Wilder and Joaquin: A Literary Journey from Grover's Corners to Intramuros

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Thornton Wilder's *Our Town* (1938) and Nick Joaquin's *Portrait of the Artist as Filipino* (1952) exhibit fundamental structural affinities. Their affinities, however, are not always apparent. Wilder's play has been examined frequently in the context of the epic theater and the theatricalist drama. But it has never been analyzed as a product of a strictly Realist tradition. The Stage Manager who comes in and out of the dramatic action, the free manipulation of time and space, and the reliance on minimal and non-existent props—all emphatically negate a strict Realist interpretation and suggest an entirely different tradition. Joaquin's play, on the other hand, has been analyzed largely, if not exclusively, within the framework of dramatic Realism. The play, in fact, reflects a recognition of some of the Realist conventions—notably, the fourth-wall convention and the use of elaborate concrete props and period costumes. Moreover, the issue raised and explored in the play point clearly to their source in the contemporary Philippines experience, thus again reinforcing the "realistic" orientation of the play. The references to historical personages and events as well as the use of actual geographical landmarks (Intramuros, unlike Wilder's Gover's Corners, is not after all purely a product of Joaquin's imagination) serve to strengthen the impression of a play deeply rooted in real time and place. Consequently, the play's strengths and limitations are often examined according to Realist principles and assumptions. And yet Joaquin's play owes its structural orientation to two opposing dramatic traditions— the Realist as well as the theatricalist, the dramatic as well as the epic, the Aristotelian as well as the Shakespearean. In short, both to the Closed and to the Open Form (although this very mixture ultimately, by definition, aligns the play with the Open Form).

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The specific value of a comparative study of the structural tendencies of the two plays is the light that it sheds on their fundamental kinship beneath their surface differences. By comparing Joaquin's *Portrait* with Wilder's *Our Town*, which is a relatively "purer" embodiment of the Open Form, one gains a better understanding of how identical tendencies may yet manage to project apparently divergent manifestations. Moreover, a recognition of this dual debt allows one to examine Joaquin's play from a broader perspective. For instance, the narrative and didactic segments of *Portrait* may be seen as a weakness within a Realist framework since these elements tend to nullify the basically interactive nature of Realist drama. Also, the narrative segments may be seen as a variation of the aside, the monologue, and the direct audience address--devices that constitute an acknowledgment of the audience and, consequently, gesture of pointing, showing, and demonstrating exemplifies the distinguishing feature of the Open Form. The Stage Manager explicitly acknowledges audience presence, introduces the characters as actors, and makes clear that the dramatic presentation is only a play. He propels the action in seemingly arbitrary directions, changes, interrupts dialogue, and abstracts the central insights underlying the dramatic events. All this is done without any attempt at concealment.

Bitoy Camacho essentially fulfills the same functions: through his narrative introduction to each scene, he prepares the audience for what is to come. He establishes the mood and identifies the conflicting forces in the action. However, he never refers to the audience as "audience" or to the play as "play." His narratives or monologues are spoken in the general direction of the audience, but the acknowledgement of its presence, unlike that in *Our Town*, is only partial and implicit. Nevertheless, the deictic gesture of an "epic I" is fully realized in Bitoy's various self-conscious manipulations of space and time and of the sequence of events. By anticipating the events that are to unfold, he is in a sense directing audience attention to specific issues. The dramatic events themselves no longer seem to grow out purely from the interpersonal relationships of the various characters; they become a fulfillment or a demonstration of the oracular vision of the "epic I." This epic tendency, however, is associated only with Bitoy the narrator, not Bitoy the character. A relatively clear-cut line separates the two. In the narrative material that precedes each major scene, Bitoy assumes a broader perspective which transcends the immediate time and space of the action; he looks backward and forward, remembering the past and anticipating the future. However, once he physically enters the drama proper, this privileged perspective suddenly disintegrates and he loses his omniscience. He becomes an ordinary "realistic" character. Thus, Bitoy himself embodies that very dichotomy which the overall dramatic structure of the play suggests. By crossing this temporal line—that is, by physically stepping from the rubble of the postwar Intramuros— Bitoy emphasizes the two different worlds in *Portraits*. The idea of two contrasting worlds embodying the past and the present is themati-

cally crucial and this is, therefore, repeatedly conveyed and expressed in the treatment of the various dramatic elements. Bitoy is only one of the specific crystallizations of the thematic intent.

Bitoy is thus not exactly like the Stage Manager. His character shifts are regular and predictable and, as a result, do not approximate the surprise and the fluidity with which Wilder's Stage Manager assumes his varied roles. Now a prop-man pushing out a couple of trellises, now the-town historian giving the audience a quick run-down of the happenings in the intervening years between acts, the Stage Manager changes color, so to speak, with the ease of a chameleon. He is an actor playing the role of a Stage Manager who, in turn, plays various characters in the play-within-a-play including a Congregational minister, a druggist, and even an old lady. The change is unpredictable: it occurs at the most unforeseen times in unlikely places, with no regard for verisimilitude or apparent logic. But his is precisely the technique which makes the Stage Manager's deictic gesture more emphatic because he does not create an illusion, but instead repeatedly points to the separation of subject and object and refers to the characters as elements of a theatrical experience. Bitoy's transformations, on the other hand, are always psychologically prepared, no matter how flimsily at times. His contemplation of the rubble of postwar Intramuros leads smoothly to the fleshing out of his memory in the drama proper where he again becomes the confused young man that he was before the war; the fond reminiscences of Candida and Paula lead them and Bitoy to a reenactment of a past *tertulia* in a play-within-a-play. Everything is given some reason for its occurrence so that Bitoy never really achieves the richness and unpredictability of the Stage Manager. But this is how it should be: to make Bitoy more fully or consistently "epic" throughout the play is to destroy the very distinction between the world of the past and the world of the present which Bitoy partly dramatizes.

The total self-referentiality of the Stage Manager is conveyed not only by his multiple functions but also by his very title itself: Stage Manager. Although the title is never used in the dialogue, some of the Stage Manager's actions—announcing the cast and bringing some props onto the stage—strongly suggest the role, even to those who may not have read the playbill. The theatrical context is reinforced through references to the performance as a "play" and to the breaks in the presentation as "intermissions." The Woman in the Balcony, the Man in the Auditorium, and the Lady in the Box, although not named as such in the dialogue, nevertheless suggest a theatrical context because Mr. Webb treats them as members of the "audience." The Stage Manager's title indicates that he is essentially outside the play, that he moves beyond the more circumscribed world of the Gibbses and the Webbs. Bitoy, on the other hand, is more an insider than outsider. This is reflected in the fact that he interacts with the other characters more directly and more thoroughly.

Although the most significant similarity between the two plays is their com-

mon use of a narrator-actor, their choice and treatment of the other characters also reveal distinct similarities. Both employ a relatively large cast of characters *Our Town* has nearly forty and *Portrait* twenty-six. In each play, the characters reflect some definite grouping: in *Our Town* they are small town types of elements in a theatrical situation; in *Portrait* the characters clearly represent a cross-section of Philippine society, economically and culturally. In both plays, "dead" characters figure prominently. The three central characters in *Portrait*—Don Lorenzo, Candida, and Paula—were already killed in the war before the play proper opens. In *Our Town* various characters "die" at various points—Doc and Mrs. Gibbs, Joe Crowell, Wally, Emily, Simon Stimson—although their "death" does not necessarily stop them from participating in the action. Both plays use variation and parallelism in character choice. In Wilder's play the Webbs and the Gibbses are practically a mirror image of each other—a family consisting of a father and a mother, a daughter and a son. Their simultaneous presentation in Act I with their identical preoccupations and routines reinforces this parallelism. In Joaquin's play a similar relation is seen in the family of Don Lorenzo and that of Don Perico. The difference us that in Wilder the two families move toward their complete integration, particularly with the marriage of George and Emily, while in Joaquin the two families reflect an increasing divergence as a result of the contrary commitments that Don Lorenzo and Don Perico have chosen for themselves. Wilder underscores the common ties of humanity, Joaquin, the divisive force of conflicting values and loyalties. The tendency to present characters in terms of reactive or harmonic dyads can also be seen in Bitoy and Tony who seem to function as an ego and alter-ego to each other, or in Candida and Paula who are different sides of the same coin, or in the journalists and the socialites who, in their apparent commitment or lack of it, still betray similarly flawed perceptions of themselves and their world.

Wilder and Joaquin show a strong similarity in their treatment of space and time. In both plays a narrator-actor appears on stage and establishes the spatial and temporal framework of the action, initially through verbal scenery and then through actual or stylized props. Both plays identify a town as the spatial field of the action--Grover's Corners and Intramuros. But the boundaries of the town, in both cases, gradually expand to embrace a much wider symbolic territory—Wilder's Everywhere and Joaquin's Philippines. Both plays also focus on the topographical heart of the town: the Main Street of *Our Town* and the Calle Real of *Portrait*. From then on the focus in both becomes even narrower and moves into the kitchens of the Webbs and the Gibbses in one case, and into the living room of the Marasigans in the other. Their treatment of setting differs in some important aspects. *Portrait* uses a rich variety of concrete objects and sets to flesh out its dramatic space, and it sets up the stage as a self-contained room with the proscenium opening functioning as the fourth wall which supposedly separates actors from audience. *Our Town*, on the other hand, makes no similar

impression it sets up the stage in a manner that allows a simultaneous presentation of various areas of the houses and even the town. If there are walls and boundaries at all, they are more tacitly recognized or verbally defined than physically presented. Props are minimized and used more flexibly than those in *Portrait*. Both plays, however, employ non-existent props, particularly in connection with some pantomimic scenes.

Wilder and Joaquin also use time similarly, with some qualification in their relative freedom. Both plays specify definite temporal contexts. "The day is May 7, 1901. The time is just before dawn," the Stage Manager says in his opening lines. Bitoy Camacho also gives the month and year of the action proper, in a less direct ways: "I remember coming here one day early in October back in 1941—just two months before the war broke out." Both seem to follow a general time sequence that is more or less natural; that is, the acts are arranged according to a historical sequence. In *Our Town* Act I occurs in 1901, Act II in 1904, and Act III in 1913. Although there are big gaps between acts, the overall sequence can still be considered as historical or natural. Moreover, in each act the movement of the action follows the natural movement of time from dawn to evening. Likewise, in *Portrait* all the major scenes are set in October 1941, with Scene I taking place in early October, Scene II a week later, and Scene III two days later. However, despite the general historical framework of both plays, there are also methodical attempts to undermine the strict linearity of time through all kinds of temporal digressions and disruptions. In *Our Town* this is chiefly done by the Stage Manager who periodically interrupts the immediate action to look forward to the future or backward to the past, or simply to introduce an entirely different interest (audience participation in a question-and-answer forum). Bitoy achieves the same effect by shuttling back and forth between the narrative and the dramatic segments with their different temporal frameworks. The periodic shifts from postwar Intramuros to prewar Intramuros and back again blur the strict linearity of time. Also, within each major scene itself, there are other devices that serve to alter the temporal focus and perspective. The plays-within-a-play found in Scenes I and II essentially reenact situations from the distant past and thus may be considered as disruptive of linear time. The ritualized gesture of remembering indulged in by practically all of the characters ("Remember when ...?" is the most often repeated rhetorical question in the play) likewise changes the temporal focus from the immediate to the distant, from the now to the then. Thus, ultimately, in both plays time is no longer just historical and linear but cyclical and even simultaneous (that is, the various temporal dimensions have a simultaneous existence). Time has been redefined and reconstituted.

There are, of course, structural differences between the plays. None is more emphatic than the treatment of action. *Our Town* does not raise in the initial act any one particular issue which is then subjected to all manner of complication and contrary influence, and resolved in the end. In other words,

there is action but there is, strictly speaking, no plot or no sense of a cause-and-effect progression underlying the action. The action consists of episodic vignettes dealing with ordinary incidents and situations in the daily lives of the townsfolk of Grover's Corners. The incidents themselves are quite loosely connected and do not immediately present a strong sense of unity and direction until the Stage Manager reveals their organizing principle in Act II, which is that of the human journey from birth to death with all its accompanying social rituals. Once seen in the context of man's archetypal rituals, these episodic incidents acquire a new coherence. The choice of specific action in *Our Town* tends to be elemental—growing up, falling in love, marrying, having children, dying. The incidents in their recurrence and changelessness suggest the eternal and the universal in the human condition.

In *Portrait*, on the other hand, action can be mapped out in terms of a clearly defined issue which is introduced early in the play: the pragmatic efforts of the Marasigan sisters to cope with the mounting economic and moral pressures being exerted upon them. Specific characters in the play work to influence the sisters' reaction to their dilemma: whether or not to exchange the painting and the family house for some financial security. This limited pragmatic issue, however, reveals increasingly wider moral implications. The journalists and the socialites come in and explore their reactions to the painting, thereby defining not only their moral relation to the painting but also to the values symbolized by the work. The eventual decision of Candida and Paula, therefore, can no longer be viewed as limited or inconsequential because it is firmly tied in to the general moral crisis of the Filipino people who are undergoing a radical change in their social order and in their moral orientation. The question of economic survival and moral compromise is kept in the foreground; it is relentlessly pursued against the human drama of struggle, temptation, betrayal, and hope, until it is finally resolved in Scene III. However, unlike the action in *Our Town* which becomes a universalized reflection of man in his living and dying, the action in *Portrait* is generalizeable mainly as a national, not universal, experience. Its roots are too deeply entrenched in the soil of Philippine history and social order to allow a much wider thematic impact. Both plays end with a strong sense of finality: in *Our Town* because the action has moved full circle, life ending in death, but an end which is also a beginning; in *Portrait* because the main conflicting forces have found their resolution in the moral victory of the protagonists, Candida and Paula, and the defeat of the antagonists. And finally, in both works the narrator-actor functions as a unifying or a framing device by opening and then closing the play.

There are other more localized similarities. Both make allusions to war as a recurrent human reality: in Wilder the French Revolution and the Napoleonic Wars, the American Civil War, and World War I; in Joaquin the Tro-

pan War, the various Philippine "insurrections" against Spain and the United States, and World War II. However, war in *Our Town* remains a distant reality, impinging on the lives of the townsfolk of Grover's Corners only peripherally. Just as Emily embodies all the rich possibilities of girlhood and, later, womanhood, Joe Crowell stands for the touching loss of every war dead whose dreams, known only to his family and loved ones, must lie stillborn in a grave that is often unmarked and in a land that is far away from his home. Making one represent the many is a symbolic or an exemplary strategy Wilder repeatedly uses in *Our Town*. Partly for that reason, Wilder is content with a less direct and more limited treatment of the idea of war because the single instance already suggests the universal experience. Moreover, war itself constitutes only one aspect of the total reality of man. Thus, it cannot be allowed to usurp the play's thematic focus.

In *Portrait*, on the other hand, war is a more fully realized metaphor for the moral crisis and the collision of values in the Philippine society as well as in the outside world. This moral disequilibrium permeates the atmosphere of the play, and the war, which is the universal manifestation of that disequilibrium, has an invisible but unmistakable presence. All the characters are well aware of its threat and constantly allude to it, although some react to it with seeming reckless bravado. By constantly talking about it, they bring the war which is brewing outside into the world of the drama proper. The war itself is not a passive reality whose presence is effectively banished by simply ignoring it. It is highly active: it intrudes into the world of the characters without invitation and ceremony. In Act I it reappears in the guise of the air-raid siren which drowns out any attempts at human communication. Thus, these visual and aural extensions of war totally dominate certain points of the play and emphatically suggest the centrality of the image of war in the theme of *Portrait*. Indeed, it is the ruthlessness of war which ultimately proves stronger than the moral conviction and spiritual superiority of Don Lorenzo and his daughters: they, after all, were destroyed by the war. Only Bitoy, the remember among the rubble, is left to rebuild the city of his fathers with his song. The ending suggests man's indestructible will for survival and renewal: as long as the artist can still sing and dream, all hope is not lost. Thus, despite its elegiac lamentation over a vanished past, *Portrait* is ultimately a celebration of hope; just as *Our Town*, despite Emily's death, conveys an end which is pregnant with the possibility of new beginnings.

In both plays, religion is used as a recurrent motif. In *Our Town* human joys and sorrows are celebrated as religious ceremonies: baptism, wedding, burial. In *Portrait* the church likewise plays a role in the moral struggle of the Marasigan sisters by strengthening their resolve to live according to the spiritual (Roman Catholic) values of the past. Scene III, for example, conspicuously opens with a reference to the sisters having heard the Sunday Mass. This implies their spiritual reaffirmation. Moreover, the play climaxes with the religious procession of La

Naval de Manila, which is a celebration of a people's spiritual commitment. Don Lorenzo's emergence from his self-exile coincides, not accidentally, with the moral victory of his daughters and the procession itself and, thus, takes on the implication of religious rebirth. In *Our Town* religious hymns thread in and out of the people's lives like a refrain. Appropriately, the hymn "Blessed Be the Tie that Binds" in particular accompanies the people in their journey from the cradle to the grave, a journey made less lonely because shared as a communal experience. There are other songs, religious and otherwise: "Are Thou Weary, Art Thou Languid?," "Love Divine, All Love Excelling," Handel's "Largo," and Mendelssohn's "Wedding March." In *Portrait* Don Perico laments the coming "Day of Wrath" by singing "Dies irae, dies illa" as though in a requiem mass and the procession of La Naval de Manila is accompanied by the Gavotta Marcha Processional. (Secular music is also used to characterize people: Tony plays the "Vereda Tropical," Susan and Violet sing the "a-tisket, a-tasket," and Candida plays the waltz from the *Merry Widow* on the piano.)

In both plays there are references to Marxist questions. This is especially true with *Portrait* where the journalists in Science I engage in a protracted discussion on exploitation and the bourgeoisie, revolution and the proletariat. In *Our Town* the question leveled at Mr. Webb by the Man in the Auditorium makes a more general, but no less unmistakable, reference to a Marxist issue: "Is there no one in town aware of social injustice and industrial inequality?" The issue addressed by the question is obviously not a central thematic concern of Wilder who deliberately refuses to explore the complex ramifications of the issue. But this brief reference to a contemporary social problem indicates his awareness of the problem and may also be seen as a partial retort to the criticism of the Marxist critic Michael Gold who, in an article, brings Wilder to task for his lack of social consciousness in such earlier works as *The Cabala* (1926), *The Angel that Troubled the Waters* (1928), *The Bridge of San Luis Rey* (1929), and *The Woman of Andros* (1930). The more extensive treatment of Marxist ideology in Joaquin may be more appropriate. With its largely agricultural economy, the Philippines tends to be divided between a small handful of rich and powerful landlords who own the vast tracts of arable land in the country and the masses of small tenant-farmers who work the land and get a share of the yield, enough to allow them to live on subsistence level but not enough to allow them to liberate themselves completely from a lifelong dependence on the landlords' land and money. Marxism, therefore, has exerted a certain desperate attraction to the Filipino poor who perceive in it a promise for their economic liberation. The journalists' exploration of Marxist philosophy, however, does not really go beyond the superficiality of cliches and slogans. Whether this is Joaquin's criticism of those people whose understanding of the ideology is only skin-deep and whose espousal of the cause is based on what is fashionable, or this is Joaquin's rejection of the viability of a Marxist solution to Philippine socio-economic problems, seems unclear. His

ambivalence toward the issue is reflected in the fact that he depicts the posturings of the journalists as basically a parody, even as he recognizes the validity of their anger and cynicism. Incidentally, both plays use an editor as a character: Mr. Webb with his Grover's Corners *Sentinel* and Pete with his *Daily Scream*. The choice of newspaper title in each case is very telling. The idea of *Sentinel* evokes something dignified, trustworthy, and vigilant; the *Daily Scream*, on the other hand, is a definite parody of the journalistic predilection for cheap sensationalism and partly defines Joaquin's attitude toward the journalists. This is ironic because Joaquin himself is a professional journalist and Bitoy Camacho, who really carries on Don Lorenzo's vision, is also a journalist.

Both plays make an allusion to James Joyce's *Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* (1916). Joaquin's choice of title for his play immediately forces this relation. Although this title is commonly used by painters for their self-portraits as Don Lorenzo is apparently doing in the play, the allusion to Joyce is obviously intentional. A common thematic preoccupation clearly underlies both novel and play: the artist's uncompromising dedication to his art and his convictions. As Stephen Dedalus says: "I will not serve that in which I no longer believe whether it calls itself my home, my fatherland or my church: and I will try to express myself in some mode of life or art as freely as I can and as wholly as I can . . ." Don Lorenzo in *Portrait* has essentially made the same commitment and is now suffering the consequences of his decision. Interestingly, Don Lorenzo is using the very weapons that Stephen has appropriated for his defense: "silence, exile, and cunning". Wilder's allusion to Joyce's novel in *Our Town* is very slight and certainly not comparable to the more substantial debt of his *Skin of Our Teeth* (1942) to Joyce's *Finnegans Wake* (1939). The allusion simply consists of an expanding device reflected in the minister's letter to Jane Crofut which uses an address that starts out with Jane's name and then progressively broadens the spatial context to include the town, the county, the state, the country, the continent, the hemisphere, the planet, the Solar System, the universe, and finally the Mind of God. This device is found in Joyce where Stephen has written on the flyleaf of his geography book the following:

Stephen Dedalus
Class of Elements
Clongowes Wood College
Sallins
County Kildare
Ireland
Europe
The World
The Universe

As in Joyce, this device is used in *Our Town* to suggest the awesome immensity of a God that must encompass all elements of His creation. (One of the towns lying around Mt. Manadnock by Grover's Corners is called Dublin).

Joaquin's use of literary allusion and reference is, understandably, much more extensive than Wilder's because *Portrait* is partly an examination of the artistic heritage that is implied in the Spanish past as well as in the American present. The more obvious references are the following, in no particular order: Virgil, Homer, St. Augustine, Aquinas, Dante, Shakespeare, Calderon, Donne, Byron, Victor Hugo, Sinclair Lewis, Yeats, Eliot, and Hemingway. Aside from the literary references, there are also others of a more political or historical nature. Marx and Trotsky are closely related to the journalists' discussion of Marxist ideology. Certain historical figures who played significant roles in the Philippine revolution—including Rizal, the Luna brothers, Aguinaldo, Del Pilar, and Lopez Jaena—are referred to as contemporaries of Don Lorenzo. This strategy is used to evoke a sense of texture with the various historical and literary references functioning as counterpoints, in the minor key, to the main theme of the play.

Wilder also uses a variety of references to define the cultural climate of the town and to endow it with a sense of history: the Bible, *Robinson Crusoe*, Shakespeare's plays, the *New York Times*, the Constitution of the United States, the Treaty of Versailles, the Lindberg flight. There are also indirect quotations from Shaw and from Edgar Lee Masters.

Three of the most important place names in literature and history are found in *Our Town* and *Portrait*: Babylon, Greece, and Rome. Wilder relates Grover's Corners to the ancient world cities by underscoring their fundamental similarity. As the Stage Manager points out, the people in ancient Babylon went through the same daily routines and social rituals that the Webbs and the Gibbses are following: father and children come home at the end of the day, smoke goes up the chimney, mother cooks supper, they eat, and then they go to bed. Nothing much has changed, essentially. Greece, as well as Homer's *Iliad*, is of course suggested by the Trojan War which is the background of Don Lorenzo's painting. Rome is likewise suggested since it is the city that Aenaes was destined to build in Virgil's *Aeneid*. To an extent, the destiny of the two cities continue to be echoed in the destruction and renewal of Intramuros. Joaquin's treatment of Babylon, however, emphasizes the contrast between the past and the present, instead of their essential similarity as Wilder has done. In *Portrait* the idea of Babylon is more or less equated with a glorious past or legacy which has somehow become out of place in the modern world. Thus, the Marasigan sisters see themselves as "Babylonians": "We can only catch rats and speak Babylonian. What place is there for us in the world?" Don Perico makes the same unhappy observation about his dying language and the inability of the old and the new generation to speak to each other in a common language: "Who among the young writers now

can read my poems? My poems may as well be written in Babylonian!"

In both, the references and allusions to various literary and historical elements—works, events, and personages—point to sources external to the plays and, therefore, serve to breach any sense of self-containment. As Szondi has pointed out earlier, these are the very devices which reflect the "epic" theatre because they actively undermine the absolute or primary nature of the work. References, allusions, and quotations are like little fingers pointing outward to their original sources. The historical context is, of course, central to the theme of *Portrait*. But even in *Our Town*, the recurrent establishment of a direct connection between the events in the play proper and the events in the "real" world creates a sense of "reality" in the play. Realism, which Wilder exploits through his use of credible commonplace characters speaking a common language and acting in ordinary everyday situations, remains an important dimension of the play because it is this quality which anchors it firmly to a universally recognizable world.

Notwithstanding the apparent thematic differences in Wilder and Joaquin, the wealth of structural and localized similarities between *Our Town* and *Portrait* invariably raises the question of Wilder's specific influence on Joaquin. The identification of strong similarities between two works does not automatically establish a direct influence. The two authors may have arrived at the same conception and execution independently of each other. Or they may have derived their common qualities from a third outside source. Or their common elements may be archetypically conditioned, elements permanently available in the imaginative repertory of man's consciousness. Any of these circumstantial configurations is possible.

Historical evidence, however, would initially suggest some direct, or indirect, connection. *Our Town* was a Broadway hit and a Pulitzer Prize winner in 1938. This fact is crucial because it suggests that they play had generated a solid popular and critical reputation in the United States and, conceivably, a corresponding curiosity of interest among those interested in American drama outside the country. Joaquin's *Portrait* was written in 1945. There is a good seven years which separates the two plays. The reputation of a celebrated play like *Our Town* should have taken less time than that to cross the Pacific Ocean and arrive in the Philippines. Since Joaquin is widely-read and widely-traveled (he has been to the United States several times), the possibility of his being exposed to Wilder's *Our Town* before 1945, in an actual performance or in book form, is highly probable. The Philippine reception of *Our Town* has been generally warm and even enthusiastic: it has in fact been "adapted" into Pilipino by Onofre Pagsanghan in *Doon Po Sa Amin*. Rolando Tinio, a Filipino writer and critic, considers *Our Town* as one of the dramatic vehicles which have made a "satisfactory impact" among Filipino theatre-goers and, one would imagine, among Filipino playwrights as well. But this characterizes the play's general and current reception; it does not say when the play was first produced in the Philippines, nor does it specify how it was

received initially. These last questions are more crucial in establishing a direct relation between *Our Town* and *Portrait*. Generally, Filipino playwrights *do* seek inspiration from Western playwrights, as another Filipino critic has observed. And it is reasonable to suppose that Wilder could have been a potential influence on Joaquin. However, all this remains highly conjectural. The question of influence can be decided unequivocally only if specific facts are established and specific questions are answered. Was Joaquin actually exposed to Wilder's play, in one form or another, before he wrote his *Portrait*? This is the most crucial question. And this question could be resolved best through a direct statement from Joaquin himself and through actual documents (say, newspaper clippings indicating the date of the first production of *Our Town* in Manila) which would help establish the factual and direct connection between the two works. Lacking such documents here in the United States, one refrains from any definitive assertion about the influence of Wilder on Joaquin.

This problem is compounded by the possibility that the influence might have been indirect. *Portrait* has a more obvious affinity with Tennessee Williams' *Glass Menagerie* (1945). Again, like *Our Town*, Williams became an almost instantaneous success, and like Wilder's play, it enjoys a similar warm reception in the Philippines. It has also been translated into Pilipino as *Laurang Kristal* by Rolando Tinio. The structural affinities between Williams and Joaquin are striking: both use a narrator actor who plays practically identical roles in both plays (William's Tom and Joaquin's Bitoy); both are "memory" plays growing out of the mind of a central character; both have two women characters who are trapped in the hopelessness of their present and in the tenuousness of their future and dreams (Amanda and Laura in Williams, Candida and Paula in Joaquin); both employ a character who, briefly, suggests the possibility of fulfillment (Laura's gentlemen caller, Jim, the sisters' "Principe de Asturias" in the person of Tony, their lodger); both use the picture of the absent father as a symbol of an uncompromising commitment to a specific ideal of lifestyle; both employ the detail of a light bill not being paid; both give the physical darkness some symbolic significance; both acknowledge a "fourth wall" and then proceed to breach it; both make use of pantomime and natural acting, concrete props and absent objects. All these elements strongly suggest a direct relation between Williams and Joaquins, but again the lack of factual evidence relating to Joaquin's exposure to the play precludes a more definite statement about any direct influence. William's *Glass Menagerie*, however, has been patently influenced by Wilder's *Our Town*. Consequently, to the extent that a direct relation can be established between Williams and Joaquin, an indirect influence by Wilder on Joaquin can also be implied.

But one thing is certain: the tendencies of the Open Form found in *Portrait* are not derivable from Wilder alone. The actual structural inspiration and sources of the play may be closer to home. A brief look at the popular Philippine dramatic tradition indicates that it is relatively expressive of the Open Form. For instance,

the Passion Play or the *Cenaculo*, which is still performed today in the country during Lent, derives from the medieval liturgical drama. The *moro-moro* is a blood-and-thunder type of drama dealing with the victory of Christians over infidels; the clown, one of its stock characters, "would make satirical comments on the play, and might even, if he dared, criticize the town officials." The *zarzuela*, which is recently enjoying a popular revival, is clearly a direct appropriation of a Spanish and Italian dramatic form from the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. As one critic describes it:

> *The zarzuela at its best resembles a good revue, with music, dances, songs, acting, slapstick, and a bit of a plot all thrown together. At the slightest provocation, hero, heroine, stern father, villain, and all the other stock characters burst into song.*

And finally, the vaudeville, which reached the height of its popularity during the 30s and 40s (around the time when Joaquin was writing the *Portrait*), is another extremely theatrical dramatic form combining pantomime, dialogue, song, and dance. All this suggests that the structural basis of *Portrait* partly derives from the popular dramatic tradition of the country. Joaquin's use of these old elements and practices has made them new again.

Wilder and Joaquin each in his own way has created a work that is a unique expression of a personal vision and at the same time an expression that is firmly rooted in the main traditions of Western drama. Their thematic preoccupations are not identical. But both playwrights share a common tendency toward the epic theater and thus the Open Form in their treatment of dramatic structure. In both, the choice of form enhances and clarifies the theme; in both form creates, and becomes, meaning. Wilder starts out with a presentation of an American experience in Grover's Corners. But by focusing on the elemental patterns and rituals that attend the people's living and dying, he manages to transcend the finite and suggest the universal in man—what is true for all men everywhere and always. Joaquin, like Wilder, begins with a narrow context: the attempts of one Filipino family to come to grips with the changing economic, social, and moral realities. But Joaquin also suggests a progressively expanding implication by repeatedly relating the experience of the family to the wider historical, literary, religious, and mythological experiences. Thus, in Joaquin the individual also becomes more than itself: it begins to embody a national and possibly even a universal reality. The Open Form is eminently a vehicle of such an expansive vision. In both *Our Town* and *Portrait*, the vision has found its expressive realization in the form. This is ultimately the special achievement of Wilder and Joaquin in their plays.