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## False Vision in Two Plays by Aurelio Tolentino

Alma Jill Dizon



A close look at national identity is inevitable when we read such works as Aurelio Tolentino's plays from the years following the Philippine War of Independence and the Philippine-American War. The need to reaffirm a national identity is crucial to the literature of this period given the attitude of the occupying force that there was no war against a recognizable nation, just the quelling of an insurrection. Writing in 1905, Arthur Stanley Riggs (1981, 2) states that "There is a reason for this [lack of Philippine literature and history] in the fact that the tribes composing what the native fondly calls the "Great Filipino Nation" have no more solidarity nor national entity than the North American Indians." Thus it is in contrast to a lack of political and artistic recognition that Tolentino's plays indicate a process of national identification as well as its expression. While this process may seem obvious, it is a complex one predicated upon a criticism of subject/object relations. We must not reduce the reading of such one-act plays as *Boda maldita* (1908) and *!Hilat! !Aray!* (1908) to clear cut oppositions of Philippines versus colonizer. Instead, we should examine how these plays seek to incite and define a Philippine vision that cuts through the falsehoods of Hispanized tradition and an Americanized intelligentsia.

### Aurelio Tolentino

Aurelio Tolentino (1867-1915) was originally from Pampanga and educated at the College of San Juan de Letran. He was unable to finish his law studies at the University of Santo Tomas due to his father's death, and so he became a teacher. Later, he was one of the original members of the Katipunan and went on to be numbered among the signers of the Declaration of Philippine Independence at Kawit in 1898. After the American intervention, Tolentino edited two nationalist newspapers that were both suppressed by the authorities.

He wrote a number of plays in Tagalog, Pampango, and Spanish that led to repeated arrests for sedition. After his pardon by Governor Forbes in 1911, he turned his attention to organizing Filipino laborers. Toward the end of his life, he also promoted Tagalog literature through his school, El Parnaso Filipino, since he believed that the adoption of Tagalog as the national language was necessary to achieve unity (Zapanta-Manlapaz 1975, 1-3).

While Tolentino is best known in the Philippine canon for such Tagalog plays as the allegorical *Kahapon, Ngayon at Bukas*, he also wrote short musicals, melodramas, and novels. Given his tendency to rework ideas into different forms and languages, some story lines are explored a few times over. Such is the case with *Boda maldita* and *¡Hilat! ¡Aray!*, which we examine here in their Spanish-language versions. Although Tolentino was educated in Spanish, Spanish was primarily the print language of the *ilustrados*. Thus his works in native languages reveal both a popular base for his drama as well as a kind of intimacy in art that, for instance, José Rizal's novels could not reproduce widely until translated from Spanish. In addition, when Tolentino did use Spanish, he placed himself in immediate danger with the Americans who were still depending largely on Spanish in order to communicate with the Filipinos. His drama in native languages like others of the period came under fire less for actual words than for stagings that showed the outlawed Katipunan flag and a trampled American flag. Arthur Stanley Riggs (1905, 285) notes how in *Kahapon, Ngayon at Bukas*, "the costumes of the players were so designed that when at a preconcerted signal they gathered in the apparent confusion in the center of the stage, and as quickly drifted into separate groups, the insurgent or Filipino flag, for an instant, was distinctly formed from their dresses, the stripes and triangle being clearly defined." Interestingly enough, Zapanta-Manlapaz lists Pampango versions of *Boda maldita* and *¡Hilat! ¡Aray!* (p. 369)<sup>1</sup> but no Tagalog versions. The Tagalog versions may simply not have survived, but whether or not they existed, one can see how the playwright was willing to choose Spanish at times as a common language. As Salvador Lopez points out "Komunikasyon. Iyan ang mahalagang panuntunan ni Aurelio V. Tolentino sa pagsulat. At sapagkat nais niyang magpahayag sa marami'y sinikap niyang gamitin sa pagsulat ang lahat ng kaniyang alam na wika" (Zapanta-Manlapaz 1975, 5). (Communication. That is Aurelio Tolentino's important objective in writing. And because he wanted to communicate to many, he tried to use in writing all the languages he knew."

**Synopses of *Boda maldita* and ¡Hilal! ¡Aray!**

*Boda maldita* begins with the arrival of Soledad, Reinaldo's forgotten lover. She pleads with Pedro, Beatriz' father, to stop the marriage of his daughter to Reinaldo. Through the dialogue, we find out that Pedro was originally a family friend who had gone with Reinaldo to ask Soledad's parents for her hand. Soledad's father had thought her too young to marry, and so she fled with Reinaldo and lived with him for a time. Their relationship produced a child, but they never married. In the meantime, Soledad's father died, and she remained an outcast to her family. Then, inexplicably, Reinaldo decided to marry Beatriz, a wedding apparently orchestrated by Pedro and a priest. Returning to the present, Pedro manages to chase Soledad away, and the wedding proceeds. In the next scene, Beatriz and Reinaldo sing of their love and joy. There is some guilt concerning Soledad, but the priest blames her sinfulness. When the priest and Pedro leave, Beatriz promises Reinaldo that she will give one of her houses to Soledad and her son. Then the newlyweds can travel guilt-free through Europe and America before returning to administer their properties. Beatriz leaves Reinaldo for a moment to get his present, and just then both a letter and a bottle of poison arrive. The letter is from Soledad saying that she has taken half the poison, and she wants him to take the rest. He is about to dash off to save her when he sees another package on the ground. Inside, he finds a love letter from Beatriz along with a portrait of her, both addressed to another man. Now enraged, Reinaldo dashes off to see Soledad. In the following scene, Soledad dies a moment before Reinaldo enters. When he discovers her corpse, he quickly swallows the rest of the poison just as Beatriz enters. She then explains to him that, as he already knows, she has a sister with the same name and appearance who is engaged. Thus the letter and portrait were intended legitimately for their future brother-in-law. Reinaldo looks at the portrait again and recognizes the sister. Pedro then enters while Beatriz and Reinaldo sing one last line about their love. Beatriz and Pedro catch the dying Reinaldo in their arms while the newlyweds sing "¡Fatalidad! ¡Maldición!" 'Evil fate (Death)! A curse!' (Scene 4, p. 336)<sup>2</sup>

Unlike the corpse-strewn melodrama, *Boda maldita*, ¡Hilal! ¡Aray! opens with two married couples who share a house. The husbands, Crispin and Pepe, want to go out without their wives at 11 P.M., and their wives, Neneng and Juling, tease them by withholding a hat and a cane before finally letting them go. After the men leave, the two

women reveal that each one has received a love letter from the other's husband. They plot together to catch their husbands. Juling waits for Crispin to return, and when he does, she listens to his long explanation of his courtly love for her. She finally agrees to meet him again in half an hour, at which time she will tell him if she loves him. In the next scene, Neneng speaks with Pepe, who in turn says lines that are very similar to Crispin's. Neneng also tells Pepe that she will meet him again in half an hour and say whether or not she loves him. Then Neneng waits in the dark for her husband, Crispin. He doesn't recognize his wife while he talks at length about his love for Juling and his lack of affection for his wife. As he demands to know whether or not "Juling" loves him, Juling herself enters with a candle, laughing. The two women jeer at him and won't let him leave. They promise to pardon him on condition that he lie in wait with a gun for his wife's lover. Neneng then waits in the dark again, this time for Pepe. She declares her love for him, and just at that moment, they hear approaching feet. Neneng makes Pepe hide beneath the table. Crispin enters, lights a candle, and angrily accuses his wife of meeting with a lover. He then lifts the table cloth and shoots Pepe as the other man tries to escape. Pepe falls to the floor, and Juling rushes in. At first, even Neneng thinks that Pepe is dead, but Juling finds the "bullet," a ball of wax, stuck to her husband's forehead. The play ends with the two women teasing their husbands and dragging them by their ears.

### The "Foreign" Vision

While the first play combines the ridiculous and the melodramatic to portray a kind of senseless tragicomedy, and the second one ends in comic humiliation, they both seek to define the nation morally. This is to say that the plays reveal both the adoption and the discarding of values as covers for self-interest. Both attitudes fail in their blindness since neither a Hispanized nor an Americanized vision can differentiate between objects. The inability of the male characters to tell their wives apart from other women ultimately leads to their downfall.

*Boda maldita* seems to exist outside of historical time since its Hispanized atmosphere is neither obviously pre- nor post-revolutionary as much as specific to an economic class. This "neither here nor there" situation suggests that the revolution might just as well not

have happened, a notion that mirrors the ease with which Reinaldo weds Beatriz, as if his relationship to Soledad had never been. Given the rhetoric of colonialism in which empires cast themselves as mothers to immature colonies, we can see an allegory for the Philippine revolution in Soledad's decision to flee with her lover despite her father's protest concerning her age.<sup>3</sup> Yet the curse of Spain hangs over the Philippines as seen in the Hispanized infrastructure of the play. We can thus liken Reinaldo's marriage to how some former revolutionaries could accept American hegemony in order to avoid overwhelming change. In addition, the calm acceptance that Beatriz displays when speaking of her double reveals a duplicity innate to her social standing. She accepts her father's and the Church's cruel treatment of Soledad so that she can buy off Reinaldo's guilty conscience. These three characters represent the different paths that members of their class took at the turn of the century. Even while there is no talk of an American presence in the play, in the conflict of these characters we see the failure of the Philippine revolution and thus can imply a substituting of masters behind an apparently unaltered infrastructure.

It is striking that Soledad's scene of pleading turns into an affirmation of identity and intellectual vision outside of Hispanized culture—a reflection of the literal meaning of her name, solitude. Thus the main point of contention between Soledad and Pedro is her insistence on the word "*esposa*" 'wife' when describing her relationship to Reinaldo. She refuses to accept social and legal control over the signifiers, wife and "*manceba*" 'concubine.' She announces, "*Yo no veo diferencia entre la esposa y la manceba*" ('I see no difference between wife and concubine.') (Scene 1, p. 324) Soledad then constructs a critique of her society's hypocrisy by launching into an examination of marriage, saying:

En efecto, el casamiento se verifica en mil formas, según las épocas, los pueblos, las costumbres, las religiones, las idolatrías y, siendo medio de explotación religiosa, ha perdido totalmente el carácter espiritual con que ha sido instituido. (Scene 1, p. 324)

In effect, marriage takes place in a thousand ways according to historical periods, towns, customs, religions, idolatries, and, being the instrument of religious exploitation, has completely lost the spiritual character with which it was instituted. (Scene 1, p. 324)

In a sense, since Soledad is an outcast from her society, she is in a position to see her Hispanized culture as one of many. Thus she refutes the supposedly universal truths of Catholic tradition, as well as its control over the rites of marriage. Moreover, she accuses religious exploitation in general, not just that of the Catholic Church, of having emptied marriage of its spiritual meaning. In this manner, she both diminishes the Church to a particularist level and, through a broader vision, regards all marriage customs as empty signifiers. Strikingly, this situation enables her to seize language and use words as she chooses in order to describe and identify herself.

In addition to equating the terms, wife and concubine, Soledad attacks those who would see them as different. She tells Pedro, "Señor, la Ley, al excluir de sus límites á la mujer que Vd. llama manceba, ha cometido una estupidez, un crimen, un asesinato" 'Sir, by excluding the woman whom you call concubine, the Law has committed a stupid act, a crime, a murder.' (Scene 1, p. 324) This outburst shows the degree to which Soledad has abandoned cultural norms. She recognizes that the Law with a capital L is no more than a particular legal system and therefore fallible. She can then make a logical statement out of an apparently impossible metaphor of the law as criminal. She reveals that the arbitrary differentiation between two signifiers has caused the legal system to go against its intention of protecting people and in essence to cause the death of the woman labelled concubine.

Also remarkable is that Soledad does not seek out another culture as a vantage point from where she can criticize Hispanized culture. Instead, she calls upon common sense when she states:

Todas sus formas, con sus ridículas liturgias, son más ó menos irrisorias ante el sentido común, y sin embargo son admitidas dentro de sus legalidades respectivas. Siendo así ¿por qué se ha de excluir de esas Legalidades la forma más natural, más sublime, la forma del misterioso acto en que un hombre y una mujer, poseidos de celestial delirio, se arrebatan, se confunden en un solo ser, para consumir la Eterna Ley Divina que perpetúa las generaciones? (Scene 1, pp. 324-25)

All forms [of marriage], with their ridiculous liturgies, are more or less illusory when faced with common sense, and yet they are recognized within their respective legal systems. Being thus, why is it necessary to exclude from these Legal systems the most natural and the most sublime form: the mysterious act in which a man and a woman,

possessed by celestial delirium, are swept off their feet, are confused in one being in order to consummate the Divine Eternal Law that perpetuates the generations? (Scene 1, pp. 324-25)

Again, Soledad emphasizes the variety of rituals and legal structures to demonstrate the inability of any particular one to depict itself as universal. Indeed, while the one law that Soledad does recognize as outside human legal systems might recall Genesis and the creation of Eve, she makes no actual reference to the events. Instead, the argument rests on the sexual act itself as an originating moment that reoccurs with the creation of each generation. Consequently, the Divine Eternal Law depends more on the physical notion of genesis itself rather than biblical text. Moreover, the term *sentido común* 'common sense' also plays upon *sentido* 'sense' as meaning. What everyone knows instinctively is the common meaning of marriage as controlling and thus covering up human sexual nature. Soledad bares herself to cut through the confusion of custom and law, thereby affirming herself as true to a universally human act: procreation.

In returning to the idea mentioned above of the arbitrary control that society has over language, the plot device of a second Beatriz off-stage in *Boda maldita* raises some interesting doubts about this supposed power over words. It is not completely impossible that a Hispanized family would give two daughters the same name. Spanish literary criticism is full of research to determine familial relations and whether or not more than one person would have used the same name. One would assume that the families themselves would have been able to differentiate between members with the use of middle names. But there is no second, clarifying name here. The added confusion of similar faces and signatures thus helps to create a sense of ridicule. Upon finding the letter and checking the signature, Reinaldo exclaims: "Sí, la firma es de ella, es de su puño y letra . . ." 'Yes, it's her signature from her very hand . . .' (Scene 2, p. 331) Yet later, Beatriz states, "muy solemne" 'very solemn': "Esta carta no es mía. Es de mi hermana. Ella y yo, como tú sabes, tenemos igual forma y un mismo nombre" 'This letter is not from me. It's from my sister. As you know, she and I look the same and have the same name.' (Scene 4, p. 335) There is a weird logic in giving the same name to two completely interchangeable women since one could argue that each one signifies essentially the same as the other. It stands out that Beatriz uses the phrase "igual forma" 'same shape/form' since this takes us back to Soledad's repeated use of "forma" when speaking



of marriage customs. Are the two Beatrices two manifestations of the same phenomena? Another possible logic is that the act of giving the same name twice has the effect of creating the same object twice. So that if one uses the same term for two unrelated objects, the phonetic similarity leads to a semantic connection as in poetry. At any rate, this whole mess depends on the notion of a misnomer, an error first in giving identity to and later in recognizing an object. The classic example is the term "indio" 'Indian,' dating from Columbus' famous nautical error, which in turn has led to the confusing of indigenous groups from around the world despite their geographical particulars. So what we see in the case of the two Beatriz's is an intellectual error first committed when their father chose their names and the Church christened them, and later perpetuated in Reinaldo's confusion. In other words, the authorities and supposed subjects cannot see clearly. They give female objects the same names and then cannot tell them apart.

The fallacy, however, in the subject/object paradigm lies in a fundamental paradox that one's object is another's subject. Control over the female object is at best precarious, and so the constant anxiety over honor in Spanish Golden Age works reflects an instability in a system based on the preservation of that delicate and wayward vessel, the female body. Since a man's good name in society, and thus to some degree his identity, rests on his wife's faithfulness and his daughter's chastity, the female deviation from social norms requires the bloodshed of the honor plays of Calderón and Lope. It is this anxiety over the wife's behavior that ultimately leads to Reinaldo's blindness and his downfall. It stands out that even while money buys nearly everything in *Boda maldita*, it cannot buy the security of Reinaldo's honor. It is not clearly stated in the play, but it is reasonable to assume that Beatriz' wealth helped to foster Reinaldo's love for her. After all, her description of their future honeymoon to be followed by their return in order to "administrar nuestros intereses" 'administer our interests' (Scene 2, p. 330) implies the joint maintenance of a financial empire as a basis for the relationship. Beatriz' wealth also soothes Reinaldo's conscience. As soon as she determines that he no longer loves Soledad, she promises to provide for the other woman and her son (Scene 2, p. 330). Reinaldo is a troubling character in that he doesn't seem to be especially evil or cruel, merely easily influenced. As soon as he receives the letter and poison from Soledad, he prepares to rush to her aid. Despite his proclaimed lack of love for her, his sense of morality compels him to try to save her.

After finding the second Beatriz' letter and portrait, he still leaves to help Soledad, but now he says "¡Mi cabeza estalla! ¡Mi corazón se oprime! . . . Veo sangre!" 'My head is exploding! My heart is oppressed! . . . I see blood!' (Scene 2, p. 331) Unlike the honor plays, Reinaldo's vision of blood does not lead him to take Beatriz' life but rather to an attempted return to the former love object, Soledad. When he finds her corpse, he takes the poison, saying "Tú no me has de dejar. Te has ido, también me voy" 'You must not leave me. You have gone, I will go also.'" (Scene 4, p. 334) It seems strange that a male character would take his own life in response to a woman's violation of his honor, but he explains to Beatriz:

Con tu sangre traidora,  
mis manos por no manchar,  
he salvado mi honor  
con un veneno mortal.

To not stain my hands  
with your blood, traitress,  
I have saved my honor  
with a mortal poison. (Scene 4, p. 335)

Now, even when he says that he sees blood, Reinaldo never actually states that he wants to kill his wife. What he does say is that Soledad belongs with him, and so even though he doesn't use the words "wife" or "love," he in a sense reestablishes her as the love object. So his statement here that he has taken his life in order to avoid killing Beatriz sounds more like a statement of blame to inflict guilt, much like Soledad's wishful double suicide pact. But Beatriz has a calm explanation, and Reinaldo now finds that his death has no meaning. His name is still honorable in his milieu—it was just that he mistakenly saw it as lost.

### **The Husbands' Vision**

In *¡Hilal!* *¡Aray!*, there is an interesting similarity between the husbands' idea of marriage and Soledad's, and yet the two approaches differ widely in the basis of their arguments as well as in their end results. By defining wife and lover in a way that allows a man one of each, Crispin and Pepe hope to have their cake and eat it, too. And while Soledad speaks from outside cultural limitations

for the recognition of the unmarried lover, Crispin and Pepe attempt to use a supposedly modern and imported reasoning to justify their infidelity. We cannot help but remember Soledad's impassioned speech, oddly echoed and twisted when Pepe tells Neneng, "Según los modernos, según nuestra civilización anglosajona, el casamiento ha perdido ya su carácter espiritual. No es más que un contrato, una transacción puramente social y económica" 'According to modern people, according to our Anglosaxon civilization, marriage has lost its spiritual character. It's nothing more than a contract, a purely social and economic transaction.' (Scene 3, p. 351) Unlike Soledad, Pepe speaks from another culture, rather than from outside all cultures. In this way, his words demonstrate a supposed hierarchy of cultures that goes hand in hand with a kind of cultural colonialism. This dichotomy between Americanized men and unadulterated native women is not surprising, given the opening moment in which the men go out at night while the women stay home. Neither wife leaves the house during the play, which indicates that they do not go seeking outside ideas. Given that *loob* in Tagalog means literally 'inside,' and from there 'soul,' it would not be too far-fetched to argue that the wives both maintain the sanctity of the Philippine home and national soul unlike their husbands.

It follows then that both men demonstrate a scorn for traditional morality as opposed to so-called modern customs. Crispin lectures Juling, saying that his love for her "Es un crimen para los espíritus timoratos ó fanáticos que ven el terrible mandoble de Dios hasta en la sopa, los cuales no debieron haber nacido en esta época de las luces, sino en la edad antigua, en la época de las idolatrías y de todo género de supersticiones" 'is a crime for fearful and fanatical spirits who see the terrible sword of God even in their soup, for those who should not have been born in this enlightened period but rather in ancient times, in the time of idolatries and all kinds of superstitions' (Scene 2, p. 346). Later, Pepe tells Neneng ". . . yo nunca he creído que tú estuvieras en la línea de las mujeres ignorantes, fanáticas, visionarias, hipócritas" '. . . I never believed that you were one of those ignorant, fanatical, visionary, hypocritical women' (Scene 3, p. 351). Between scorn and flattery, each husband seeks to influence the other's wife, so that she will trade her code of conduct for one that allows him infidelity.

Furthermore, the husbands of *¡Hilat! ¡Aray!* go beyond raising the lover in status, go so far as to lower the position of wife, and thus do not achieve the equality of the two terms in the way that Soledad

does. So even while their intentions seem opposed to those of Pedro and the Priest when these two exalt the wife and debase the concubine, Crispin's and Pepe's differentiating vision is also one of self-entitlement. Crispin tells Juling that "Neneng ocupa en mi vida un puesto fijo, el puesto de una esposa, que es el puesto de todo lo que es material, lo prosaico, lo baladí. Mas, tú ocupas en mi vida el puesto de todo lo ideal, lo sublime, lo eterno" 'Neneng occupies a fixed place in my life, the place of a wife, which is the place of everything that is material, prosaic, trivial. But in my life, you occupy the place of all that is ideal, sublime, eternal.' (Scene 2, p. 346) Indeed, rather than simply uplifting the lover to the level of wife, the husbands go on to deify their intended lovers, bringing to mind the rhetoric of courtly love.<sup>4</sup> Yet this language of deification raises problems when we try to puzzle out who is the subject and who is the object. Crispin tells Juling that "Y desde entonces, comprendiendo que tú eras el único y constante objeto de mis dorados ensueños, erigí un altar en el fondo de mi alma, donde te he endiosado con veneración sublime, rindiéndote el culto más ferviente de frenética adoración" 'And from then on, understanding that you were the only and constant object of my gilded dreams, I erected an altar in the depths of my soul where I deified you with sublime veneration, offering up to you the most fervent worship of frenetic adoration' (Scene 2, p. 346). At first glance, it would seem that Crispin is expressing how much power Juling holds over him. Yet we have to remember that he is literally the subject of all the verbs from building the altar to deifying her. He has made her into a fetish and prayed before her in order to obtain what he wants. When he calls her the object of his dreams, we should perhaps take him literally. Under the guise of romantic love, he embarks on an invasion.

The husbands' desire for their love objects leads them astray, however, in that they assume that the women would not think for themselves or act independently. Moreover, their desire is so strong that they willingly forfeit their ability to perceive what's happening around them. In this way, Crispin agrees to meet Juling a second time with the lights turned out. When he enters, he says "¡El caos!" 'Chaos!' (p. 353), an odd allusion to the time before the Creation. In this way, he underlines his conscious decision to give up light and order. As for the conversation that follows with Neneng, it is strange that Crispin cannot recognize his wife's voice. This is a particularly funny scene in which his wife makes nasty asides that only the audience can hear. Yet beyond its basic comedy, the scene is telling in

that Crispin's desire is such that he not only allows himself to be blinded, he deceives himself to the point of believing that he is speaking with Juling. In a sense, he chooses deafness. This situation also indicates that he doesn't know his wife very well—an acceptable notion, given the doubt cast on his ability to know any object at all.

Crispin's adoption of an Americanized analytical process with all of its post-religious assumptions has not, however, completely rooted out a traditional sense of honor. Thus when given the chance to take the spotlight off himself and maintain his dignity, he jumps at the opportunity to attack his wife's "lover." Ironically, the shot at Pepe's forehead hits him literally where both men have sinned, that is in the seat of his false intellect and his imagination where he first concocted the image of woman as deified object. The cowardice and false pride of both men depict the vulnerability of those who would take on foreign ways to further their own interests. From the beginning, their inability to leave the house without the Western trappings of male power, the hat and the cane, already indicates their superficiality. They have no moral grounding to fall back on. They cannot have any real control over their wives or anyone else's wife, for that matter. Notably, it is the women who, in possessing a solid moral code of their own, rule their home.

It is in the final moments of the play that the native words of the title, *¡Hilat! ¡Aray!*, enter the dialogue. The women call out "*¡Hilat!*" 'See!', and the stage direction notes that they "Al decir la palabra "*Hilat*" tiran hacia abajo el párpado inferior, como hacen los filipinos al burlarse de uno" 'pull down their lower lid while saying "*Hilat*" as do the Filipinos when making fun of someone' (Scene 6, p. 359). By saying "*hilat*," the women indicate a clear vision which the men have lacked throughout the play. Notably, the men yell in Tagalog "*¡Aray!*" 'ouch,' in response to the pinching. Humiliated and stripped naked of their pretensions, they are reduced at last to their native selves as they cry out in pain and embarrassment.

### The Post-Tragic Vision

While *Boda maldita* differs from *Kahapon, Ngayon at Bukas* in that its characters have christian names rather than the names of peoples and governments, it is nonetheless a kind of national allegory. There is a striking theme of betrayal—within families and between friends, lovers, and spouses—that necessarily brings to mind

the fragmenting of the revolution. At the same time, there is a reaffirmation of a Philippine vision based on human truths outside the cultural limitations imposed by a Hispanized regime. Social norms stand revealed as equivocal, and action based on those norms ends in loss and death. Thus the play neither presents us with a tragedy's renewed sense of order nor a melodrama's positive affirmation of a moral vision. Referred to as a one-act lyric drama on its frontispiece, *Boda maldita* resembles a melodrama to some degree. Yet it lacks a happy ending and also presents some strange subversions to the notion of love as a guiding principle.

As Peter Brooks notes, the French melodrama arose during and soon after the French Revolution—a socio-historical setting that, like the Philippines of the early twentieth century, does not provide for a tragic vision. Brooks writes that the melodrama is “a response to the loss of the tragic vision. It comes into being in a world where the traditional imperatives of truth and ethics have been violently thrown into question, yet where the promulgation of truth and ethics, their instauration as a way of life, is of immediate, daily, political concern” (pp. 14–15). He later adds that melodrama “. . . strives to find, to articulate, to demonstrate, to “prove” the existence of a moral universe which, though put into question, masked by villainy and perversions of judgement, does exist and can be made to assert its presence and its categorical force among men” (p. 20). It is worthy of note that while *Boda maldita* does give a strong sense of villainy through Pedro and the Priest, and of perverted judgement through Reinaldo, it cannot make that final move toward a moral universe and a happy ending. Although Soledad is certainly more sympathetic, her desire to end Reinaldo's life in addition to her own, leaving their child an orphan, makes her an unattractive paradigm. Unlike the French Revolution, which for all its tragedies did maintain its national integrity, the struggle for Philippine independence left much to be asserted and identified. Notably, *Boda maldita* contains a possible loophole for future happiness. Soledad cannot bring herself to kill her infant, and so the child is still alive, though oddly silent and ignored at the end. Yet this forgotten child cannot stand for a vindication of an ethical vision. The play is almost but not quite a melodrama just as there was almost but not quite an independent state at the end of the last century.

In contrast to *Boda maldita*, *¡Hilat! ¡Aray!* is called a one-act “zarzuela” or musical on its frontispiece. Yet while both story lines

move in opposite directions that reflect their different genres, they nevertheless share plot devices and dialogue that point toward a common criticism of foreign modes of analysis and their use. Like *Boda maldita*, *¡Hilat!* *¡Aray!* questions the assumptions of those who would impose their misguided vision on others. While there is less angry confrontation and pathos in the zarzuela than in the first play, we should not assume that the "happy" ending of *¡Hilat!* *¡Aray!* is unproblematic. If anything, the play leaves us with no clear sense of preferred social structure. At first glance, the traditional approach to marriage over Americanized pseudo-intellectualism wins out, but is this value system Hispanic? Given the ridicule heaped on Crispin in his momentary role of aggravated husband, it is doubtful that there can be a return to the Hispanized era. Moreover, trouble lies ahead in the home that is the evolving Philippine nation. For if there is no true resolution or change, revenge without bloodshed is merely wishful thinking.

### Notes

1. Zapanta-Manlapaz (1975) indicates that holographs of the Pampango versions of these plays are located in the Aurelio Tolentino Collection in the Philippines.

2. All translations are my own unless otherwise indicated. I have chosen to maintain the nineteenth-century spelling and accentuation while correcting minor typographical errors found in the Zapanta-Manlapaz edition. In some instances, Tolentino uses Golden Age spellings, which I have modernized.

3. In *Foundational Fictions: the National Romances of Latin America* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991), Doris Sommer builds upon Benedict Anderson's *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London: Verso, 1983) when she demonstrates how nineteenth-century romantic novels use lovers in the construction of national identity. Sommer's observations naturally bring Rizal's works to mind. With regard to Tolentino, however, we are faced with the additional and relevant question of what happens after the wedding when the marriage is troubled. Thus despite the colonial situation of the Philippines with respect to the United States at the time, these two plays have more in common with peninsular works like Galdós' *Fortunata y Jacinta* or *La familia de León Roch* in which marital problems reflect the difficulties of a nation at war with itself.

4. Although not specifically named here, one cannot help but think of parodies of courtly love. In *La Celestina*, for example, Calixto declares himself a believer in a religion devoted to his beloved, Melibea. It is also striking how the overblown style of Crispin's and Pepe's speeches contrast with the women's everyday language much like the contrast between Calixto's manner and that of his servants.

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