

THESIS/DISSERTATION ABSTRACT

(536)

Title: The Lineyte-Samarnon Zarzuela (1899-1977): History and Aesthetics

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Statement of the Problem:

This dissertation on "The Lineyte-Samarnon Zarzuela 1899-1977): History and Aesthetics" has two purposes: first, to provide a historical survey of the Lineyte-Samarnon zarzuela in the above time span, and second, to explore native aesthetics through the perceptions of its authors, performers, and members of its audience.

Procedure:

The research was undertaken in three phases. The first phase was composed of exhaustive research into dramatic materials found in the Leyte-Samar Museum of the Divine Word University of Tacloban. Seven playwrights were identified and thirty-three extant copies of stage-plays became available to the researcher. The museum also yielded secondary materials helpful to the study. The second phase consisted of the retrieval of texts not found in the Leyte-Samar Museum. Seven writers with twenty-nine extant plays presented more materials, and also enhanced the collection at the Leyte-Samar Museum, since photocopies of the retrieved manuscripts were donated to the Museum. In the course of the research fieldwork, interviews were conducted and 116 respondents were randomly selected. The third phase consisted of the transcription and study of the interviews. From these interviews, as well as the zarzuela texts, information on the native aesthetics was culled to recover what the audience, actors, and authors felt about the zarzuela.

Treatment of Data

The study is divided into five chapters. Chapter I forms the introduction and describes the broad cultural and literary situation which shaped the zarzuela

as a popular dramatic form in the region. Chapter II is a chronological survey of eminent playwrights, giving also the main characteristics of important plays and outstanding features of a particular group of writers. Chapter III describes the structure of the Lineyte-Samarnon zarzuela, the stages of production as well as the people involved in the production of a zarzuela. Chapter IV discusses the aesthetics of the Lineyte-Samarnon zarzuela from the point of view of authors, performers, and audience. Chapter V contains the summary of findings, the conclusion and recommendations. The appendix will include: one major zarzuela reproduced in Tagalog, and a listing of all Lineyte-Samarnon zarzuelas, both those retrieved and those for which only titles have survived (respectively identified).

Findings:

Rooted in the culture of the Leyte-Samar people as the fiesta celebration basically associated with religious rites honoring patron saints and the May festival or Santacruzán. The fiestas, however, were not only highlighted by solemn high masses, processions, parades, games, and sumptuous meals, but also featured dramatic presentations on open-air stage built in the town or church plazas. The purpose of these theatrical spectacles was to entertain guests from neighboring barrios, towns, cities, and the local residents as well. The Leyteños and Samareños prepared with enthusiasm for their yearly fiesta celebrations and their theatrical activities, partly as an outward manifestation of their desire to honor the patron saint, and partly to entertain their guests.

Roughly around the late 1800s and the first two decades of the 1900s, the hadi-hadi, a spectacular play about the conflicts between the Christians and the Muslims became a popular theatrical activity of Leyte and Samar, especially during fiestas. As some towns and cities of the region started to grow more urbane in their mode of living, the people's attitude toward the hadi-hadi became lukewarm and the introduction of a new drama form caught their attention and satisfied their need for a new kind of entertainment. This was the zarzuela, a play with songs, sometimes with dances interspersed.

(The earliest dated vernacular zarzuela was "An Pagtabang Ni San Miguel" (The Help of Saint Michael), a religious zarzuela written by Norberto Romualdez and staged in Tolosa, Leyte in 1899. Unfortunately, there are no data on the

circumstances that surrounded this zarzuela, and we only know the author, title, place and date of production and the type of zarzuela. The next zarzuela, "An Tulo Nga Capurupod-an Sa Filipinas" (The Three Islands of the Philippines) by Margarita Nonato of Calbayog City was dated 1913, but only a synopsis and some critical reviews survive. In 1914, however, two plays entitled "Hi Teresa Ngan Ili Perto" (Teresa and Perto) and "An Lara San Higugma" (The Sting of Love) by Iluminado Lucente of Tacloban City were staged and copies of the texts are available. It is evident, therefore, that the beginning of the vernacular zarzuela may be traced to 1899, when the Romualdez play was staged, and that it developed alongside the hadi-hadi which was then flourishing in the region. The year 1914 then served as the take-off point of this research and sixty-two plays, all staged, written by fourteen playwrights from 1914 to 1977 were studied.

Another cultural dimension set into the background of the Lineyte-Samaron zarzuela was the founding of the Sanghiran San Binisaya (Academy of the Bisayan Language of Leyte and Samar) in 1909. Norberto Romualdez and the rest of his co-founders consciously aimed at refining, cultivating, enriching the language spoken in Samar and Oriental Leyte, and fostering the revival of written Waray poetry and later, drama. This academy inspired founding members and other writers of the time to write in the vernacular. The writers engaged in playwriting thus found not only the occasion for writing, but a higher motive-enrichment of the language. For the playwrights, this was a positive development because now they did not only write and present what they wrote, especially during fiestas, but also felt themselves part of the language milieu.

The fiesta and the Sanghiran thus provided the broad cultural context within which the zarzuela was born and flourished, generally out of the people's need for entertainment and specifically, out of the Leytenos' and Samareños' pride in their own language, a pride especially manifest in the cultural elite - writers, critics, and educators.

The playwrights called their plays by several names: zarzuela dramatiza, drama nga kinantahan, melodrama, sainete, opereta, comediahay nga kinantahan, durugas, hiruhimangraw ngan karanfa and comedia. All of the plays studied for this research have songs written into them, and some have dances interspersed, though they vary in length - from a one-act play to a four-act play. The number of the songs also varies, ranging from two to twenty-two. The songs are featured

differently: some are especially composed to fit normally into the plot or theme, but without sung repartee between characters; others are borrowed or adapted from popular tunes or taken from folksongs popular in the region.

In the names can be seen the elements of the zarzuela: verse from the comedia, expressed in song, as in operettas, always kinantahan; dramatic situations (melodrama, drama), and some lightness, like the sainete. The audience themselves loosely refer to the zarzuela as "drama nga may kanta" (drama with songs) or even use the term comedia which here means comedy, not hadi-hadi. For them, the zarzuela is a drama - one that has action, comic and sentimental scenes, but also songs and sometimes dances. The names often associated with Lineyte-Samarnon zarzuelas are Norberto Romualdez, Sr. (1875-1941), Alfonso Cinco (1880-1963), Iluminado Lucente (1883-1960), Emilio Andrada, Jr. (1887-1975), Francisco Alvarado (1890-1938), Jesus Ignacio (1891-1982), Margarita Nonato (1891-1969), Pedro Accerden (1898-1980), Pedro Separa (1903-1976), Eduardo Hilbano (1905-1978), Moning Fuentes (1906-1987), Virginio Fuentes (1911-1969), Agustin E. O'Mora (1914-), and Generoso Nuevas (1919-). They come from all walks of life -- lawyer, politicians, government officials, doctor, court stenographer, insurance agent, bus conductor/driver. They also come from different towns/cities of Leyte and Samar -- Tacloban City, Palo, Tanauan, Tolosa, Carigara, Burauen, Dagami, Calbayog City, Catbalogan and Villareal. Eleven playwrights come from Leyte and three from Samar. Commissioned to write plays by the hermano mayor, the sponsor of the barrio or town fiesta, or requested by friends to present plays for benefit shows or to honor important persons, the playwrights wrote for a specific audience and for the following motives or purposes: to offer the work to the people, the fiesta, and thus patron saint; to boost family morale; to comment on domestic, political, moral and religious issues with the object of teaching and correcting the people's foibles and follies; and to augment family income. This yearly activity produced two kinds of playwrights - those who only wanted to entertain, and those who made it a living. The "pakyaw" system enabled a playwright to train a permanent crew who travelled with him to several barrios/towns for a performance the whole year through; or he could be directly hired by the fiesta organizers to stay for a month or so to train participants who came from the sponsoring locality.

Most of the playwrights were composers, so they encountered no problems in writing their own compositions and setting them to music. Other playwrights who could only write the lyrics but could not set it to music, depended on colleagues or friends. There was then a friendly atmosphere among the playwrights. One outstanding characteristic of the playwrights was that they were themselves the directors or sometimes even actors of their plays. This showed the versatility of some writers and also proved that they knew their craft which they learned from the boards, so to speak.

Among the fourteen playwrights, Norberto Romualdez deserves to be mentioned first because he started the pace of vernacular writing in Leyte and Samar, and local writers emulated him. The most prolific, however, was Iluminado Lucente who wrote some thirty plays, all staged. It was also Lucente who indirectly articulated his aesthetics of theatre: that a good play must not only entertain but must also teach. Still another playwright who contributed to the flourishing of the zarzuela in the region was Alfonso Cinco. He founded the Orquesta Naciente and made a remarkable statement on the importance of an orchestra to a zarzuela production. The women writers like Margarita Nonato and Moring Fuentes also attained prominence in the Lineyte-Samarnon zarzuela.

Based on the works produced, one sees that the Lineyte-Samarnon zarzuela spanned sixty-three years, even if in the 60s and 70s only a few were coming out every year, during fiestas.

The subject matter of the zarzuela from 1899 to 1977 revolved around issues that directly concerned the Leyteños and Samareños. As social commentary, it developed themes which reflected the changing values in society through this span of time. For example, some plays were concerned with the affectations of men and women in modes of dressing, dancing and speaking. Earlier, the zarzuela was concerned with religious issues, but shifted to domestic issues in the succeeding years, when playwrights became preoccupied with matters of daily urgency, involving family. As social commentary, the zarzuela brought home its messages through humor, and sarcasm, and satire. Although it judged and condemned what in general was considered unacceptable behavior, the zarzuela also commended behavior that was proper to the moral standards of the time. It thus functioned as a "comedy of manners" - commenting, satiring, commending.

Among the best remembered plays were "An Anak Han Manaranggot" (The Daughter of a Tuba-Gatherer) by Romualdez, "Hi Teresa Ngan Hi Perto" (Teresa and Perto) and "Diri Daraga, Diri Balo, Diri Inasaw-an" (Not A Maiden, Not Widowed, Not A Married Woman) by Lucente, "Pipang" (Pipang) by Cinco, "An Awit Han Mangingisda" (The Song of the Fisherman) by Moning Fuentes and "An Anak Han Yawa" (The Son of the Devil) by Ignacio. These plays were both entertaining and useful to the lives of the audience watching the play at that time. They were restaged several times and contained didactic messages brought about through the skillful manipulation of wit and humor, and of the Waray language by the individual playwrights; and the realistic interpretation of roles by the actors and actresses.

Because its themes evoked the people's reflections on some of their significant experiences, the zarzuela world was evidently close to the hearts of the people. This was a fact shown during the preparation of the actual zarzuela presentation when enthusiastic cooperation characterized the attitude of the people in the community. In effect, each one played a significant role in the zarzuela production - either as a member of the audience or a stagehand or a cast member or even just a bystander whose opinion on the props was always a welcome comment. Thus, the society had a communal bond with the zarzuela world.

The production of zarzuelas involved a good number of people in the community. Since zarzuelas were usually presented during fiesta celebrations, the success of this celebration depended on proper planning of the dramatic activities, usually spearheaded by the hermano mayor who requested or commissioned a playwright to write and stage a play, and financed production costs. The playwright chose his actors and actresses and welcomed volunteers to compose the production crew. The barriofolk or the townspeople also helped by contributing money to defray some incidental expenses, donating stage props and materials for costumes, building the stage, and especially, acting in the play. The process of production of the play, therefore, was as significant as the text, because it depended on and enhanced this communal bond.

Rehearsals started a month before the final performance and the cast was carefully selected and the nightly rehearsals were in themselves events that created a strong bond among the participants and the onlookers. They

enjoyed the rehearsals because snacks were served and tuba, the social drink among the Leyteños and Samareños, enlivened the group and strengthened the spirit of camaraderie as well as the "spirit" of the actors and actresses to act and sing well devoid of inhibitions.

The actors and actresses had their own motives for joining the cast. Some believed that if they refused proffered roles, they would be the target of recriminations from friends, and worst of all, of "gaba" (God's wrath). There was a strong social censure so that if anything untoward happened to an actor or actress who had previously refused to cooperate with the cast, it was attributed to uncooperativeness, therefore, he was "nagabaan." It was as if he had broken the communal bond.

The playwright, the performers and the audience played significant roles in judging or evaluating a zarzuela. The playwright saw to it that his play entertained and taught a lesson; the performers gave a faithful interpretation of the zarzuela text; and the audience, the final judge, some of whom were critics and writers in newspapers, laughed or cried and brought home something useful to their lives. The aesthetics of the Lineyte-Samarnon zarzuela of this era, therefore, demanded that a zarzuela have entertainment as well as practical value to the lives of these three groups of people.

The zarzuela became popular during the first five decades of the 20th century and eventually declined in popularity. This was largely due to the coming of the "talkies" and the introduction of electronic amusement devices. As important a factor as these was the fact that the Lineyte-Samarnon zarzuela world also crumbled: the communal bond was broken because of other more immediate concerns of the community. The rising prices of commodities also hampered donors from giving substantial amounts of money to put up plays. Harassed by the demands of everyday living, most townsmen worked hard and found little time to involve themselves in communal projects like putting up a zarzuela.

The taste for open-air theatrical spectacles also waned. Fiesta organizers were no longer interested in presenting free shows but became more money-conscious, such that fund-raising became one of their preoccupations - thus beauty contests, singing contests, benefit dances and variety shows were held. With the coming of the movies and the betamax mania, open-air theatrical presentations became relegated to revivals held in honor of the celebrated playwright

of the region or seen as journeys back to the past in which students and nostalgic adults could experience the once-upon-a-time rich native tradition of Leyte and Samar.

Conclusion:

The significance of the Lineyte-Samarnon zarzuela world lies in the following: that the zarzuelas were based on a definite society, whose unacceptable and acceptable behavior it commented on, criticized, or commended; that the zarzuela was produced by the communal bonding of a barrio or town; that the audience, authors, and critics agreed on what was desirable in theater (the native aesthetics) and therefore, what was important in life. The Lineyte-Samarnon zarzuela, therefore, was the voice of Philippine society in one time and place.

From the time the zarzuela was recognized in the Philippines as a dramatic form, it has had the reputation of excellent public appreciation, but undeniably, it has declined in popularity. Despite the several forces pulling the zarzuela down - the introduction of the talkies and electronic amusement devices - still the value of the zarzuela as a catalyst of social change has made it survive. Hence, groups of people have always tried to revive it on several occasions even though it is seen to be dwindling in fame and appeal. Because the zarzuela has particularity of theme which hews closely to local life, even if the form now seems dated and quaint, some Samaraños and Leyteños continue to appreciate it. Actually, the zarzuela as a drama form is technically dead despite the revivals. However, its influence in the form of songs and themes inherited by modern dramatic forms is still alive. Contemporary movies and television sitcoms carry similar subjects and have songs and dances interspersed between scenes. The zarzuela therefore is part of the Leyte-Samar heritage that has become timeless. It deserves recording and remembering.

Recommendations:

This study takes the zarzuela from 1914 to 1977, through the study of sixty-two plays by fourteen writers in twelve municipalities. It is strongly recommended therefore, that a follow-up study be made in order to fill up the missing historical facts about the flowering of the zarzuela in Leyte and Samar. More fieldwork should be conducted in Samar, since only three places were visited.

A study of the hadi-hadi would help enrich our knowledge of the drama tradition in Leyte and Samar, and complete the picture.

In a region where literary research is just beginning to flourish, one of the frustrations of researchers is the lack of authoritative source material on various aspects of regional literature. An annotated bibliography of Lineyte-Samarnon writings would certainly make possible a more systematic research methodology. This, however, would entail a lot of funding and the efforts of many scholars.