

philippine studies

Ateneo de Manila University • Loyola Heights, Quezon City • 1108 Philippines

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Philippine Studies vol. 45, no. 3 (1997): 353–384

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Fri June 27 13:30:20 2008

The Theater of Karl Gaspar: The Biblical-Religious Plays

Pamela del Rosario Castrillo



An earlier article (*Philippine Studies* 44 [1997]:174–96) discussed the social plays of Karl Gaspar. This article reviews his religious and Biblical plays.

Of the thirteen religious plays of Karl Gaspar, one is a modern three-act *sinakulo*, “Kinsay Inyong Gipangita?” [Whom Do You Seek?] (1973). Four are morality plays with social justice themes from the hard-hitting texts of Amos, Isaiah, Luke and others. These are “Kapunongan ng mga Pangulo sa Kadautan sa Kalibutan (KPKK)” [League of the Evil Masters of the Universe] (1973), “Ang Silya” [The Chair] (1974), “Ang Hukmanan sa Katapusan” [The Last Judgment] (1974) and “Kolokabildo ni Tawo Duyog ni Kinabuhì ug Kamatayon” [Man’s Conversation with Life and Death] (1977). Two are musicals: “Ang Paghulat Kang Diosnato” [Waiting for Diosnato] (1978) is inspired by the PETA production of Samuel Beckett’s *Waiting for Godot*, which treats religious belief, among other things. The dangers of being Christian are tackled by “Katakomba: Paglutos sa mga Kristianos” [Catacombs: The Persecution of Christians] (1977). The last six religious plays are “occasional” plays, i.e., plays specifically written to commemorate or celebrate a special day or season. “Ang Mensahe sa Pasko Alang Kanato Karon” [The Christmas Message for Us Today] and “Emmanuel Salvador: Ania Na!” [Emmanuel Salvador: He’s Here!] (1975) are Christmas musicals. “Ikaw si Pedro ug Niining Bato ...” [Thou Art Peter and Upon This Rock ...] (1976) and “Juan: Saksi sa Kamatuoran” [John: Truth’s Witness] (1978) are fiesta plays for St. Peter and St. John, respectively. The Lenten season has the *Alay Kapwa* plays, which preach the Gospel of reconciliation with our neighbor, especially the deprived and the oppressed. The *Alay Kapwa* plays are “Hain ang Hinabang? Kinsa May Akong Kadangpan?” [Where is Help? Who Can I Turn To?] (1974) and “Ang Makaluluoy nga Nagyaka Daplin sa Dalan” [The Poor Man by the Wayside] (1977).

The two Biblico-historical plays are a later development in Gaspar's theater. These plays fuse the sociopolitical and the religious: "Binilanggong Damgo" [Imprisoned Dreams] (1980) is a play-within-a-play that shows parallels between the Old Testament story of the captivity of the Israelites and the plight of the political prisoners in the Philippines. "Sa Pagpakigbisog Kamo Mabulahan!" [In Struggling {for Justice}, You Shall be Blessed!] (1984) is a *sinakulo*, which has the transformation of Christ from the traditional weepy Christ to the revolutionary Christ.

The Religious Plays: 1973-1977

The martial law clampdown on people very critical of the authoritarian regime forced changes in theatrical vehicle and venue without reversing subject and theme. Gaspar's brief incarceration at the declaration of martial law taught him to shift gears but not direction. Backed by the revolutionary radicalism of the documents of Vatican II, the Latin American liberation theology and the homegrown Synod of Bishops, Gaspar produces an overtly religious cycle of occasional and morality plays.

These plays subvert the old function of religion as a major instrument of domination in the Philippines (beginning in the Spanish colonial period).¹ Gaspar's religious plays fight domination, much like the *pasyon*, which Ileto (1989) found to be instrumental in stirring revolutionary ardor and in "articulating hope for liberation" in the masses.

Liberation theology is a motive force in this religious cluster. The plays are clearly pro-oppressed and anti-poverty. Using Biblical texts as a base, the plays assert that the people can make a profound difference in the world. They advocate radical social change via a revolutionary Christ image, a new moral order, social responsibility and organized opposition to structures of oppression and dependence. Justice and peace themes as well as themes of resistance and liberation find expression in a predominantly musical religious cycle.

The church, recognized as the most powerful social organization in the country, continued liberation efforts in the martial law years. Catholic clergy and laity alike formed the religious opposition, which was particularly active in Mindanao.²

Religious forces and institutions criticized the ruling elite, posed alternative goals and policies, and mobilized people to articulate those alternatives. (Wurfel 1988, 211)

Referenda were held to secure consent to the regime of corruption and oppression but this practice was denounced by fourteen bishops.

Martial law is a regime of coercion and fear, of institutionalized deception and manipulation We believe any referendum held under these oppressive circumstances cannot but be a vicious farce.³

The church continued to rally for basic social change. Church media, e.g., radio, weekly newspapers and magazines, which protested against social injustice and human rights violations were closed down by the military. Materials and equipment were seized and personnel arrested (Wurfel 1988, 221). The military was the main coercive instrument of the regime. Militarization was a by-word in anti-establishment circles. It was the cause of many a harassment, torture and disappearance of parish workers suspected of being communists.

Yet, conscientization and organizing efforts went on. "Some priests who helped raise the religious and social consciousness of peasants in the 1960s said that by the late 1970s the stimulus for change was coming not from the leaders but from below" (Wurfel 1988, 223). Social activism also produced church programs and plays for conscientization.

Lenten Plays

In honor of the liturgical Lenten season, "Kinsay Inyong Gipangita?" [Whom Do You Seek?] (Morante 1973b) is a *sinakulo* in three acts, subtitled "The Final Chapter of Christ's Life on Earth." A chronicle of the life, passion, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, it is a curious blend of the traditional and the progressive. The story, straight from the Bible, and the chanting peculiar to the *sinakulo* are cast into a mold reminiscent of Andrew Lloyd Webber's celebrated rock opera, *Jesus Christ Superstar*.

The three acts of "Kinsay" cover the important Biblical events from Maundy Thursday to Easter Sunday. Act 1—Maundy Thursday—is outlined thus: Jesus and the apostles are entertained in Mary and Martha's house where Mary Magdalene anoints the feet of Jesus. Annas, Caiphas and the other priests worry about Jesus' miracles and decide to do away with him. Jesus enters Jerusalem with much fanfare. Counterpoint to the joy is the anger he indulges in as he drives away the merchants and the consumers from the temple. Jesus heals the invalids: blind, deaf and lame, and welcomes children. Judas

conspires with the priests against Jesus. Jesus washes the apostles' feet, begins the Last Supper, and goes to Gethsemane. He prays and is arrested as Judas kisses him. Jesus is brought before Caiphas. Peter denies Him thrice.

Act 2—Good Friday. Jesus is brought before Pontius Pilate, is referred to Herod who mocks him, and is returned to Pontius Pilate who washes his hands and leaves Jesus to the mercy of a bloodthirsty mob. Jesus is scourged, crowned with thorns, given a bamboo cross and made to carry it to Calvary. Judas repents, returns the silver and commits suicide. In Jesus' arduous climb, he meets the *tres Marias* and the women of Jerusalem. He is crucified. He dies, is taken down and buried.

Act 3 takes off with the Holy Saturday events: Mary Magdalene goes to Jesus's tomb, finds it empty, informs Peter and John and weeps as Jesus himself later appears in white. Jesus also appears to the apostles and wishes them "Peace," bids them spread the good news, wraps them in a net and leaves.

All three acts begin in narration which although not included in the script is supposed to update the audience on the events that transpire prior to the dramatic present. This play is staged on three different days of the Holy Week: Act 1 is performed inside a church in the evening of Maundy Thursday. Act 2 happens in the morning of Good Friday and is performed in the church and out in the streets. Act 3 is scheduled for the evening of Black Saturday in the church.

Apart from the three introductory narrations, there are seven more narrations, three of which give their sources, e.g., John 13: 12-20, John 14, 15, 16 and narration about the Lazarus event at Betania. The four others do not specify their sources. Songs are unevenly distributed within the three-day presentation. Unfortunately, neither the titles nor the lyrics are given. Songs are identified through numbers, i.e., Song 1. Apparently, the script should be supplemented by the narration map and the songbook, both of which are no longer extant.

The Christ figure in "Kinsay" is the traditional Biblical Christ: divine and human, triumphant and suffering, peaceful and angry, dead and resurrected. Also, he is simple and ordinary like the poor with whom he closely associates. It is a Christ with whom the masses can readily identify. Although not one to stimulate the revolutionary impulse, "Kinsay" presents a multifaceted Christ that is unlike the weepy Christ of the *sinakulo* which, Tiongson (1975) argues, promotes passivity. Other more revolutionary Christ images are found in later plays.

Another character stands out in "Kinsay." It is Boal's joker in the guise of a streetsweeper who pops in and out of the Biblical narrative. In the first scene, after the narration, he sweeps the aisle to the altar. He then proceeds to transform himself into a singing priest with the help of a *soutane*, surplice and guitar. He is later joined by a group of singers. They exit as the Biblical characters enter. At the close of this scene, he again enters to help clear the props, stays on and sings once more. He interrupts the action a total of eight times and bursts into song five times. He does not provide laughs but he appears once too often to make sure that the audience is not lulled into a false sense of complacency.

If the events are mere reenactments, the streetsweeper is "real." If they are characters more past than present, he is clearly of the present. He is a breath of reality in an otherwise "mythical" past.⁴ Moreover, the streetsweeper/priest character of the joker is a foil to the human/divine Christ; the presence of the two-faced joker throws more focus on the Christ figure.

The Lenten season also engendered the Alay Kapwa plays, many of which tackle social responsibility. Gaspar's "Hain ang Hinabang? Kinsa May Akong Kadangpan?" [Where is Help? Who Can I Turn To?] (Morante 1974a) presents society's contradictions within the structures of Matthew 25:31-46.

The dominant and auxiliary classes are represented by the landowner, bank manager, social worker and priest, all of whom refuse to assist the oppressed, i.e., the landless tenant, the unemployed, the homeless and the evacuee, the sick and dying and the unjustly accused. These characters are also segregated into the Biblical goats and sheep, roughly evil and good. The goats go to eternal damnation; the sheep to the Kingdom of Heaven.

"Hain" develops the Christ image in personifications of the hungry, the thirsty, the stranger, the naked, the sick and the imprisoned. The fence-sitters are represented by the *tres Marias* who are unable to see, hear or speak. Although basically a religious play, it succeeds in bringing society's problems to the fore. "Hain" even satirizes the antithesis of the prophetic church—the church that is not attuned to the needs of its people. Giuhaw (Thirsty) who is unemployed, tells off Padre Escaler: "Pasagdi lang una nang kinabuhing dayon Padre, kini unang kinabuhing dayon sa ngadto-ngadto, apan ang problema nako mao ang kinabuhi ko karon nga nagkalandrakas." (p. 8) [Do not mind the life hereafter, Father, because my problem is my life here and now which is in shambles.]

Gigutom (Hungry) who is landless piteously asks, "Unsaon man intawon nako pag-ampo, Padre, nga wa may sulod ning akong tiyan?" (p. 6) [How on earth can I pray, Father, on an empty stomach?]

"Ang Makaluluoy Nga Nagyaka Daplin sa Dalan" [The Poor Man by the Wayside] (Morante 1977c) is an updated dramatization of the parable of the good Samaritan (Luke 10: 25-37). To the Jew/holdupper character, Jesus is a teacher cum storyteller who doubles as the poor man beaten by the wayside.

Musicals

Christmas occasioned two musicals, namely, "Emmanuel Salvador: Ania Na!" [Emmanuel Salvador: He's Here!] (Morante 1975a) and "Ang Mensahe sa Pasko Alang Kanato Karon" [The Christmas Message for Us Today] (Morante 1975b). Both plays proclaim that Christ was born to liberate us from oppression.

Musicals are also produced to celebrate feast days of saints. "Ikaw si Pedro ug Niining Bato" [Thou Art Peter and Upon This Rock] (Morante 1976a) faithfully retells the life and times of Saint Peter, an ordinary fisherman who answered the call of commitment to truth and justice. He is characterized thus: "yano ug ordinaryo kaayo siya, walay hataas nga pagtuon, kabus ug walay materyal nga bahandi" (p. 1) [very simple and ordinary, ill-educated, poor with no material possessions], which readily identifies him as common *tao*. This portrayal is seen to give Christians strength to fulfil their duties in building good Christian communities.

"Juan: Saksi sa Kamatuoran" [John: Truth's Witness] (Morante 1978) reenacts the Biblical story of John the Baptist, a man who dared denounce the lies and corruption of the oppressors and unmask the hypocrisy of the established order. To highlight the parallels between Biblical history and current events, a short scene broadly described as "naghulagway sa kahimtang sa nasud karon, diin ang kamatuoran gitamak-tamakan sa kagamhanan" (p. 2) [depicting a national situation in which truth is trampled upon by the powerful] is shown.

"Juan" was directed by Victorino Carillo for a youth group in Bansalan, Davao del Sur. He recounts that their stage was bare ["no backdrop"] and that they had two blankets and a table on loan from a Catholic school.

The parish church provided the floodlights and the sound system, including microphones. "Colorful costumes" were courtesy of the parishioners and the performers themselves. Although donations were

welcome, the youth group did not solicit funds. Also, "walang binibili[ng gamit]." (Carrillo 1990)

"Ang Paghulat Kang Diosnato" [Waiting for Diosnato] (Morante 1976b) is another musical that promotes "truth, justice and peace, love and harmony, and social responsibility" in the world. Inspired by PETA's production of Samuel Beckett's *Waiting for Godot*, Gaspar's version subverts Beckett's absurdist minimalism with expansiveness. The world of "Paghulat" is a cross-section of Philippine society: a bankrupt Don Miguelito Villagrancia and his slave Andoy (replicas of Beckett's Lucky and Pozzo); a ticket-seller and the village character; a bold movie star and her *alalay*; a bourgeois and a Mother Superior, two nuns and Caridad, a troubled woman; and Miguel and Esperanza, a married couple. All of them receive identical letters purportedly from Diosnato (Cebuano for Our God, Our Father), who promises to fulfil their dreams. The letter, which they withhold from each other, is the leitmotiv of the play.

The protest symbol in this play is "Igo!" (Cebuano for "hit" or "enough" depending on how one pronounces it) (Lluch 1981, 90). It is the favorite expression of Sito, the village character who always accompanies it with a poke in the side.⁵

The dreams and the way the characters react to Sito clue the audience in on their class consciousness. Don Miguelito wants more money and more possessions. The doctor and the bold star crave fame. The *alalay* asks for a life of ease. The Mother Superior needs financial assistance for schools and hospitals. Sister Concepcion wants to be a saint. All of them, however, are "malupigon/madaug-daigon" [oppressors]: they maltreat Sito without compunction. Diosnato never arrives for them or the fulfilment of their dreams.

The rest of the characters are "kabus/sinalikway" [poor/oppressed], but they wait for noble ends. Andoy the slave asks for freedom from chains, physical and otherwise. Esperanza wants harmony in her home. Miguel's wish is for strength for the struggle. Sister Consolacion's is for guidance in Christian living. Caridad asks for peace and commitment. Sito stutters a wish for a life hereafter, which is interpreted by these enlightened characters as being a world where justice and peace reign, where love and truth, commitment and unity prevail. "Ang Dios naa nato!" (p. 8) [God is within us!] They do not wait in vain because they understand that God sides with the oppressed. The play ends with this set of characters poking each other in the side and gleefully saying, "Igo!"

All the preceding plays discussed, apart from the *Alay Kapwa* plays, are musicals. Integral to the religious plays of Gaspar, music assumes many functions and forms. It is definitely more than just background music. Songs underline the message of the play, comment on the action or help move the play along.

In Gaspar's works, songs may be original: words and music are specifically crafted for the play, like those in "*Ang Paghulat Kang Diosnato*." In "*Juan: Saksi*," some songs are popular tunes with new lyrics, e.g., the Tagalog ditty, "*Mahiwaga*" is dressed in different and timely lyrics in "*Duol Na Ang Gingharian*" [The Kingdom is Near.] "*Anghel sa Kalangitan*" [Angel on High] in "*Emmanuel Salvador*" is sung to the tune of "*Greensleeves*." Some plays use liturgical songs as they are. Horfilla (1990) explains why:

Most of the people know the [liturgical] songs. [These] reinforce their understanding of the text . . . and tighten their understanding of the text [through] the visual component.

The narrator signifies the didactic function of these plays. It also manifests the strong storytelling tradition of Mindanao. In "*Kinsay*," the narrator bridges gaps and provides scene transitions. "*Hain ang Hinabang?*" has a narrator who opens the play, introduces the two sets of characters and closes the play with a question for the audience, "Can't you hear, speak to or see [those in need]?" In "*Makaluluoy*," the narrator opens the play but self-effaces until the end of the play when he reappears, framing this *Alay Kapwa* play. The Christmas play "*Ang Mensahe*" is a loosely constructed sequence of seven scenes introduced and held together by a narrator who has all the speaking parts. Every scene begins and ends with the humming of Christmas carols. The operetta "*Emmanuel Salvador*" has two choirs that take on the duties of a narrator. "*Juan: Saksi*" has provisions for 3-5 narrators. In "*Ikaw si Pedro*," Andrew, brother to St. Peter, serves as the narrator.

Likewise, "*Katakomba: Paglutos sa mga Kristianos*" [Catacombs: The Persecution of Christians] (Morante 1977a) employs two characters, Ebangelista and Ebangelisto as narrators who sing their parts. The Christians and their leader, Timoteo, as well as the Roman emperor Claudio Caesar burst into song at times. Written to express solidarity with church workers who were being systematically eliminated by the mounting militarization of Mindanao in 1976-77, "*Katakomba*" attempts to show parallels between the 50-100 A.D.

Christians in Rome and the so-called Church radicals of this age who are persecuted for asserting their faith.

The play ends with:

Busa igsoon, angay ipadayon ta ang kaisog sa pagpakigbisog,
kay kon mobarug ta sa atong kalig-on
kitang Kristohanon magmadaugon! (p. 9)

[Thus, brother, we must go on with the fierce struggle
because if we rely on our strength
we Christians will triumph!]

Morality Plays

The other type of religious play that Gaspar resorts to in the face of institutionalized violence is the morality play. It succeeds the overtly sociopolitical (and agit-prop) plays of premartial law years.

Apart from the tribal rituals and dances which are symbolic drama, the Philippine dramatic tradition of symbol and allegory is more political than anything else. The revolutionary plays of the early 1900s used the indirection and richness of the symbolic and allegorical to wage the Philippine revolution under the vigilant noses of the American overlords. The emancipated plays of 1973–1985 turned to history, social realism and tradition to voice protest. Galenzoga and Gaspar of Mindanao armed themselves with the Bible and the double significance of allegory to continue the resistance against oppressive structures.

Gaspar's morality plays are clearly descended from the English morality plays, a prime example of which is *Everyman*. Morality plays are Christian medieval plays freed from the traditional necessity of enacting Bible stories. They are dramatizations of abstract conflicts: Good vs. Evil, Life vs. Death, Mercy vs. Mischief, with an end to teaching a lesson or two. Allegory (Gk. *allos*, "second; another" and *logos*, "word; meaning; systematic concept") is the prevailing method in morality plays. It is the concrete representation of abstractions and generalizations.

The characters are usually personifications of abstract qualities, the action and the setting representative of the relationships among these abstractions. Allegory attempts to evoke a dual interest, one in the events, characters, and setting presented, and the other in the ideas they are intended to convey or the significance they bear. (Holman and Harmon 1986)

Allegory gives patently meaningful names to persons and places (Holman and Harmon 1986). In Gaspar's plays, morality and otherwise, the names of characters and places are indices to meaning. They reveal character or locale or act as ironic comment.

"Hukmanan sa Katapusan" [The Last Judgment] (Morante 1974b) is one of the more popular morality plays. As the title suggests, the play is one big trial scene. The judge, assistant and guard who go by numbers instead of names, i.e., Numero 1, Numero 2 and Numero 3, are clearly the Holy Trinity. Stray quotes from the Bible and references to the otherworldliness of the locale and proceedings attest to this.

No. 1: Paghulat, kay walay nagdali. Bisan ang mga naa karon dinhi mi-anhi tungod kay naa silay panahon. Ako pa kaha nga walay sinugdanan ug walay katapusan? Nakalimot ka usab nga lahi na kining kalibutan nga karon imong gitongtongan. Dinhi walay oras, walay panahon. (p. 2)

[No. 1: Wait, no one's in a hurry. Even those present are here because they have time. How much more for myself who have no beginning nor end? You forget again that this is a different world you're in now. Here, there's neither time nor season.]

An exasperated Numero 1 says at one point, "Giuhaw ako" [I thirst]. When a chained Baba [Mouth] attempts to deny the charges against her and begs for her release, Numero 1 intones, "Ang kamatuoran mao ang maghatag kanimog kagawasan." [The truth shall set you free.]

The characters on trial are parts of the human body who purportedly come from different planets: Kamot [Hands], Tiil [Feet], Mata [Eyes], Baba [Mouth] and Kasing-kasing [Heart]. When first they appear, they are bound to each other. They are then caged by Numero 3 until they are summoned individually by Numero 1. Numero 2 reads the charge sheets. A *Lalaki* is the unimpeachable witness.

Kamot of Mars died of gluttony and is guilty of landgrabbing. "Kulang sa pagkamanggihatagon sa iyang kamot. Imbis nga magpa-ambit, iyang gikomkom. Imbis nga mohatag, iyang gi-imbargo" (p. 2). [His hands lack generosity. Instead of sharing, he hoards. Instead of giving, he confiscates.]

Baba of Pluto, an inveterate liar, died of cancer of the lips [ngabil]. She is accused of having caused many to lose face and sometimes

even life. "Pipila ka mga binuhat ang nag-antus diha sa kasakit tungod sa iyang pagbutang-butang kanila'g mga sayop nga walay linugdangang kamatuoran." (p. 3) [Many have endured suffering because of her accusations of wrongdoings unfounded on truth.] Her malicious tongue has cast aspersion on good reputations and wrecked homes and communities.

Tiil of Mercury stepped on a nail and died of tetanus. He used his power and influence to deprive people of their rights and property "makugihon kaayo siya sa pagtamay diha sa pagpanamak-tamak sa katungod sa uban" (p. 4) [he was overzealous in oppressing people and trampling on their rights].

Mata of Jupiter died of cholera and is guilty of inaction in the face of injustice. "Nagpakabuta siya sa mga panghitabo sa iyang palibot, iyang gipasagdan nga gipamatay ang ubang mga binuhat, nga gigutom ug nagkalisud-lisud" (p. 6). [He turned a blind eye to his surroundings, to the people who were being killed, dying of hunger and suffering.]

Kasing-kasing of Venus, who died of a heart attack, is the "prostitute with a golden heart." She supposedly turned her back on her sordid past and repented her ways. In the Pilipino translation, "Ang Katapusang Hukuman" (1987), she is said to be "mulat sa katotohanan na pagdusta sa karapatan ng mga api . . . nakikibahagi sa pakikibaka ng sambayanan, upang magkaroon ng katarungan, kalayaan at pag-ibig" (p. 6) [awakened to the reality of scorned rights of the oppressed . . . participation in the nation's struggle, in order to attain justice, freedom and love.] Only Kasing-kasing was adjudged not guilty. She was handed a lit candle and set free.

"Hukmanan" manages to tackle society's ills without being confrontational. There are no fiery speeches against injustice, landgrabbing, graft and corruption. Still, the play pinpoints the villains and advocates social responsibility in the same breath. It has been performed over twenty times all over the Davao Province. It has also been translated into Hiligaynon for six performances in Negros (1985) and into Pilipino for an Ash Wednesday presentation in Lipa City (1987).

"Ang Silya" [The Chair] (Morante 1974c) is the story of Tony, a death-row prisoner who kills his wife, Norma, in a fit of anger and jealousy. Inspired by a PETA production of absurdist Eugene Ionesco's *The Chairs*, it is, however, very like the morality play of old in its world view, character and conflict. Its world view is Christian: repentance will save the day. Turning to God in times of trouble will

bring "kalig-on ug kahayag" [strength and enlightenment]. This idea is underlined following the manifestation of Tony's internal contradictions through characters reminiscent of the morality play. Tony's conscience is personified in Tonyo who urges Tony to admit he was wrong to have killed Norma. The Good and Bad Angels, Angelo and Lucy, respectively, are personifications of the conflicts of ideas that take place in Tony himself and the spiritual warfare between good and evil.

This conflict is also expressed in the interplay of darkness and light, of black and white, a pattern repeated in many of Gaspar's plays. In "Ang Silya," Tony wears a black shirt throughout, which coincides with the confusion reigning in him, the leaning toward the dark side. When he finally repents and asks for Fr. Jose's blessing just before he goes to the gallows, he takes the black shirt off and reveals a white shirt under the black one. This reflects his choice for good. Tony's execution is dramatized by a total blackout followed by a bright light focused on the chair. The chair is the thing. It is the scene of the crime, the seat of judgment, the seat of confusion, the confessional box and lastly, the electric chair.

"Ang Silya" is a prison play that tackles the search for a new morality, an alternative to that prevailing in the world. There are two telling references to the abnormal conditions in the country. One is spoken by Lucy (short for Lucifer), the she-devil in red.

Tan-awa ra karon ang kalibutan. Naghari ba ang mga Diosnong hiyas sa kalinaw, kaayo ug kamatuoran? . . . hangtud karon naghari ang kahakog, kagubot, kalibog, kasakit, pagdaug-daug, pagtamay, pagbentahay, kasina, kagoliyang ug uban pang mga yawan-ong binuhatan? (p. 8)

[Look at the world now. Do the Godly virtues of peace, goodness and truth reign? . . . until now, these demonic things prevail: greed, war, confusion, suffering, oppression, belittling, exploitation, envy and chaos.]

The other refers to the leaders of the land who work towards maintaining the status quo:

Tony: Buta nga pagdawat sa mga nagpaka-pangulo ug nagpaka-diosnon niining kalibutana. Kay sa ilang pagtoo, modawat ang tanang tawo sa misteryo nga maoy ilang gigamit aron dili lamang kita makamando nga klarohon gayod ang tanan. (p. 3)

[Tony: (There is) a blind acceptance of the men who lead and play God in the world. These men believe that all the people will accept the "mystery" that they use to mask the true state of affairs so we won't ask that things be clarified.]

Tony is saying that some men have transcended the naive consciousness that does not question the way things are. It is an indirect invitation to the audience to struggle towards an enlightened consciousness.

"Kolokabildo ni Tawo Duyog ni Kinabuhi ug Kamatayon" [Man's Conversation with Life and Death" (Morante 1977b) is described by Luch (1981, 131) as:

a morality play in song and dance with a simple theme of man faced with a choice between good and evil—a conflict that unfolds in sequence of creation, fall and hope in Christ's redemptive work. The lyrics of the songs make clear the social aspects of both grace and sin.

"Awit 13: Awit sa Kadautan" [Song of Evil] is sung by Kamatayon [Death] and his companions.

Ako si kasakit, ako si kangit-ngit
Ako nagdala'g kapait.
Tanang gubot, kanako mogikan
kahakog ako'y timailhan,
tanang kadautan kanako mogikan
kamatayon ang padulngan.

.....

Kapildihaan sa kaayo, kaangayan ug katahum,
makit-an na kay wa karon,
milampos ilang paglaum.
Amo-a na ang katawhan,
nga migakos namong tanan.
Ang among gingharian, wala nay katapusan (p. 2-3)

[I am suffering, I am darkness
I bring bitterness
All chaos comes from me
Greed is my trademark
All evil springs from me
Death is the ultimate destination.

.....

The defeat of goodness, order and beauty
is apparent in their absence in the world
Gone is their hope
Humanity is ours
The people have embraced us
Our kingdom knows no bounds]

Meant for the Alay Kapwa program, this play is all music and movement by a triumvirate of Tawo [Man], Kinabuhi [Life] and Kamatayon [Death], the Good and Bad Companions and the narrator. Tawo here is Tony of "Ang Silya" all over again. He, too, is led to sin, assailed by doubts and is moved to return to the fold. The good-bad dichotomy, reflected in the light-darkness motif, is still present.

"Kapunungan sa mga Pangulo sa Kadautan sa Kalibutan" "KPKK" [League of the Evil Masters of the Universe] (Morante 1973a) is the story of a diabolic conference of the masterminds of evil in the world. Kabangis [Violence] leads the pack composed of Kagubot [Chaos], Kahakog [Greed], Kasina [Envy], Kalagot [Anger], Garbo [Pride], Potong [Quick Temper] and Kasamok [Disorder].

The characters are not persons nor demons: they live in fear of Satan, "in the year of Satan 1999 on the doorstep of Satan." The meeting itself is fraught with tension born of the intermingling of various evils: they cast asperity on each other's character (or obvious lack of it), bicker, needle each other, threaten each other with death, castration and bodily harm. Everybody is deliciously belligerent.

They make progress reports to determine who among them has had greater impact on the world of men and women. They cite historical and Biblical instances of the destruction wrought in their names. Action is practically at a standstill as these escapees from Pandora's Box rave about their accomplishments.

Gaspar's characters tend to speechify, an offshoot of the didacticism that envelops his plays. In "KPKK," part of Garbo's [Pride] speech reads:

Tan-awa karon ang mga nagkalain-laing mga pamilya ug mga katilingban sa tibuok kalibutan. Wala ka ba makamatikod nga daghang mga mag-ila sa usag-usa ka managsoon. Mga katilingban nga nagpaka-Kristianos, masulti ba nato nga adunay tinuod nga panag-igso-onay ug panaghigugmaay. Kristohanong katilingban kono, apan nagbinongolay, nagsilibakay, nanagtamay sa usag-usa. Unsay hinungdan niining tanan? Ako, Si Garbo. Ako ang nagtulod kanila sa maong kadautan og sila nagpaulipon kanako. (p. 4)

[Look at the different families and communities in the world. Haven't you noticed that many of them—brothers all—deceive one another? Those communities that are supposedly Christian, can we say that there is true brotherhood and love in them? They say that they are Christian communities but they lend deaf ears, talk behind backs and belittle each other. What brought this on? I, Pride. I pushed them to do evil and they allowed themselves to be trapped.]

Kahakog's report in full follows:

Sukad gibuhat ang tawo naa na kaniya ang kahakog ug bisan pa sa pagkatawo sa nagbatok sa kahakog, nagapabilin ang akong pagpilit sa hulagway sa tawo. Nganong gipatay ni Cain si Abel? Nganong gihulog sa iyang mga igsoon si Jose sa balon? Nganong gibaha ang banay ni Abraham? Nganong gibiyaan sa pari ug sa ubang mga Hudeo kadtong gikawatan ug gidakdak diha sa daplin sa dalan? Nganong gisunog ni Nero ang Roma? Nganong gipaputol ni Salome ang ulo ni Juan? Repetition kani sa akong mgamga nangaging reports apan daku kaayo ang kalambigitan sa updating sa akong mga accounts.

Sama sa akong gisulti ang tawo gitapot sa kahakog, sukad sa iyang sinugdanan. Ug tan-awa siya karon. Nagpabilin ang kahakog, miburot ang tiyan tungod sa toman kahakog. Kon atong unahon ang mga kanasuran, tan-awa ang kalibutan. Pipila lamang kabuok mga nasud ang naa sa kahamogaway. Ang kadaghanan nakulong sa walay katapusang pag-antus tungod sa kapobre. Ang mga kanasuran sa Asya, Africa ug America Latina nag-dangoyngoy sa tomang kalisud sa pangibuhì kay walay matila bisan usa ka lugas nga kan-on. Tan-awa, nangalata ang mga patay nga lawas sa Indiya ug sa Biafra, nagkurog sa kagutom ang mga taga-Tanzania ug Bangladesh, nagakopas ang mga makililimos sa Brazil ug sa Korea, unsay hinungdan niining tanan? Tungod kay ang dagkung mga nasud nagpakahakog ug nagpakaulipon sa mga gagmayng nasud pinaagi sa dolyar ug sa ekonomiya..

Tagsa-tagsa natong tan-awon ang mga matag nasud. Dili ba nga ang kadaghanan sa mga tawo walay kasigurohan nga adunay makaon? Unsay hinungdan niini? Tungod kay nagpakahakog ang mga nagkopot sa bahandi diha sa ilang hasyenda ug mga bangko. Daghan ang nag-inilogay sa yuta, ug miabut kini sila sa korte. Naa gani diha nga nag-iniloganay ug asawa't bana. Tan-awa, usahay managsoon na gayod parehas ang dugo nga naglatay-latay sa ilang mga ugat, apan tungod sa kahakog nagpinatyanay na lamang. Kahakog maoy hinungdan niining tanan! Ako! Ako ang nagtulod kanila sa maong mga kapakyasan. Ako, si Kahakog! (pp. 4-5)

[From the time man was created, greed has been a part of him. I have always imprinted myself in man's image. Why did Cain kill Abel? Why did Joseph's brothers throw him into a well? Why was Abraham's home flooded? Why did the priest and other Jews ignore the man who was robbed and left for dead by the wayside? Why did Nero burn Rome? Why did Salome have John beheaded? Although these are repetitions of my previous reports, they are relevant to the updating of my accounts.

As I have stated earlier, greed is inherent in man. Look at him now. Greed reigns, his stomach is bloated from an excess of greed. Start with the countries of the world. Only a few countries are rich. The majority are imprisoned in never-ending suffering due to poverty. The countries of Asia, Africa and Latin America are wailing from unbearable difficulties in survival because nary a grain of rice is left. Look, corpses line the streets of India and Biafra, the people of Tanzania and Bangladesh tremble from hunger, the beggars of Brazil and Korea are dwindling into nothingness. Why? It is because the large countries are consumed by greed and have oppressed the small countries through the dollar and economy.

Let us look at the countries individually. Isn't it the greater majority have no means of ensuring food on the table? It is because those who have the wealth keep their *hacienda* and banks to themselves. Many go to the courts because of landgrabbing. Some even deprive others of husbands and wives. Look, even brothers with the same blood flowing through their veins kill one another in the name of greed. Greed is the reason for all these. It is!! I pushed them to such depravations. I, Greed!!

The issues of the day are still given free airtime notwithstanding the repressive times and the religious nature of the play.

The three worst evils who have literally lived up to their names are presented with medals: bronze goes to Envy. Silver ends up with Greed and the gold is awarded to Chaos. Violence is the pervading theme and violence is its main protagonist. This reflects the current social issue as well. It is a contemporary social comment. How ironic that on the day of the meeting where violence is the order of the day, Violence is supposed to be celebrating his birthday and he supposedly forgot all about it. His thoughtful league confreres mark this joyful occasion with a gift: Public Enemy No. 1 of a world gone crazy—Gugma [Love].

Gugma is recognizably Christ in female garb. She is bedraggled and puny, utterly helpless, but hers are fighting words. She speaks the words with which Jesus levels Pilate (John 18).

Kabangis: Kay ngano man, mas taas ka ba diayg rango kay kanako?

Gugma: Sumala sa gi-ingon mo, mas taas pa ako'g rango, apan wala magkatugma ang atong pagsabut sa maong gahum, kay tinuod nga sa pagkakaran, aduna kay gahum sa akong lawas, apan gawas niana dili nimo maulipon ang akong tibuok kinabuhi (p. 8)

[**Violence:** Why, are you saying your authority is greater than mine?

Love: As you say, I have greater authority, but our understanding of power is not the same. Because it is true that now, you have power over my body. Apart from that, you cannot enslave my whole being.]

She sobs Corinthians 13 ("Love is kind").

Ang gugma dili magalipay sa pagkadili matarung, kondili nagalipay uban sa kamatuoran. Kay bisan tuod ug adunay molihok tungod sa salapi, ayawg kalimti nga adunay molihok tungod sa principio nga ilang gibarugan. (p. 10)

[Love does not rejoice at injustice, instead it rejoices at truth. Even as some are motivated by money, don't forget that others are motivated by the principles they live by.]

Interestingly enough, Gugma also speaks lines from the letters of opposition leader Benigno Aquino smuggled from prison.

Bulahan kadtong mosulay bisan malisud ang paglantaw nga sila magmalampuson. Kay ang dakung sala sa mga binuhat mao ang pagdawat sa kapakyasan, ug walay pagpaningkamut nga makab-ot ang iyang bulawanong tumong. Ug kon kining kalibutana, walay ni bisan usa lamang nga naningkamut, nan isiyagit ninyo sa tanan nga naa gayud kaninyo ang kalampusan. (p. 10)

[Blessed are those who try even though success seems difficult. Because accepting failure without striving to reach the golden goal is a great crime of humanity. And if in this world nobody strives, you can shout it from the rooftops that you can be certain of failure.]

Gugma is given a chance to save herself, though. A pact with the devil is the solution. She is supposed to renounce her old job of making people love and be loved. She is supposed to cause the evil league no more untold casualties. She is ordered to become one of them.

It is unthinkable for a Christ figure to change sides.

Kabangis: Ug imong gipili ang kamatayon, mao ba kana, Gugma?

Gugma: Mas ipalabi ko pa nga ako mamatay nga nagbarug sa akong mga tiil sa tomang ka-aghop kaysa mabuhi ako apan nagkamang sa akong mga nangabali nga tuhod sama sa usa ka bitin. Aduna kamoy inyong mga katungdanan nga angay ninyong buhaton, ug aduna akoy kapalaran nga gihalad ug kini akong pagadawat. (p. 11).

[Violence: So you choose death, is that it, Love?

Love: I would rather die on my feet with honor, than live crawling on broken knees like a snake. You have your duties to perform and I have my fate to offer and to this I submit.]

Gugma's lines are a variation of Ninoy Aquino's letter to the military tribunal: "I would rather die on my feet with honour than live on bended knees in shame" (Aquino 1979, 23).

Violence washes his hands of the case, imitating Pontius Pilate. The rest of the league then proceed to strangle Gugma, who struggles free and runs to the audience for help. Nobody helps. She dies. Evil reigns.

A surfeit of evil is presented in KPKK. Were it not for the puny Christ figure towards the end, this play would be utterly despairing. But then again, the image of a totally demeaned and defeated Christ also heightens the despair. On the other hand, the audience could identify with the image of a Christ oppressed and look upon it as a challenge to take up the cross and struggle to change the order of the world.

According to Gaspar (1985a), "KPKK" was staged by Mga Magdudulang Mayukmok ng Mati around a dozen times in Digos, Davao del Sur and Mati, Davao Oriental. As with the revolutionary plays of the 1900s, actual "KPKK" performances had materials like speeches from militant labor union leaders inserted in the dialogue of the characters (Horfilla 1990).

Summary: 1973-1977

The religious plays of 1973-1977 continue the Gaspar tradition of valuing the community of the oppressed. Conscientization themes include the search for a new moral order, justice and peace and social responsibility. These find expression in occasional and morality

plays. The occasional plays are predominantly musical and feature Boal's joker as a narrator who bridges past and present dramatic action. Morality plays use allegory to create two levels: the contemporary and the Biblical.

Seven plays carry a light-darkness motif that roughly corresponds to the good-evil dichotomy. Five plays begin in darkness and feature the Genesis story of creation, particularly the "Let there be light!" episode. This motif also underlines the purpose of the plays, which is enlightenment.

Pervasive images in this cluster are those of man as prisoner and the Christ image. The image of man as prisoner is a political statement: unfreedom is the lot of the oppressed who struggle or should struggle towards liberation. A shackled Gugma is the prisoner in "KPKK." In "Ang Silya," it is Tony, the jealous murderer. "Hukmanan's" characters on trial are chained and put behind bars. "Katakomba" is the story of Christians who do not have the freedom of religion. Allied to this image is the ubiquitous trial scene (and the idea of justice). Tony in "Ang Silya" is condemned to die after a year's deliberations. After a long wait, "Paghulat's" society subpoenaed through individual letters are divided into "kabus/sinalikway" [poor/oppressed] who see the light and "malupigon/madaugdaugon" [oppressors] who wait in vain. "Hain's" characters are adjudged as God's sheep or Lucifer's goats in the last scene. "Hukmanan" is the judgment of those who refuse to take responsibility for their neighbor. The Jesus-Pilate encounter is replicated in "Kinsay," "Ang Mensahe sa Pasko," "Ikaw si Pedro," "Juan: Saksi" and in "KPKK."

The Christ image varies from play to play. "Kinsay's" Christ is a simple and poor man-God who, in Francisco's (1977, 197) words, is "matalik ang pakikiugnay sa tao." In "Hain," Christ is identified as the neighbor in personifications of the hungry, thirsty, stranger, naked and imprisoned. In "Ang Makaluluoy," he is storyteller cum teacher who doubles as the neighbor, the needy man by the way-side. In "Kolokabildo," Christ is the redeemer of Tawo who had succumbed to sin (represented by Kamatayon). "Emmanuel Salvador" and "Ang Mensahe sa Pasko" present Christ as having been born to liberate people from oppression. Lastly, "KPKK's" Christ figure is Gugma who defies the dark forces and suffers to save the people from structural and personal evils. Her death is a challenge to the people to move to change the moral order of the world.

On the whole, the religious plays of 1973–1977 address the pressing need of the times for exposes of society's contradictions. At the same time, this cycle of plays advocates change via a new moral order mostly through Biblical imagery.

Gaspar's theater performers composed of students and community folk (including young professionals, market vendors and out-of-school youth) had audiences of teachers, social development workers, BCC leaders, parish workers, local theater groups, urban poor and parishioners in venues such as schools, chapels, churches and streets.

The Biblio-Historical Plays, 1980–1984

The Biblio-historical plays of 1980–1984 are a spin-off of the religious plays of 1973–1977 with a more solid social orientation. Written during the period of the supposed lifting of martial rule, the plays focus on the unchanged state of unfreedom and injustice in the country.

The early 1980s were unstable years. The worldwide oil shock of 1979, i.e., a sharp rise in the cost of imported oil, brought about economic deterioration (Wurfel 1988, 239). In 1980, the world price of coconut and coconut products suffered a 30 percent drop. By late 1982, the world price of sugar hit a ten-year low. Factories closed down, unemployment was at an all-time high. The financial crisis worsened when Dewey Dee fled the country.

In 1983–1984, peaceful demonstrators in Mendiola were shot down. Opposition leader Ninoy Aquino was assassinated. Various other military atrocities were committed against those demanding basic social change. In 1984, "free elections" were held, the massive money supply of which led to inflation. High oil prices and the devaluation of the peso as well as drought and typhoons led to extreme poverty for many Filipinos.

Opposition moves include urban terrorism, e.g., the Light-a-Fire movement and the "peaceful mass mobilizations of segments of the upper and middle class as well as of the masses" (Wurfel 1988, 293). The church officially attacked the Marcos regime through pastoral letters and the organized efforts of bishops and businessmen via *Veritas*, a news weekly. Other venues include plays, some of which were by Gaspar. Gaspar was one of the church workers who were detained on a subversion charge in 1983.

"Binilanggo'ng Damgo"

Inspired by the movie, *The Man from La Mancha*, "Binilanggo'ng Damgo" [Imprisoned Dreams] (Morante 1980) is an occasional play celebrating the tenth anniversary of Mindanao-Sulu Pastoral Conference. A play-within-a-play, it tells the story of the Filipino political prisoners within the Old Testament story of the captivity of the Israelites.

Present prison conditions depicted include the nonsegregation of male and female detainees, torture in interrogations, and summary execution ("salvaging"). Also, they look "dugay na'ng wala kaligo, hugaw na ang mga sanina, ug daw kulang sa kaon ug tulog" (p. 4) [as though they haven't bathed in a long while, with clothes that begged to be washed, and haven't eaten and slept well].

The play alternates song and episode, with the Exodus story in the middle of things. A *Koro* of nine persons plays the joker who, among other things, states the purpose of the play: "ang pagtukod ug mga Kristohanong katilingban/ Diin ang katawhan mahigmata sa ilang pagka-linupigan ug nga masugdan ang kahugpungan" (p. 1) [the building of Christian communities/ so the people can become aware of their oppression and begin organizing]. Rhyming verses and songs comprise most of the *Koro's* dialogue.

A multiple role scheme facilitates the shifts between past and present. Julio is the belligerent detainee who resists military force valiantly. He is also a leader among farmer-tenants, a BCC leader and a staunch defender of human rights. He also plays Moses who leads the Israelites out of Egypt. Julio also becomes another joker as he addresses the audience directly to introduce the Biblical sequences (and to allow the other characters to don the costumes and masks that transform them into Middle Eastern characters).

Nalimot na ba kamo sa Exodo, nga nahitabo didto sa Ehipto, pila ka siglo na ang miagi? Wala ba ninyo kini mahinumdumi diha taliwala sa inyong mga kasakit karon? Ang Piniling Katawhan sa Dios naa sa kaulipnan, ug bisan pa sa kapit-os nga ilang gi-amguhan, buhi ang ilang mithi. Mithi sa kagawasan. Mithi sa kalingkawasan. Kay sila misalig sa ilang Diyos. Nga dunay kasabutan nga na-ilhan. (p. 8)

[Have you forgotten the captivity of the Israelites in Egypt, which happened many centuries ago? Don't you see that it parallels our sufferings today? The Chosen People, though enslaved and in great difficulty kept their dream alive, the dream of liberation, the dream of freedom. They looked to God with whom they had a covenant.]

The Exodus scenes are those of the hard labor endured by the Israelites, their turning to God for salvation, Moses' killing of an abusive soldier, God's tasking Moses with leading the Israelites, the Moses-Pharaoh exchange and the exodus itself.

The shift to the present is accomplished by Julio who speaks to the audience again.

Dili kita mahadlok, ug dili sab nato wad-on ang paglaum. Ang atong pagka-anaa sa bilangoan, dunay kahulugan. Kay kini nahilambigit man sa pakigbisog ngadto sa kalingkawasan. Hangtud na ang Dios sa kaluwasan nagpaluyo kanato, ug hangtud na ang katawhan nagbarug sa maong tuyo, mosanag ra ang bidlisiw sa mga tali-abot nga mga adlaw, diin makalingkawas ra gayod kita. (p. 14)

[We should not be afraid and should not let go of hope. Our being imprisoned is meaningful. It is very much related to our struggle for liberation. As long as the God of salvation inspires us, as long as the people are committed to our cause, sunlight will filter through in the coming days and then we will be free.]

The strengthening of community organizations, political and religious, is urged as the detainee characters sing of the united efforts of peasants and laborers, urban and rural poor, students, religious and professionals against modern enslavement. The final scene consists of a gunshot, the death of a soldier and the detainees' escape from prison.

Issues raised by the Koro include structural violence evident in the systematic persecution of those out for basic social change, the takeover of small farmlands by state-supported businessmen and multinationals, marginal wages of laborers, inflation and the inequitable distribution of power and wealth.

The Koro sings:

Binilanggo'ng damgo, sa katawhang ulipon
Nagdala'g pagbakho, kasakit, kamatayon
Kon way kausaban, kahimtang magpadayon
Binilanggo'ng damgo, molagnot—gahum iyang gun-obon! (p. 3)

[Imprisoned dreams of an enslaved people
Bring weeping, suffering, death
If this situation persists, remains unchanged
Imprisoned dreams will break free—dismantling power {structures}!]

Dominant images are a carryover from the religious plays of 1973–1977. Darkness is still antithetical to light, which stands for the struggle for understanding and liberation.

The Koro sings:

Katawhan'g linupigan, may adlaw mo-asdang
Tungod kay kini ra ang katapusan'g lakang
Mi-asdang ang mga ulipon, nagbanhaw ang dugo
Pag-gun-ob sa kaaway, gikan sa Diyos ang sugo. (p. 12)

[Oppressed people, the sun will rise
This is the final step.
The slaves will rise, the blood will flow
The enemy will be destroyed, this is God's command.]

Petra asks, "Kinsa ba ang mipalong niining maong kahayag . . .?" (p. 4) [Who put out the light?"] To which Emilio answers, "The beasts! Those who lord over our lives and put us behind bars!" (p. 4)

The ubiquitous steel bars (that reiterate the image of man as prisoner) are dramatized through shadows. Scenes of torture abound and are mimed behind the white sheet that stretches from stage right to left. Projected on the same sheet are slides depicting the plight of the poor and the political detainees, images of oppression in the Philippines and the people's struggle (e.g., mass demonstrations), which are flashed in time with the Koro's songs.

"Sa Pagpakigbisog Kamo Mabulahan!"

Likewise, "Sa Pagpakigbisog Kamo Mabulahan!" [In Struggling (for Justice), You Shall Be Blessed!] (Morante 1984) is a prison play. It was crafted and produced in the Davao Metropolitan District Command (Metrodiscom) PC/INP Jail and performed on Good Friday and Easter Sunday by political detainees. They were conscientized themselves in the process of play production through Bible sharing and reflection and conscientized the spectators through their performances. "Sa Pagpakigbisog" is also an occasional play twice over: it was written for the tenth anniversary of TFD-Mindanao and it is a Lenten play nicknamed "Pasyon 1984." More importantly, it is a play-within-a-play that takes off from the traditional *sinakulo* and wings off to revolutionary heights.

The play begins with a rehearsal of a musical scene from an anti-imperialist play, "Ang Bayabas ni Juan."⁶ The call to resistance and the clenched-fist ending sets the tone of the whole play.

"Sa Pagpakigbisog" is actually a play-within-a-play-within-another-play, which has Boal's joker in Abe, a leader of sorts and the stage director of the plays within the play. A portrait of Gaspar himself, Abe is an almost intrusive presence that anchors the plays within to reality.

The first play level dramatizes prison conditions not much different from those depicted in "Binilanggo'ng Damgo." Rations are still inadequate. Colds are common. Everybody misses family, friends and freedom. Torture is de rigueur in interrogations. Talk of "salvaging" is rife. Although the women detainees now have their own cell, it is still as cramped as their male counterparts'.

We see the detainees go through a roll call and commence sunning. They interact with each other and their visitors, showing off their heightened sociopolitical awareness through references to the World Bank's and International Monetary Fund's manipulation of the Philippine economy, discussion of progressive literature such as Carlos Bulosan's *America is in the Heart*, Lualhati Bautista's *Dekada '70* and Latin American Pablo Neruda's poems, and exchange of copies of the alternative WHO magazine and tapes of the nationalist band, ASIN. They talk about the success of "Bayabas ni Juan" and brainstorm about putting on a play for Lent as part of their liturgical celebration.

Their play (the second play level) is a *sinakulo*, for which they prepare with earnestness and laughter. They jest among themselves as they cast Doy as Jesus. They horse around as they set ground rules: rehearsals are times of sobriety; evaluations will end rehearsals. Yet they come up with amazing insights, especially about the integration of Jesus' life and message into modern life.

The historical Jesus scenes are the Sermon on the Mount, the washing of the apostle's feet, the Last Supper, the carrying of the cross and crucifixion. These scenes are shown sans words. Instead, songs are sung and contemporary parallel events are juxtaposed with these Biblical scenes.

The third play level, which is part of the *sinakulo*, links Jesus' life, passion, death and resurrection with the life struggle of a Christian factory worker turned labor organizer. Doy who plays historical and modern Jesus rationalizes:

Dugay na kong mitoo nga adunay kalabutan ang atong tinuohan sa kinabuhi ug mga pulong ni Jesus diha sa atong baruganan alang sa pagkab-ot sa kalingkawasan sa atong katawhan gikan sa kakabus ug pagpanglupig. Kinahanglan gayod nga diha sa atong Kristohanong

pagtoo, kita mobarug alang sa kaangayan ug kagawasan sama nga si Jesus nagpakamatay alang sa maong mga mithi. (p. 35)

.....
kon nahitabo nga karon ug dinhi siya nagpakatawo sigurado man gayod nga naa siya sa hut-ong sa mga mamumuo ug duna gayod siya'y ikasawaysa pagpadaug-daug sa atong mga mamumuo na naghupot karon sa gahum. (p. 36)

[I have long held that there is a link between (our) life and the Word of God concerning commitment to the salvation of our people from poverty and oppression. As Christians, we must stand for justice and freedom, like Jesus who died for these same principles.]

.....
[had Jesus been born here and now, I'm pretty sure that he'd be in the ranks of the laborers and protesting against the oppression of our laborers.]

Jesus's commitment to the oppressed is shown in the turning point of the play, the strike scene. Doy exhorts his fellow factory workers to protest against the oppressive working conditions and they move to strike. The revolutionary song, "Katawhan" which is featured in many earlier Gaspar plays, is used to convey militance in lieu of the clenched fist, shouts of "Welga!" and general mayhem; also, these gestures would have been cause for military censorship.

The scourging of Jesus is shown through Doy's experience of torture: punches and rifle- and gun-butt beating, the water cure and cigarette burns.

The carrying of the cross is contextualized within the experience of the cast: it is likened to the carrying of huge bunches of bananas at Chiquita Farms, of big sacks of pineapples at Dole Philippines; also to the stevedores' shouldering of sacks upon sacks of copra and to the workers who do hard labor at the Sta. Clara Sawmill in Davao.

The song "Kaloy-i Kami, Ginoo" [Have Mercy On Us, Lord] is internalized easily when asking for God's forgiveness and is equated with requesting for their release papers. Songs easily serve two seemingly contradictory masters in "Sa Pagpakigbisog:" they help temper the anger in the play and deliver social meaning, which is evident also in the accompanying "minimalist and subtle body movements and gestures" (Gaspar 1985b, 30).

The image of light (also associated with Jesus) overpowering darkness, recurs:

Midag-um na ang langit
Naghari ang kasakit
Kasing-kasing nabuak, kapait ang paghilak. (p. 68)

.....

Mga gidagmalan mobarug, molantaw
Didto sa sidlakan kon diin mosanag
Mapulang adlaw sa kagawasan! (p. 69)

[The sky darkens
Pain reigns
Heart breaks, weeping bitter tears.]

.....

[Those who have suffered, rise and see
the horizon where there will shine
the red day of freedom!]

The image of prison bars is supplemented by barbed wire. That of the caged bird clearly stands for the political detainee. (These images are also used by these same detainees in the all-occasion cards they make for added income under Gaspar's supervision.)

These verses echo the sentiments of "Bayan Ko."

Ang langgam sa hawlang bulawan
Mangandoy sa kagawasan
Nasud pa kahang di magtuaw
Kon ang kagawasan ihikaw
Perlas ka sa Silanganan
Sa mga langyaw inilogan
Pakamatyan ko ang imong kagawasan (p. 60)

[The bird in the golden cage
Longs for its freedom
How much more the country
Deprived of freedom
Pearl of the Orient
Trespassed by aliens
I will die for your freedom]

A cross, which signifies salvation is formed in "Si Jesus ang Dalan"
[Christ is the Way]:

Si Jesus ang dalan, kamatuoran
 Nag-awhag nga maghari—kagawasan
 Siya ang kahayag sa kalibutan
 Ang tuburan sa atong kagawasan. (p. 27)

[Jesus is the way, the truth
 Prophesying his righteous reign
 He is the light of the world
 the spring of our freedom.]

The most powerful image in "Sa Pagpakigbisog" is that of Christ, "son of a carpenter turned itinerant preacher, becoming a garment-factory worker turned labor organizer." He is a Christ who is real for our times and our culture (Gaspar 1985b, 30). Historically, he struggled for truth and justice and suffered. The contemporary character of Christ's passion is explained by both Abe and Doy:

Abe: Andam kita kanunay kon dili mahupas ang atong pagpangga sa katawhang linupigan ug ang atong kadasig nga magmugna ug sosyedad nga naghari gayod ang kaangayan.

Doy: Sama ni Jesus.

Abe: Oo, sama ni Jesus. Ug sama sa atong mga igsoon nga mihalad sa ilang kaugalingon aron ma-aninaw ang pagsubang sa adlaw nga magdala ug hustisya'g kalinaw. Sila mao si Jesus. (p. 64)

[Abe: We are always prepared (to strike the mad dog) as long as we never falter in our caring for the oppressed and in our desire to create a society where peace reigns.

Doy: Like Jesus.

Abe: Yes, like Jesus. And like our brothers who have laid their lives on the line so that we will live to see the rising sun that brings justice and peace. They are Jesus.]

Clearly, the play intends to show Gutierrez's (1988, 7) "liberation is salvation in Christ in the historical conditions of today." This liberation idea is also found in the images of Christ in Philippine literature after the Second World War. Francisco (1977, 186) reports that hence, the dominant Christ image is one of Messiah of society.

In Aurelio Tolentino's realistic play, "Bagong Cristo," the Christ figure is like Gaspar's:

isang sosyalistang pinuno ng mga anakpawis. Isinugo siya ng Ama upang tuligsain ang umiiral na kalagayan sa lipunan—ang pang-aapi

sa mga manggagawa . . . ang di-pagkakapantay-pantay sa lipunan.
(Francisco 1977, 200)

[a socialist leader of the laboring class. Sent by the Father in order to criticize the widespread condition of the society—the oppression of the worker . . . the inequality in society]

The gospel of this new Christ is “iisa ang makatuwiran at ang utos ng Diyos” [only one reason and commandment of God] (Francisco 1977, 200).

In Tolentino and Gaspar, Christ’s resurrection, the source of hope, is contextualized thus: “ang kabanhawan diha sa pagpadayon sa pakigbisog hangtud modaug ta” (p. 58) [Christ resurrects when we struggle on until we succeed].

The Biblico-historical cluster of two plays weds religion and politics, strange but lately, frequent bedfellows. It also meshes tradition and present, Biblical and contemporary, two different but complementary levels. Corollarily, “Binilanggo’ng Damgo’s” and “Sa Pagpakigbisog’s” genre is a play-within-a-play, which allows shifts and transitions in time and space readily. In this case, these are Biblical and contemporary levels. Characters assume multiple (particularly dual) roles and a joker grounds the events in the present.

The themes of community organizing and struggle for justice and liberation are embodied in songs and images. Song and dance air protest subtly while images clarify the need for resistance. Prison bars, caged birds, torture scenes and darkness point to the oppressive situation for redress. Light/illumination speaks for conscientization for social transformation. Finally, “Sa Pagpakigbisog’s” revolutionary Christ figure,

in his class origin, his poverty, his awakening to his mission, his conscientization, his hopes and fears, his insecurities in the face of those in power, and his message of liberation, aligns him with the oppressed who see hope in his death and resurrection and are inspired to struggle on. (Gaspar 1985b, 30)

Conclusion

Gaspar’s theater of conscientization and liberation (1971-1984) is composed of social, religious and Biblico-historical play clusters. The theme of struggle is preeminent in the twenty-seven plays owing to

its liberation framework which is clearly inspired by Gramsci, Freire, Boff, Gutierrez, Brecht and Boal, on one level. The gut-level inspiration comes from the basic communities and the situations that make struggle a necessity.

Gramsci's promotion of worker councils, cooperatives and cultural organizations for a new social order find a voice in Gaspar's insistent call for a united front by laborers, farmers and communities. His leading role in the formation of little community theaters of liberation as an organic intellectual (via the CD training workshops) also echoes Gramsci's organizing line. The recurring theme of struggle through community organizing is also affirmed by Brecht (1964, 68):

people have worked to find out how man can improve his condition, and today we know that he cannot do this purely privately. It's only by banding together and joining forces that he stands a chance.

This chance of improving man's condition is increased with Freire's conscientization process, which aims at replacing the culture of silence with that of struggle. Both Freire and Gaspar promote the process of reflection-action-reflection—Freire through his philosophical works and Gaspar through his educational theater. His later social plays even feature a lecture scene which emphasizes the didactic trend. Gaspar endorses Freire's notion of education as a cultural action for freedom in the orientation of his theater towards both didacticism and liberation.

The influence of liberation theology on Gaspar's theater is undeniable. Alan Glinoga (1990) of PETA says, "Karl's craft is linked intimately with church programs." These programs, which are pro-oppressed and anti-poverty are Alay Kapwa and Creative Dramatics. The programs and the plays of Gaspar assert that people create history as they move towards radical social change via a new moral order, social responsibility and organized opposition to structures of oppression and dependence.

The religious images of Gaspar's plays are obviously courtesy of liberation theology. The Christ images: a man-God who is one with the oppressed; a Messiah or Liberator; and a revolutionary who struggles towards liberation, articulate hope along with the image of light and the lecture scene for enlightenment or the awakened consciousness. Antithetical to these are the images of darkness; chains, prison bars and barbed wire; the trial scene, the booming disembodied voice; and the oppressor as demon. These latter images point to the pre-

vailing situation of unfreedom and injustice which need changing. "Gaspar's plays," Fernando Josef (1990) avers, "are distinctive because they have faith and sociopolitical realities in the forefront."

Gaspar's plays are Brechtian in the sense that they make the spectators observers but arouse their activity. The plays compel the spectators to make decisions when the events that the plays relate and confront the audience with communicate insights.

The distance-creating devices such as slide, shadow play and song; mime and masks are Brechtian. So are the characters who are representatives of social classes rather than individual personalities. Social contradictions are also derived from Brechtian theater theory and practice.

Both Brecht and Boal recommend the use of music in theater and Gaspar acknowledges this. A good number of his plays are musicals. Songs are used to underline the message, move the play along, and break up and comment on the action. Soloists and choruses are play mainstays; at times, these singers also take on the role of Boal's joker.

Boal's joker figures prominently in Gaspar's theater. He shatters the illusion of reality by being a breath of reality. He frequently addresses the audience directly to state the purpose of the play, to hammer a message home, to exhort the spectators to move to change their world.

Although Gaspar does not conform rigidly to Boal's joker system of performance, many of his plays, among them "Bangon Akong Igsoon!," "Hain ang Hinabang? Kinsa May Akong Kadangpan?" and "Binilanggo'ng Damgo," include six of the seven parts of the structure. The plays usually start with a dedication (usually to an event), and an explanation of the purpose of the play. Action is often episodic, with almost independent scenes. (This technique is also recommended by Brecht.) Comments are inserted to relate the play to current events. Lastly, the exhortation has the joker addressing the audience to become critical of their realities; organize themselves for the struggle; and resist oppression.

Like Gramsci's new literature, Gaspar's theater is historical, political and popular. Its artistic simplicity makes for effective community theater for conscientization and liberation, one of the venues available to the oppressed for their efforts towards organizing and the transformation of their world.

Notes

1. See Tiongson (1975).
2. According to Wurfel (1988, 217), 50 percent of progressive bishops are reportedly from Mindanao.
3. From "A declaration for human dignity at the polls," 11 September 1976, quoted in Wurfel (1988, 121-22).
4. De los Reyes (1978, 1) refers to the use of Biblical themes as the mythical method.
5. Gaspar borrows this idiosyncrasy from Davao City's own village character, Pacita Tan. Curiously enough, after the play's presentation, the expression evolved into what Lluch (1981, 90) calls "a sharp journalistic sword" in Igo, a newsletter with a conscientization orientation.
6. Incidentally, "Bayabas ni Juan" is one of the earlier collectively created plays that the political detainees staged behind bars.

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