, with flags dipping and twirling, called "bati." In Sariaya, Quezon, there is a permanent concrete structure at the town plaza where the meeting is always held.

The peak point of the drama is this meeting of mother and son, always at a predetermined point, where some kind of structure, usually called a *galilea*, has been erected.² At this climactic moment, an angel descends in some ingenious fashion from the galilea to pluck off Mary's mourning veil, and to sing "Regina Coeli, Laetare," urging the Queen of Heaven to rejoice, since her Son lives.³

The stage machinery used at this point, and the embellishments added, are indicative of the imagination of the folk plan-

2. Dr. Nicanor G. Tiongson points out how reminiscent the galilea is of the medieval theatre's "mansions." See Nicanor G. Tiongson, *Kasaysayan at Estetika ng Sinakulo at Ibang Dulang Panrelihiyon sa Malolos* (Quezon City: Ateneo de Manila University Press, 1975), p. 37.

3. The above and following data were gathered from interviews with Sanirose Singson Orbeta, Alicia Lucero Gamboa, Nicanor G. Tiongson, from field research, and from Tiongson's *Sinakulo*.

ners, as well as their budget and facilities. In Malolos since Spanish times, it has been the practice to use a boy soprano dressed as an angel, and he is armed with a stick to lift up the veil. This creates some difficulties, since the veil is not only slippery, but often gets caught on the Virgin's headdress. In Vigan, Ilocos Sur, where the Salubong was the special preserve of the first families of the town, the prettiest little girl of the year was chosen angel, and her family planned some special stage device — e.g., a giant flower that descended on a pulley and opened to reveal the child angel — that would upstage every other family's previous effort. In Silay, where the descending angel is not traditional, a whole choir of angels on bleachers has been known to sing the *Regina Coeli*. In a poor community in Guimaras, Iloilo, the angel of the year was strung up in a child's high chair, still in its original blue color, with nursery motifs. In Loreto, Sampaloc, it is said, doves swoop down on the veil and fly off with it, dropping it enroute. A little tag on it promises a cash reward to the finder who returns it to the parish church.

Perhaps because Angono, Rizal, is so idyllic a town, and has produced such genuine native artists as painter Carlos (Botong) Francisco, and musician Lucio San Pedro, its Salubong, which is pictured here, is of course out of the ordinary.⁴

Definitely started in the Spanish era, the Salubong begins after the 6:00 A.M. mass at the parish church, from which emerges the Risen Christ, led by the little angel, and followed by devotees. The black-clad Holy Mother has, meanwhile, with Maria Salome, Maria Jacobe, and Maria Magdalena, been taken around the small town in the dawn darkness. The whole town is awake, and either walking in the procession, or watching from the windows or along the streets, or preparing breakfast for after the Salubong.

The galilea is spectacular, more than twenty feet high, and has been built near the municipal building, right on the main highway into town. The tallest bamboos have been used, leaves and all, decorated with red and white flags, with an elaborate but invisible system of pulleys included. In the middle hangs the *puso*, a wooden structure shaped like a banana heart, and lovingly decorated with red and white paper cutouts in a lavish celebration of

4. The data following are from field research undertaken on 10 April 1977 in Angono, Rizal, jointly with Dr. Nicanor G. Tiongson and Prof. Felipe de Leon, Jr.

folk art. In it is a secure, fenced-in compartment for the angel (chosen for not being scared of heights; her mother had her practice by climbing trees), and flaps to cover her.

Dancing up in the air are red, white, and green birds, seven of them, each about four feet long, made of wooden frames painstakingly covered with tissue paper fringe "feathers."

When the two processions come in sight, the people applaud, the band strikes up a waltz composed and conducted by Lucio San Pedro, and the statues of Christ and Mary meet directly beneath the puso, into which the angel has been previously loaded.

Then come the ceremonial greetings. On a stage twelve feet away from the galilea, attention is focused on a pretty, coifed town damsel in a gold lamé terno who declaims, in the traditional style, a poem to the Virgin. This is followed by a mannered dance of greeting (the music is an indigenized gavotte) using a flag, performed by another town *dalaga*, in a blue terno.

When these ceremonies are over, the seven birds swoop down; six to open the petals of the puso, and one to scatter confetti on the crowd (I was told by those who saw me brushing it out of my hair and camera, that it would bring me blessings for the coming year — and it did!). The puso is lowered as it is opened, and the angel leans out, plucks the black veil from the Virgin's shoulders, and is raised again to sing "Regina Coeli, Laetare."

The people clap, the band strikes up a lively march, and everyone goes home to breakfast, from angel to visiting researchers, who have the privilege of having *pan de sal* and *chocolate* with Lucio San Pedro and his family. Never, he says, will Angono residents let the Salubong disappear from their town. It is their tradition, they are all involved in it, they have had it since they can remember, and it means a great deal to them. What better way, indeed, could there be, to start a bright Easter morning?

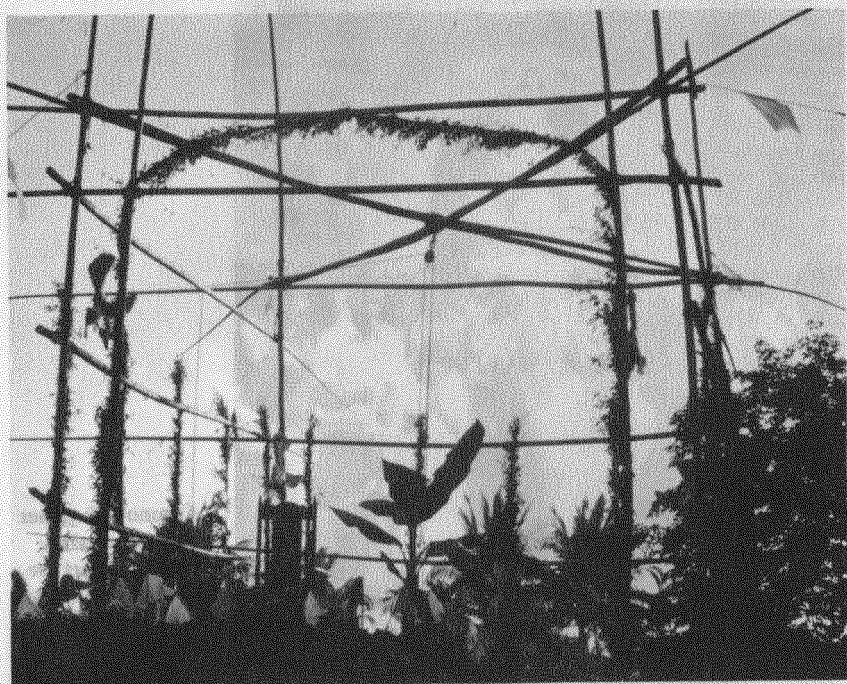


Angono folk gather before the parish church to start the Salubong procession with the Risen Christ.

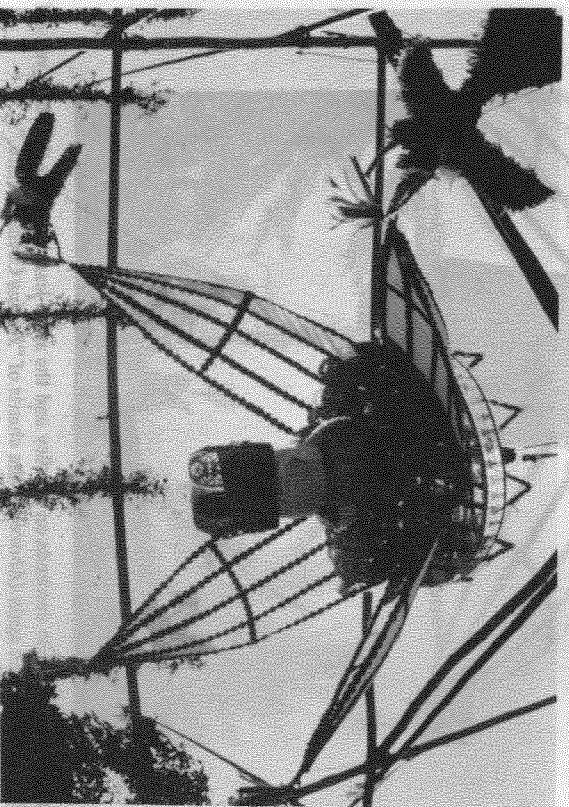


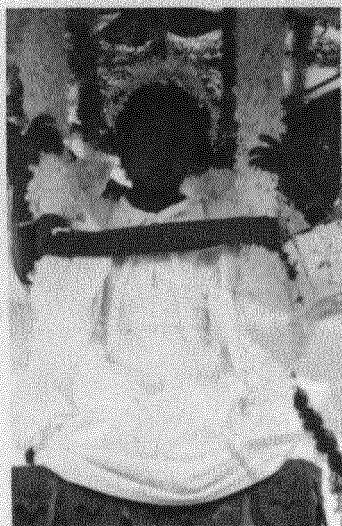
(Above) The black-veiled Holy Mother Mary before she meets her Risen Son. Her carroza is taken around the small town in another procession.

(Left) The little girl who was chosen to be the angel.

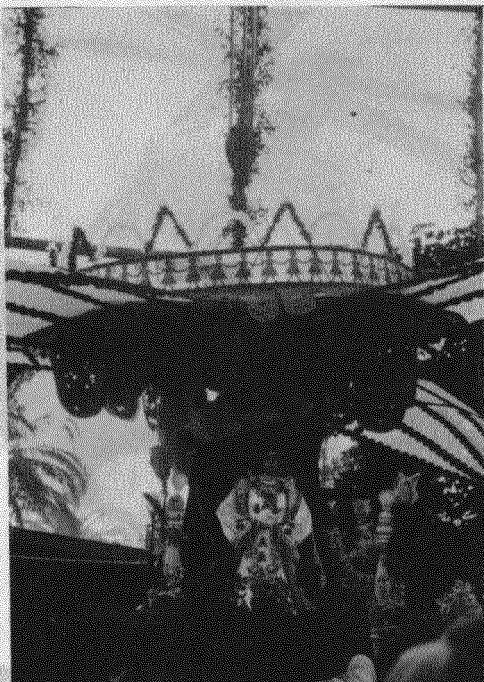


(Above) The bamboo galilea stands twenty feet high, decorated with flags and has hidden pulleys. In the middle hangs the puso (Left), containing a cubicle for the angel. (Top right) Seven wooden birds covered with colorful tissue feathers dance in the air. As the statutes of Christ and Mary meet directly beneath the puso, six birds open the petals of the puso (Below right) and one scatters confetti on the crowd.





(Above) The puso is fully opened to reveal the child angel in a cubicle decorated with paper cutouts.



(Top right) The puso descends on a pulley and the angel leans out, lifts the black veil off Mary, and is raised again (Above) to the chants of "Regina Coeli, Laetare."