

FOREWORD

Sugbuanon theatre is the theatre of the people in the provinces of Central Visayas and Mindanao where the native speech is the language of Sugbu (Cebu) province. It comprises a vast field of creative endeavor. It includes, first of all, the Sugbuanon playwrights—those who have held that a play's only excuse for being is to entertain, as well as those who believe that a play should not merely entertain but record and communicate the values and moral ideals of a nation. It comprehends plays written in Sugbuanon, in Spanish, and in English, ranging from the scriptless folk theatricals—like the *balitaw*, the *duplo*, and the *kulilisi*—of unremembered date and origin, to the lavishly mounted zarzuelas of the city stage in the twenties, the sophisticated plays of school and seminary, and the popular productions of radio, movie screen, and television of contemporary times. Also within its scope is the performance of urban and rural artists of the fine arts and performing arts, as well as the activity of workers in the more practical arts of management and production. Sugbuanon theatre includes, above all, the audience—that innumerable multitude in the city theaters and around open-air stages on city street corners and at barrio fiestas—for whose pleasure the creative energies of the theatre artists have been engaged. It includes playgoers who ask only that a play be “maanindot,” nice, and others who expect a play to arouse them to great intensities of thought and feeling. An exposition of the entire spectrum of Sugbuanon theatre would thus be an exposition, not simply of theatrical forms and trends, but ultimately of the character and culture of the Sugbuanon Filipino. Of a certainty, no other expression of Sugbuanon culture yields keener insights into that culture than Sugbuanon theatre.

An investigation in this field would require the time and dedicated labor of many students of Philippine culture. Beginning efforts have already been made in that direction, largely in the form of graduate research. Many more studies are called for. And this work is offered to further encourage our young students to contribute to research in this field.

This work is an introduction to a critical anthology of pre-war Sugbuanon drama. It presents a brief historical survey and chronicle of pre-war Sugbuanon theatre and three plays of the anthology. It is the first main publication from a research project funded by

the Social Science and Humanities Research Committee of the University of the Philippines.

This work concerns itself with the vernacular theatre from 1902 to 1941—the period of the first shining of the Sugbuanon stage. New Year's Day 1902 is a landmark in the history of the Sugbuanon stage. On this day, a play entitled *Gugma sa Yutang Natawhan* (Love of Country), the first written completely in Sugbuanon-Visayan and depicting real people and events in recent Sugbuanon history, opened at the European-play-oriented Teatro Junquera in the capital town of Sugbu. It was an instant success. It had been written by Vicente Sotto, a popular journalist and an ardent scholar in Sugbuanon language and history, and the publisher of *Ang Suga*, the first vernacular Sugbuanon newspaper in the country. His play ushered in the period of the realistic drama of Sugbuanon life which held the stage for over three decades in the capital town of Sugbu while at the same time becoming a part of the fiesta tradition in the rural towns and barrios of Sugbu and neighboring provinces. In its incandescent years, this drama was represented at its best in the field of the zarzuela and the reflective play by the works of Buenaventura Rodriguez (1893-1940) and in the field of the comical play, by the robust farces and laughing scenes of Pio A. Kabahar (1892-1977). The plays of these two dramatists maintained their popularity even after the *teatro* went dark at the beginning of the war in December 1941.

Specifically, this work aims to give the student, as well as the general reader, an acquaintance with the history of this period in the life of Sugbuanon theatre, an impression of its atmosphere and of the wide-reaching appeal of its new drama, and some insights into the value system of the Sugbuanon folk as reflected in the playwrights' choice of themes and in the audiences' response to the plays. This work aims, in addition, to introduce the student to the art of Rodriguez and of Kabahar—by the best means of all, a reading of some of their plays—and to show him how they stood among their contemporaries as, above all else, men of the theatre. Finally, this work offers the student of Philippine theatre history, biography, and bibliography a chronological record of theatrical and other related events of the period compiled from the *Bag-ong Kusog*, 1915-1941. The terms *Sugbuanon theatre* and *Sugbuanon drama* are used to refer exclusively to that theatre and drama which is characterized by the use of the language native to Sugbu province.

This book consists of three parts. Part One comprises a brief historical survey of Sugbuanon theatre and a descriptive account of

the careers and several works of Buenaventura Rodriguez and Piux A. Kabahar based on data recorded in the *Bag-ong Kusog*. Part Two contains the original texts of the first set of anthology plays—Rodriguez's three-act *Bomba Nyor!* and Kabahar's one-act *Babaye ug Lalake* and *Miss Dolying*—together with English translations and notes. Part Three is a chronicle of Sugbuanon theatre derived from the *Bag-ong Kusog*, to which are appended an alphabetical listing with dates of all play titles entered therein and a similar listing of playwrights and their works.

Part One is a survey of the theatre mainly in Sugbu province where most of the performances recorded in the *Bag-ong Kusog* took place. The survey is divided into three periods. Within each period, the *dulang binisaya* or the Sugbuanon plays in the Sotto tradition, are classified according to the three principal types by which the plays were then identified—the *dulang hinonihan*, the *dulang kataw-anan*, and the *drama* or *dulang mahinuklogon*—and according to the four areas in which the plays were performed—the *teatro* or city theatre, the open-air stage of the city street and city barrio fiestas, the town stage of the poblacion and barrio fiestas, and the provincial stage outside of Sugbu. After the classification of the *dulang binisaya*, the Sugbuanon plays of the old traditional theatre before Sotto are listed or described in chronological order, with emphasis on the *moro-moro*, the folk's favorite theatrical. Next, the popular and other news-worthy actors of the day are considered. Then the audience is presented. The plays of Rodriguez and Kabahar, together with audience opinion on them, are surveyed last.

Depending upon availability of information from the source, the description of plays in the survey ranges from identification merely by title or author's name or genre or place and occasion of performance, to that which includes all these data plus a listing of artists' names, a statement of theme, a synopsis of the argument, and a quotation or paraphrase of significant critical remarks. Only details relevant to the careers of Rodriguez and Kabahar as men of the theatre are included in Part One, but significant data revealing their achievements in other fields of endeavor and their many-sided contribution to the life of the Sugbuanon community are recorded in the chronicle in Part Three.

The plays selected and translated for Part Two by the compiler are among those not noticed in the *Bag-ong Kusog*. They have been selected firstly, because they will serve to extend the reader's knowledge about Rodriguez and Kabahar beyond what he can learn from Part One; secondly, because they are of contemporary interest; and

thirdly, because they have been warmly received by students from under-graduate and graduate classes in literature. *Bomba Nyor!* includes an exposé of the tragic situation where corrupt practices have come to be accepted by the people as the normal way by which elections are won. *Babaye ug Lalake* is a study from the comic point of view of the universal problem of unfulfilled love. *Miss Dolying* entertains and teaches with a light-hearted comedy of deceivers deceived and a characterization of what many men have considered *the ideal womanly*.

Part Three complements Part One. It chronicles 1426 play performances comprising probably two thousand different plays, together with other related events, which constitute the specifics of the survey and biographical accounts in Part One. What would have been more than 1200 footnote entries are organized into chronicle entries with parenthetical documentation. Thus Part Three serves as the documentation section for Part One.

Part One and Part Three are based entirely on information derived from the book-bound compilation of the *Bag-ong Kusog* in the Vicente Rama Collection at the University of the Philippines. This compilation was donated to the University in 1972 by the family of the late Vicente Rama through Governor and Mrs. Osmundo Rama of Sugbu. It represents the newspaper's twenty-six and one half years of publication from May 1915 to December 1941.

The *Bag-ong Kusog* was published in Sugbu, Sugbu, by its owner Vicente Rama, a member of one of the capital's prominent families, who earned a name for himself as journalist, writer of fiction, theatre critic, and public servant. From the beginning, the *Bag-ong Kusog* was interested in recording, among others, such events as were part of the social history of the Sugbuanon, particularly those related to the development of the Sugbuanon language and literature. It printed reports of, and remarks on, many a Sugbuanon and Spanish *funcion teatral* at the *teatros* of the capital. It carried theatrical news, comments, rumors, and gossip, not only from around the *siyudad* (*ciudad*), as Sugbu, the capital of Sugbu province, has always been known to the Sugbuanon, but also from the poblaciones and barrios of rural Sugbu, as well as from a number of other places outside of Sugbu. The reporters were either its own employees or other individuals who wanted to describe fiestas in their hometowns. Rama himself contributed critiques of plays acted at the *teatros*. The number of theatrical facts recorded in the *Bag-ong Kusog* increased as it grew from its initial four-

page bi-weekly edition in 1915 to its thirty-six-page weekly edition beginning in 1936.

The *Bag-ong Kusog* started out modestly on May 2, 1915 as the four-page bilingual newspaper, *Nueva Fuerza*, which was issued on Sundays and Thursdays. It consisted of two pages of news and an editorial in Spanish and two pages of the same in Sugbuanon, along with short literary pieces, under the heading *Bag-ong Kusog* which is Sugbuanon for *Nueva Fuerza*. It had six pages in 1917 and eight in 1918. In 1920 it came out on Tuesdays, Thursdays, and Saturdays. In all this time the Spanish and Sugbuanon sections of the newspaper shared equal space. In September 1921, *Nueva Fuerza* and *Bag-ong Kusog* became separate entities. *Nueva Fuerza* was made a vehicle of journalism in Spanish and English. *Bag-ong Kusog* began its independent life as an all-Sugbuanon weekly. It was issued on Wednesdays and varied in number of pages from eight to sixteen. It became a fourteen-page Friday weekly in 1923, increased to twenty-six pages in 1931, and attained to its full length of thirty-six pages in 1936.

The *Bag-ong Kusog* is one of Sugbu's most valuable newspaper sources of pre-war theatrical information. It has recorded for posterity the first luminous period of Sugbuanon theatre. Its several descriptive accounts of play performances contain information on themes, dramatic genres, playwrights, musical composers, producers, directors, actors, promoters, scene designers, costume donors, places and occasions of performance, ticket prices, audiences—in short, a wealth of detail that produces a distinct image of the theatre of the time and a feeling of its atmosphere. It identifies about 430 play titles which are significant indicators of thematic preferences among playwrights and audiences. Its brief notices where plays are identified only by genre or place and occasion of performance offer statistical evidence of the Sugbuanon's enthusiasm for the *dulang binisaya* i.e. the new Sugbuanon' drama, of its far-flung popularity, and its variety of form. The *Bag-ong Kusog* has recorded a considerable amount of biographical and critical information on Rodriguez and Kabahar. Moreover, it carries an important historical account of the state of the theatre at the turn of the century and of the birth of the drama depicting Sugbuanon life and history—Vicente Sotto's "Mga Handumanan sa Sugbu" (July 4, 1924, pp. 2-3). It has also recorded the highly significant fact that the *dulang binisaya* had to compete with Spanish drama both written locally or brought in by travelling companies of Spanish actors like the *Compania de Opereta y Zarzuela Iberia*, the *Compania de Opereta y Opera Española Torrijos-Blay*, and the *Compania Tagaroma-Carvajal* — a

