

THE LINAMBAY OF CEBU:  
A SOCIO-HISTORICAL STUDY

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A Thesis  
Presented  
to the Faculty of the Graduate School  
University of San Carlos  
Cebu City

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In Partial Fulfillment  
of the Requirements for the Degree  
Master of Arts in Literature

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by  
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APPROVAL SHEET

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To my little angels ---

Tweetums

Chacha

Cheeri

and my husband - Roy

this work is affectionately dedicated.

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## CHAPTER I

### THE VERNACULAR THEATER OF THE PHILIPPINES

#### Introduction

The Philippines has a rich tradition of theatrical forms, from the folk performances that grew out of the indigenous culture to the varied dramatic types that Filipinos assimilated from neighboring cultures and the West. One dramatic form that has a large place in Philippine theater history is the moro-moro, a play which, while it is of foreign provenance, has been so assimilated into the local culture that it can be justly claimed as Filipino theater.

This study is intended to be a contribution to a critical history of this dramatic form. It treats of the Cebuano moro-moro (or linambay, as it is called in Cebu), dealing with its history, its socio-cultural context, and the various coordinates that define the work: namely, the artist, audience, world-view, and the play itself.

Here we shall introduce the study of the linambay by sketching for it a broad historical background, its context in the tradition of Philippine theater itself.



The Origins of Philippine Theater

The evolution of the various forms of theater in the Philippines can be traced to the religious rituals of the primitive Filipino. Worshipping a multitude of spirits and graven idols, but not yet adept in uttering his thoughts, the Filipino aboriginal man resorted to action. He externalized his devotion and religious fervor through the primitive method of dance.<sup>1</sup> He spoke to his Bathala, anitos and diwatas<sup>2</sup> in dance; he prayed in dance accompanied by unintelligible incantations. In his rhythmic movements and soulful chants lie the germs of the drama.<sup>3</sup>

Action -- a pivotal element of drama -- was born of the dance gesture of the baylans or catalonas (priestesses),

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<sup>1</sup>On dance as an element of theater, see Sheldon Cheney, The Theater: Three Thousand Years of Drama, Acting, and Stagecraft (New York: Tudor Publishing Co., 1935), p. 11.

<sup>2</sup>From Francisco de San Antonio's "Cronicas" in Emma Blair and James Robertson, The Philippine Islands, 1493-1898 (Cleveland: The Arthur H. Clark Co., 1916), Vol. XL, p. 333, we read thus: "... they had other idols which the Visayans called Diwata, and the Tagalogs anito, each of which had its special object and purpose.

<sup>3</sup>Epifanio de los Santos asserts that the Tagalog theater before the Spanish conquest was reduced to the dance associated with music and poetry. Cited by Gregorio Zaide in "Ancient Philippine Civilization," Encyclopedia of the Philippines (Manila: P. Vera and Sons Co., 1935-36), Vol. XV, p. 70.

and from the chanted prayers accompanied by native musical instruments arose poetry and song. Loarca gives the following description of a typical primitive religious ritual in his "Relacion de las Yslas Filipinas":

The priestesses dress very gaily with garlands on their heads, and are resplendent in gold. They bring to the place of sacrifice some petarillas (a kind of earthen jar) full of rice wine, besides a live hog, and a quantity of prepared food. Then the priestesses chant a song and invoke the demon who appears to them in gold. Then he enters their bodies and hurls them to the ground, foaming at the mouth as one possessed. All of these take place to the sound of bells and kettledrums. Then they rise and taking a spear pierces the heart of the hog. Upon an altar erected there, they placed the dressed hog, rice, bananas, wine, and other articles of food that they have brought.

On acting we read:

... the catalonan before them all spoke some words between her teeth while she opened the animal ... the devil became incarnate in her, or the catalonan feigned to be him by grimaces and shaking of the feet and hands and foaming at the mouth, acting as if out of her senses.

There are several points here. (1) We discern a kind of organization among the leaders of the sacrificial rites.

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<sup>4</sup>Blair and Robertson, op. cit., Vol. V. p. 133.

<sup>5</sup>Ibid., p. 76.