

PASYON

The *pasyon*, from Spanish *passion*, is a type of doctrinal and didactic religious verse that narrates the life of Jesus Christ. The *pasyon* is usually written in the *quintilla* verse, that is, a stanza of 5 lines with each line containing 8 syllables. A few examples use the *lalabindalawahin* or *plosa* form, that is, a stanza of four lines with each line containing 12 syllables. Both use assonantal rhymes.

The *pasyon* is often chanted antiphonally in the *pabasa* (reading) held during Ash Wednesday, the Sundays of Lent, and Holy Week. Two or more singers alternate in chanting the verses of the text, while seated in front of an altar. Chanting styles may be plaintive or fast, and may incorporate popular melodies. The *pabasa* may be held at home, in a *visita* (chapel), or in a makeshift tent called *kubol* in Tagalog and *abungabong* in Ilocano. The *pabasa* has been popular since the 19th century.

The *kalbaryuhan* of Marinduque consists of impromptu dramatizations or improvisations of scenes from the *pasyon*. A question-and-answer form of chanting the *pasyon* is known as the *tapatan*. The *pasyon* is also the basis for the script of the *sinakulo*, a dramatized life of Christ that employs all the conventions of stage—sets, props, costumes, lights, and sounds.

The *pasyon* first appears in Tagalog in 1703 or 1704. The first published text is Gaspar Aquino de Belen's *Mahal na Passion ni Jesu Christong Panginoong Natin na Tola* (Holy Passion of Our Lord Jesus Christ in Verse) which is appended to a book of prayers for the dying. There are indications that other narratives of the life of Christ appeared in the vernacular before Aquino de Belen's, but texts of these *pasyon* have yet to be found. Aquino de Belen's narrative appears to have been based on Fr. Juan de Padilla's *Retablo de la vida de Cristo* (Tableaux of the Life of Christ), 1585. The Tagalog *pasyon*, however, cannot be called a mere translation of the Spanish because the native poets have changed the text by injecting their own sensibility into the characters that people the narrative.

Aquino de Belen's text begins with the Last Supper, during which Jesus leaves his apostles a sign of his presence in the bread and wine, and ends with the martyrdom of the centurion Longinus. Aquino de Belen's text was originally intended for chanting during a wake. During the 18th century, the *pasyon* became so popular that by the early 19th century a new text emerged, the *Casaysayan nang Pasióng Mahal ni Jesu Christong Panginoon Natin na Sucat Ipag-alabng Puso ng Sinomang Babasa* (The Story of the Holy Passion of Our Lord Jesus Christ That Should Inflammé the Heart of the Reader). Though much of its verses are paraphrases of the earlier *pasyon*, the 1814 text expands the narrative to include the story of the Creation and Fall and the awaited Last Judgment of the world. Because it begins with the story of Creation which is narrated in the Biblical book, Genesis, the text is more popularly known as *Pasyong Genesis*. It is also called *Pasyong Pilapil* after the ecclesiastical censor, Mariano Pilapil, who

corrected and edited the text prior to its approval for publication. The *Pasyong Genesis* became so popular that there have been numerous printings of it since the 19th century. It continues to be printed to the present under the popular title *Pasyong Mahal*. In 1842 Fr. Aniceto de la Merced presented a pasyon to the church censors. Ten years later a revised version of the text came out under the title, *El libro de la vida* (The Book of Life). The pasyon text came to be known as the *Pasyong de la Merced*, or the *Pasyong Candaba* because De la Merced was Vicar Forane of Candaba when the pasyon was published in 1852.

All the three texts cited above contain *aral* (lesson) about morality, proper conduct, and Christian life in general. The lessons are often coordinated with the narrative so that the narrative serves as an illustration or inspiration for the lesson. For instance, the *Pasyong Genesis*' lesson after the narrative of Jesus being found in the temple has to do with obedience and the bondedness of children to their parents because parents have sacrificed so much for their children.

Because of its popularity, the *Pasyong Genesis* eclipsed all other pasyon and was translated into Pangasinan as *Pasion na Cataoan tin Jesucristo ya Dinemuet ed Saray Masantos a Evangelio tan Pinalinan na Saray Daquel a Incalingo ya Oalad Saray Arum a Pasion a Impluma* (The Complete Passion of Jesus Christ Taken From the Holy Gospel and Purged of the Many Mistakes Found in Other Written Pasion), 1855; into Bicol by Francisco Gainza as *Casaysayan can Mahal na Pasion ni Jesucristong Cagurangnanta na Sucat Ipaglahad nin Pusong Siisay man na Magbasa* (The Narrative of the Holy Passion of Our Lord Jesus Christ That Will Inflammate the Heart of the Reader), 1866; into Ilocano by a native of Batac, Ilocos Norte as *Biag da Apotayo Jesus, Maria quen Jose* (The Life of Our Lord Jesus, of Mary and Joseph), 1889; into Ilongo by Mariano Perfecto as *Quinabuhì cag Pasion ni Jesucristo nga Aton Guinoo* (The Life and Passion of Our Lord Jesus Christ), 1892; into Waray by Pascual Diaz as *Casayuran Nang Pasion nga Mahal ni Jesucristo nga Guenoo Naton Sadang Ikasubo Nang Casing-casing han Sino man nga Magbabasa* (Narrative of the Holy Passion of Our Lord Jesus Christ That Will Inflammate the Heart of the Reader), 1918; into Pampango as *Bienang Queralandalanan ning Guinu-tang Jesucristo Cabang quetiya quing Yatu angga quing Pangalasanang Pangamate quing Cruz ulining Pamañaclungna quing Casalanan Tamu* (The Life Lived by Our Lord Jesus Christ While He Was on This Earth Until His Suffering and Death on the Cross In Order to Save Us From Our Sins), 1927; into Sambal by Jacinto Bernal as *Pasion nang Catauan tamon Jesucristo sa Salita Sambali* (The Complete Passion of Our Jesus Christ in the Sambal Language), 1929; and into Ibanag as *Pasion nay yafutam a Jesucristo Aquimallo tad Dios Anni Virgen Maria* (Passion of Our Lord Jesus Christ, Prayers to God and the Virgin Mary), 1948. Some translations are not word-for-word renderings of the *Pasyong Genesis*, as the native poet takes liberties by editing or paraphrasing the original text or by adding new lessons. For instance, the Pampango text warns the reader about the proper manner of doing the *pagbasa*. Reverence has to be observed and all forms of worldly diversions, especially taking alcoholic drinks during the *pagbasa*, should be

avoided.

Other versions of the pasyon have been written, such as Luis Guian's *Passion de Nuestro Señor Jesucristo* (Passion of Our Lord Jesus Christ), 1740. A Cebuano version, *Pasion sa Atong Guinoong Jesuchristo* (Passion of Our Lord Jesus Christ), has appeared in many manuscript versions, namely, the Balamban (Oño) text, the Casa Gorordo text, the Camiguing text, 1955; the *Pagsakit* (Passion), Cebu, 1955; Luteria de los Reyes, 1887; and probably its oldest example, the Argao text, 1884. This Cebuano manuscript appears to be based on the Aquino de Belen pasyon, although the narrative of Jesus' entrance into Jerusalem on Palm Sunday and of the Ascension into heaven has been added. Another Pampango version is Diosdado Macapinlac's *Casaleysayan qng Mal a Pasion nang Jesucristo Guinutamu* (Story of the Holy Passion of Our Lord Jesus Christ), 1876. The Pampango have a practice of asking a town poet to compose a special pasyon for a particular family. This has given rise to many private pasyon, of which the *David Codex* is an example.

Chanted and read for centuries, the pasyon story looms large in the Christian Filipino's consciousness. The image of Jesus at once subservient yet powerful, meek yet dynamic, conquering his enemies through his suffering and death, and the lessons about domestic bliss and proper human conduct—all are themes that recur in Philippine popular literature and media. Moreover, the pasyon served as the bible of the poor, since it was the only narrative of the History of Salvation available to the common folks. Finally, some anthropologists have suggested that the pasyon was central to the life of lowland Christian communities because it took the place of the ethnoepics, which in precolonial times were also chanted in social gatherings, and which narrated the life and deeds of a hero with supernatural powers.

The Political Pasyon

Because the pasyon was so popular, it became a vehicle as well for overtly political ideas among lowland Christian groups. By showing an image of Christ different from that found in the *Pasyong Genesis*, writers sought to break a stereotype that depicted Jesus and hence, the Christian follower, as a meek and subservient colonial.

Marcelo H. del Pilar wrote "Pasiong Dapat Ipagalab nang Puso nang Tauong Baba sa Kalupitan nang Fraile" (Passion That Should Inflamm the Heart of the Person Who Suffers the Cruelty of the Friar). This parody of some verses of the *Pasyong Genesis* was published circa 1885 as part of the propagandist's campaign to expose the abuses of the friars. Del Pilar's text, which uses the quintilla measure, has 17 stanzas, the first eight of which expose friar abuses and wish the fraile "hirap, sakit sa inferno" (pain and suffering in hell). Eight stanzas of the aral follow, warning the reader against consorting with the friar whose avarice will use anything, even the threat of purgatory or exile to Jolo or Paragua (Palawan), to get at the purses of his parishioners. The text concludes with a rhetorical

question: what will happen if the friar is banished from the Philippines? Del Pilar suggests that an age of prosperity, enlightenment, and health will ensue.

Pascual Poblete, who organized the Iglesia Filipina Independiente with Isabelo de los Reyes and Gregorio Aglipay, wrote *Patnubay ng Binyagan* (Guide for the Christian), 1935, a pasyon based for the most part on Aniceto de la Merced's *El libro de la vida*, with added passages lifted from the *Pasyong Genesis*. Poblete changed many of the pasyon's lessons so that he could comment on contemporary events. For instance, he paralleled the 30 pieces of silver Judas received for betraying Jesus to the 20 million dollars Spain received from the United States as compensation for the Islands in the Treaty of Paris of 1898.

Nicasio L. Geronimo's *Pasyong Pilipino: Ang Buhay at Hiras ng Ating Dakilang Martir na si Doctor Jose Mercado Rizal* (The Filipino Passion: The Life and Sufferings of Our Great Martyr Doctor Jose Mercado Rizal), 1968, comes from nationalist groups that made Rizal a cult hero. The text argues that Rizal is the reincarnation of Jesus, and hence, is the Messiah for the Malayan race. Such a proposition subverts Christian dogma and can be construed as critical of the status quo where the Christian churches, especially the Catholic Church, are the final arbiters of what is right or wrong doctrine.

Julian Leguro's *Tronco del mundo* (Origin of the World), also known as *Pasyong Truncalis*, 1930, may have been written for the Colorum sect. The pasyon draws upon esoteric knowledge that was shared by those initiated into the sect. For instance, the text says that the name of Adam was forged out of the four principal stars of heaven, as he was made from these celestial components. This sect sought to create a Utopia and was regarded as critical of the status quo, and hence, proscribed and persecuted by the Americans. Many sects with messianic leanings were branded as seditious and with them their writings.

In 1934, Joaquin Mañibo of Batangas published his *Pasion nang Bayan sa Kahapo't Ngayon* (Passion of the Nation Yesterday and Today). In 10 short parts and in the traditional pasyon's quintilla verse, Mañibo's *Pasion* revolves around the following themes: the idyll that was precolonial Philippines, the destruction wrought by the Spaniards and Americans, the monopolistic policies of America in the economy, and the betrayal of the people's interests by politicians like Quezon, Roxas, and Osmeña who are perceived to be insincere and self-serving.

The most daring and most original of the political pasyon is Lino Gopez Dizon's *Pasion ding Talapagobra, I Cristo Socialista Ya* (Passion of the Worker: Christ Was a Socialist), circa 1930. The social background against which this text is written is the agrarian unrest before World War II. This Pampango text presents the teachings of Jesus as socialist tenets. The pasyon argues that contrary to the belief that poverty is willed by God and that its oppressive effects should be borne patiently, poverty is in fact a product of human greed and oppression. The

truly godly person will take up the cause of the oppressed and challenge oppressors as Jesus did. The pasyon was so popular in Pampanga, especially in the controlled by Huks (anti-Japanese guerillas) areas around Arayat, that it came to be known as the *Pasyong Pula* (Red Pasyon).

In 1976, after his detention as a political prisoner of the Marcos regime, Francisco "Soc" Rodrigo published *Si Kristo Ay Rebelde* (Christ Was a Rebel). This pasyon first appeared in mimeographed form and was circulated clandestinely. It was printed later. Set in the plosa form, the pasyon proves that Jesus, far from being weak, knew how to fight and stand for justice. The pasyon focuses attention on the forgotten passages of the Bible.

Aside from Rodrigo, other poets have looked to the pasyon as source of images, characters, stories, and form. Jose F. Lacaba's "Pasyong Mahal ni San Jose" (Holy Passion of Saint Joseph), 1979, uses the quintilla form for the patriarch's three-stanza monologue, where the carpenter complains that his beloved is pregnant by someone else, but an angel has told him not to be upset because it was God who impregnated his wife. Virgilio Almario's "Una't Huling Pasyon ni Rio Alma" (First and Last Passion of Rio Alma), 1979, is a four-part poem, which uses free verse and the litany form (for the third section) in its epic exposition of the sufferings of peasants, workers, and other sectors of the poor and powerless. Alma's pasyon ends with the refrain that "the voice of the poor must now be heard." Lighter in tone is Rio Alma's "Pasyon sa Kamote" (Sufferings of/for the Sweet Potato), 1979, which uses the pasyon quintilla, in its mock-heroic paean to the sweet potato which, like the Virgin Mary, is hailed as "full of grace." • R. Javellana with N.G. Tiongson

References

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