ASPECTS

AUDIENCE

The audience of literature consists of listeners, viewers, or readers of poetic or prose works, whether in the oral or written tradition. The audience judges and evaluates the literary piece according to artistic experience and taste, its need for entertainment, and its standards for moral satisfaction. These in turn depend on the historical, cultural, and ethical milieu the work appears in.

A literary work affects its audience by means of sensuous, emotional, and intellectual stimulation. The reactive function of the audience is either passive or participative. Reading a book is a relatively passive function. Responding to an epic bard's chanting or singing by expressing words of encouragement, filling in gaps in the storytelling, dancing, singing in rituals, and the like, are participative functions.

There is an interplay between technology and tradition in the creation of audience response. Technology could determine certain turning points in the nature of audience response, as happened when printing press technology was introduced, or when cinema and film technology appeared. The audience meanwhile uses established tradition to measure the individual artist's creativity and innovativeness.

The audience since pre-Spanish times has undergone a series of profound transformations. Indigenous literature began with oral stories, songs, and riddles. The Manobo, who have a rich oral literature, have preserved a complex storytelling tradition that lives to this day, and illustrates the audience-artist intercreation in much of indigenous literature. The performance begins at dusk, often lasting the whole night until dawn. The typical occasion may be a gathering of relatives for harvest, where known storytellers may be present. At one point an older man or woman may volunteer, with nonverbal signals and in an indirect manner, to perform. The ritual opens with the ceremonial extinguishing of the candle, the better for the audience to imagine the story taking place right before their eyes, at the same time, to generate expectation and receptivity. The storyteller in a gesture of humility presents his/her back to the audience. He/She then clears the throat, a signal for the story's beginning.

The storyteller has to prepare process and method well, for the stamina required is prodigious. To ensure that audience interest does not flag, that it does not doze off midway into the all-night performance, the taleteller uses a whole array of voice and linguistic devices. Viewpoints may shift from an omniscient one to third person: "Take note, here we are now with Sebandar. Said Sebandar,…"; from the audience's viewpoint ("As you arrived there, how intensely you are looking all around. What should you see but a mango tree . . .") to the first person dual

pronoun “we [you and I].” And then the storyteller may use his/her own viewpoint, which may reveal his/her attitude: “As for Sebandar [villain now being punished] and the others, their backs are now sticking to the floor from being too weak to move … the only thing that she still keeps on moving are her eyeballs, she isn’t even able to get up now!” This is one way by which the storyteller arouses the audience’s feeling of moral satisfaction, or amusement, or sympathy for a character.

The storyteller shifts tenses from the dramatic present tense, as in, “Having decided, Pilanduk is dressing now. When he has finished dressing, he is setting out…” to the regular continuitive present tense: “really rains and rains…” Rhetorical devices of paraphrase and parallelism indicate the peak points in the narrative. Changes of pace, which may be a shift from terse dialogue to an involved, dramatic dialogue, or a condensation of time at the appropriate points may also be used: “My, the story goes faster now, for it is afternoon already and now it is morning again.” He also uses rhetorical questions, one after the other, to mark denouement.

All these methods are meant to elicit immediate audience response. These responses are abundant: the appearance of the hero provokes cheering; the villain is roundly chided ever and again. Narrative flow is helped along when the audience interject, “Hurry, think of something fast!”; or mark the turning points: “Aha, aha, take note of that.” Or they may themselves formulate metaphors: “Perhaps the tinkling of the bells is like the humming of the bees!” The audience as moral jurors keep up comment on the actions and decisions of the main characters: “Don’t ever agree to marry that man, Princess!” The storyteller may be verbally encouraged, or may be compelled to cut short a scene that the audience find objectionable.

Thus, audience and artist/storyteller are truly intercreators. There is all the leeway for the individual performer’s creativity in fitting traditional material for a particular living audience. The artist creates literature alongside an actively participating audience: the storyteller modifies, highlights, adapts, and edits out portions in front of an audience that signify their approval or disapproval. Later on, the audience themselves become actual performers, transmission being oral, and the story being kept alive only by means of oral recitation through generations.

In oral societies, there are no distinctions between young or old, men or women as audience; this unitary character makes for one culture for all. The rules of the art form are universally known, easily enabling the audience to be critics.

Other oral forms are riddles, proverbs, ballads; and many of these are derived from the epics, illustrating the epic’s centrality in the people’s lives. In the precolonial times, though a native syllabary existed—as it still does among the Hanunoo Mangyan— the preservation of these forms was largely oral through collective

memory. This oral tradition has been sustained and developed over centuries.

Tribal lore serves to heal social fractures and foster equilibrium and balance, weaving a close-knit consciousness of community. The communality of experience makes for an audience that is uniformly familiar with the themes, situations, activities and objects mentioned. Thus, character, narrator-performer, and audience are easily drawn into an empathetic whole. Moral judgment in these stories is bestowed by the community, and it is always the final, correct one; wrong judgment is deemed to come only from the individual.

It was when the Spanish conquest took place that the audience made the initial transition from orality to literacy. The technology of the printing press was introduced and the first books were religious manuals in the vernacular. The oral tradition, however, persisted well to the very end of Spanish rule. Hence, the ***pasyon*** (verse narratives about Christ's passion) audience in the 17th century—and even up to the 20th—was a listening, not a reading, audience. While the readers of the *pabasa* (the pasyon read aloud) were literate, the rest of the audience did not need to be literate.

Moreover, the effectiveness and artistry of the method used in the Holy Week pabasa were measured in oral terms: meter, rhyme, tone of chant, and voice climax. The very fact that it was a chanting delivery in front of a living audience recalled the epic performance. Jesus symbolized the mythic hero who undergoes various tests and triumphs in the end.

For the audience, the pabasa was a continuation of the oral epic's tradition of communal context. This was held at the *bisita,* an ordinary structure put up to accommodate a large number of people. Food, celebration, and fiesta are very much integral components of the pabasa. Liquor and fish are served to chanters, participants, and passersby alike. Truly a social as much as a religious occasion, the pabasa alarmed priests who railed against the drinking, courtship, and trysting that accompanied this religious ritual.

There is no prescribed time for the pabasa, as this may be a nine-day series within the Lenten season; or it may last from Holy Thursday afternoon up to Good Friday, and resumed on Holy Saturday while Christ lies dead; or may take place on Ash Wednesday, succeeded by a series of Fridays and/or Sundays in Lent. Chanters, readers and audience-participants take part because of a *panata* (vow) of thanksgiving, suppliance, or devotion. Thus the audience comes ready to be enlightened and be entertained. During the 18th and 19th centuries, a customary practice was to have the pasyon sung as part of the funeral ritual. A 1917 report describes how, in Batangas, pasyon stanzas were exchanged between *harana* (serenade) revelers and the *dalaga* (damsel) being courted. A related practice is the *tapatan,* which is a riddling contest, or a contest of wits, regarding pabasa text interpretation and character identification. The popularity of this activity is indicated by the practice of peasants simultaneously toiling in the fields and

memorizing the pasyon excerpts to get the better of their tapatan rival.

Sung a capella, pasyon chanting usually involves two groups responding antiphonally to each other; there are several chanters ready to take up from where others left off to take refreshments. One popular style of singing was the precolonial, native *tagulaylay* with extended trills.

Popular as early as 1740, the pasyon served as a channel for religious instruction. The aral (moral) comes at certain parts of the narration. The series of *aral* drives home to the audience that people cannot decree their own future and that they are constantly at death's door. The faithful should therefore mistrust wealth, power, and praise, for these are the things of this world which will not last. Since the only permanent reality is God, obedience to God unto death is the paramount principle (Javellana 1988).

Quite clearly, the pasyon and its *aral* served the ideological intent of Spanish colonialism to mold good colonials, with the presentation of ecclesiastical and civil authorities as God's living representatives on Filipino earth. Enriching or even educating oneself was immoral.

Yet, the very same pasyon came to be a moral guide in ways that the colonial dispensation never intended. Jesus came to be a character alive for Filipinos. Dilemmas and decisions were aligned with the values of *damayan* (mutual aid) and the virtue of *loob* (inner strength). Moreover, what the audience internalized was Christ as unlettered, poor, and of a humble spirit; the Pharisees and *taga-bayan* (town or city people), who are His accusers, are learned, rich, and powerful. In the end, through suffering, temptation, and death, it was Christ's loob that prevailed over arrogance and power. Ileto, in his. book ***Pasyon and Revolution**,* 1979, asserts that for the oppressed and exploited Filipinos, the pasyon bestowed a coherant meaning to the daily suffering and conflict that was their lot. It was loob that would win out in the end; *liwanag* (light, transcendence) was historically inevitable.

The pasyon has three major versions: Gaspar Aquino de Belen's, Aniceto dela Merced's, and the most popular version, of unknown authorship, known as the ***Pasyong Pilapil or Pasyong Genesis***. The latter's popularity and unknown authorship are a story in themselves. In the process of oral transmission, through innumerable copy transfers with varying degrees of faithfulness, through generations of performers' innovations and adaptations, the pasyon came to reflect the popular consciousness that claimed it as its own. The audience effected subtle changes even as Church authorities imposed orthodox doctrine from time to time. Of course, the fact that printings had to seek an imprimatur gave the friars an amount of control, but barely.

On the other hand, the ***manual de urbanidad*,** or conduct book, ***Pag susulatan ng Dalauang Binibini na si Urbana at ni Feliza*** (Letters Between Two Maidens

Urbana and Feliza), 1864, had a smaller audience because it required its readers to be literate. Hence, they were predominantly taga-bayan or town dwellers of colonial aspiration.

This epistolary exchange between two sisters, Urbana from a *beaterio* or convent in Manila, and Feliza from their hometown in Paombong, Bulacan, covers the code of conduct of the times concerning birth, death and courtship rituals, marital love, and the children's upbringing. It is quite explicitly moralist and evokes a style of living elevated to a social art. Such topics as table manners, the proper attitude for games and play, rules in writing correspondence, and even etiquette for visiting, are dealt with in exacting detail. For example:

> C*un pumapanhik sa hagdanan, ay patatao ...*
> *magdarahan sa pagtuntong sa baitang at houag mag-*
> *ingay ... Pagpanhic sa hagdanan ay houag caracaraca,*
> *i, tutuloy. Cun makapagbigay na ng galang sa may bahay,*
> *icao ay patoloyin at paupoinca, ay lumagay nang mahusay ...*
>
> As you go up the stairs, announce your presence …
> step softly and make no noise … Wait to be let inside.
> Having greeted the host, and once you have been invited
> to come in and sit down, have a seat and be quiet …

The author goes on to advise the reader to refrain from rowdy behavior, swinging the feet, or crossing the legs. When their father dies, Urbana reminds Feliza that life is a *pangingibang-bayan* (exile) and death is a coming home to God, for human hardships are put to an end when the person is rescued from the suffering that is life. Urbana quotes Fr. Arbiol's *santong sulat* (sacred epistle) that cautions parents:

> *… houag tulutang mamintanang palagui, sapagka,t,*
> *ang dalagang namimintana, ay caparis nang isang buig*
> *nang uvas, na bibitin-bitin sa sanga sa tabi nang daan*
> *na nagaanyayang papitas sa sino mang macaibig ...*
>
> … do not to allow [your] daughters to sit by the
> window, because a maiden beside the window is
> like a bunch of grapes dangling on the vine by the
> roadside, waiting to be picked by any passerby.

In all these, the author stands as the sole judge of morality. Moral intentions, motivations, and attitudes are dissected minutely, reflecting a view of every person as inherently evil. The audience's role, meanwhile, is to be obediently responsive. The conduct book's audience, consisting of the religious taga-bayan who can afford books and learning, follows standards of eloquence and meaning determined by such religious materials as the sermon, *ejemplo* or didactic narrative,

and lives of saints. These same materials are the source of the Biblical examples, metaphors, and rhetorical devices used in ***Urbana***.

Place and character, however, come much nearer to audience than the pasyon did. Paombong is a small rural town, and the beaterio is in Manila. The situations of the small-town characters, their concerns and hopes, are sketched in recognizable outlines.

Because both audience and writer are united by a common religious practice and convention, there is a minimum of persuasiveness on the author's part. We can assume that the audience easily reached a satisfying moral identification with ***Urbana at Feliza's*** positive characters, even as they might not have been able to keep to its constrictions in real life. This conduct book, first published in 1854, was read well into the first quarter of the 20th century. However, with the passing years, the quality of this moral identification deteriorated. The book is rooted on such assumptions as the moral leadership of the institutionalized Church, the entrenchment of male authority and colonial state law, and the feudal context of individual freedom. All these assumptions soon steadily lost ground.

At the juncture of the first propaganda movement in the 1896 Revolution, the relationship of artist to audience underwent changes, indicated by the change in the content and form of literature. The ***awit/korido*** or metrical romances began to be wielded for political ends by Balagtas. In his skilled hands, content became richer, and form became more entertaining and memorable for a wider audience. Mabini, several generations later, wrote down *Balagtas'* ***Florante at Laura*** (Florante and Laura), circa 1838-1861, from memory during his exile in Guam.

The Propaganda Movement, in the person of Marcelo H. del Pilar, Emilio Jacinto, and Andres Bonifacio, among others, was able to mold Tagalog into an infinitely more elastic and flexible vernacular expression. Using as initial models the traditional awit and korido, the ejemplo, and even the sermon, they made the language bear the weight of extended satire, polemic, and political agitation. All these forms they used for an audience that they had to move, not only to tears and laughter, but also to armed revolution—and the audience did respond accordingly.

By this time, written literature came to determine more closely the form and content of the oral tradition. This oral culture did not at all disappear even to the end of Spanish rule. For instance, the ***Noli me tangere*** (Touch Me Not), 1887, had a printing of 2,000 copies that reached only about a thousand local readers. Yet it spawned much oral and written literature that carried various interpretations of its text. These did not differ too widely from the spirit and political intent of the book. Even as the ***Noli*** targetted a specific audience, composed of the Spanish-speaking ilustrado and the liberal Spaniards, it refused to be contained; it reached a much wider audience that already was of a different class and language.

The literature of the Philippine revolution: novel, essay, poetry, *kundiman*, and

drama, reflected an audience-writer interaction occurring for the first time since the pre-Spanish period. The political context provided the necessity and direction for this interaction, even if the writers were mostly from the ilustrado class and the mass audience were vernacular speaking.

The entrance of English and the conventions of writing in this language once again divided the audience. That the English-educated class consciously developed its own audience, a readership nearer to Americans and Western-oriented elite Filipinos than the greater society, was a matter of colonial design.

Jose Garcia Villa's ***Have Come, Am Here**,* 1942, and other experimental works illustrate one concept of writing not meant for a broad audience but for a highly specialized one steeped in Western expressionism, modern art, and the canons of avantgardism. Villa's avowal of "art for Art's sake" created a pedestal for a poetry that was far removed from the broad audience, for it could only happen that the audience would be quite small. One was required to be not only literate, but specifically English-literate, literate in the Anglo-American poetic tradition. This requirement narrowed down the audience who could appreciate his method; consequently, it eliticized poetry, poets, and poetry readers. Moreover, no indigenous or Spanish tradition reverberated in his poetry.

Compare this audience, for instance, with that of Rafael Zulueta da Costa's single poem " Like the Molave ," 1940, often chosen by teachers for choral interpretation in schools. The traditional Spanish rhythms and the prosaic, declarative style were something the poetry audience in schools could easily relate to.

On the other hand, the audience came to learn to focus on the word of the printed page, or the literary text. A new level of abstraction and symbol-creation was inaugurated. Additionally, a new kind of "audience" was created: editors, critics, teachers of literary history and criticism. It was they who now presided over the development of taste and literary value.

Villa has become a part of Philippine literary striving, and he represents a trend that characterized early Filipino writing in English. Other poets of the first English literary generation may not have reached the extremes he went to, as in the use of visual devices to effect meaning, such as commas and other punctuation marks, or the blank page. But the same aspiring for the abstract and the consciously "universal" appeal determined the features of some of their output. It could be said that in writing the way he did, Villa lost a Filipino audience, lost intercreation with this audience. On the other hand, he may have gained a foothold among a "universal" audience, which became significant only because they were critics of a certain school of thought.

His insistence on an expatriate existence may have prevented him from later expressing a broader, richer sensibility that could have resulted from immersion in his native audience. Attuning to this native audience enabled other English poets

of his generation and later generations to nourish their art, even if they were working under similarly limited conditions writing in English.

Some writers have sought to expound consciously on modern themes in a style that readers could not relate to. Coming from a background of James Joyce and Ernest Hemingway, many writers of the 1950s studiously searched for alienation and angst in the native experience. Teresita Gimenez-Maceda in her "Cebuano Fiction in the 1950s," 1976, relates how characters in this type of fiction come to be "clothed in Filipino clothes, eat *bagoong* (salted fish paste) *and tinapa* (smoked fish) and drink tuba [but] undergo experiences that seem alien to the very people they are supposed to represent." Thus, readers sent letters to the editor of a Cebuano magazine complaining about the story of one such writer being "wa man gayuy lami" (quite dry). One reader complained that the story bored him and gave him a headache, instead of exciting him. The editor of that vernacular magazine soon afterwards decided to revive more of the stock adventure, sentimental, and detective stories. Vernacular writers, Gimenez-Maceda concludes, should write stories that are credible, meaningful, and comprehensible to their readers.

It was during the decade of the 1960s that English writers came to sense the need to shift to the vernacular, Pilipino in particular. Rolando Tinio exemplified this shift; so did writers Jose Lacaba, Gelacio Guillermo, and some others. Lualhati Bautista, along with other writers of realist fiction, wrote for the audience of the mass-circulation ***Liwayway*** magazine. Still others made the decision to simplify the literary usage of English to be able to reach a larger audience. They also saw the need to figure in social activism.

This audience for English expanded in dramatic proportions in the late 1960s and early 1970s when English became a language for political education and agitation. At the same time, there was an impulse to develop a simplified expression that was useful for the new users. From this expression an audience for English literature—broader and less elitist—multiplied. It was also at this point that Pihpino, which was largely Tagalog, came to be made more complex for its use as a political, academic and literary language; this was accomplished systematically by the progressive movement. The fact that this movement was a nationally organized one contributed to the speed with which dissemination was undertaken. These two general impulses for English and Pilipino language development may have been responsible for producing "Taglish," a hybrid Tagalog and English lingua franca of sorts. Although frowned upon by academics of both languages, Taglish is continually developing, and its audience continues to expand. Mass media and popular culture have now taken over and accelerated this development.

Writers now have to consider the technological, social, economic, and political context of the audience for written literature. Recent technological developments have spawned audiences for film, television, and pop music. Even the *komiks* form has been shaped into a medium of ideas, acquiring a respectability in the

process. The komiks form of ***Lipunan at Rebolusyong Pilipino,*** based on a book on Philippine history, economics, and politics from a radical point of view, 'is a notable example; there is also ***the IBON Ekonokomiks,*** the illustrated version of ***IBON Facts and Figures,*** an economics data sheet. There are various other examples of the use of the komiks in development communications, whose audience consists of people interested in health, population, and the environment, among other issues.

These new technological forms span the entire national audience north to south: barrio, town, and city. Sub-audiences for genres in each technological form exist, so that there are specific audiences for the action film, drama in English, and romance komiks. Definitely, they outstrip the traditional audiences for written prose and poetry, theater, and the visual arts. In turn, however, these newly developed audiences tend to expand the traditional audiences. All these developments contribute towards consolidating a national culture and consciousness.

To be able to reach out and tap into this consciousness, writers have experimented with other media: film, TV, theater, and pop song. Some writers are simultaneously practitioners in two or more of these media. They have also become increasingly conscious of the effect of modern developments on the audience's demands as far as the oral and visual elements of literature are concerned. Truly, after everything has been said, the visual impact and the oral message have become indistinguishable from each other: they are the story. Hence, the standards of *makatotohanan (realistic)* as a reader's demand require increasingly sharpened devices for dramatic and literary portrayal in terms of dialogue, description of space, and the handling of time. The vivid image in the electronic medium has its counterpart in the arresting realism of dialogue and description in the medium of text.

Besides technology, however, the factor of social context is shaping contemporary literature and the very concept of literary realism itself. Writers now have to consider this fact for them to succeed in reaching their audience.

An example is Lualhati Bautista's ***Dekada '70*** (Decade of the '70s), 1986, where the author has chosen to focus on the forces against the Marcos dictatorship in a society undergoing crisis and change. Social predicament and choices are encapsulated in one family: a challenge is posed by the activist son, his parents respond each in their own way, the siblings take diverging paths. Meanwhile, society is in a state of flux, and so is each character's understanding of it. What is essentially a social problem, the dictatorship, is characterized and analyzed through the characters' familial relationships. Moreover, Bautista goes beyond social exposure and creates a resolution. This resolution can only be, understandably, an individual one. In a marked development of the Filipino novel, social heroes, and not only passive victim-heroes, are created.

The epic hero, it can be said, has re-entered audience consciousness. This is confirmed by the themes in other art forms, such as radio drama and film, the difference being that Bautista's heroes take a revolutionary decision. The ***Dekada*** readers' moral identification with the hero is made easy and satisfying with the choice of the common person as hero. Workaday street-smart Taglish is the language. The News Event—"as familiar as today's headlines"—is the context for social unfolding and therefore that of the character's unfolding. Emotional reaction is shown to be an essentially intellectual decision. Morality and moral judgment are no longer immutable, but have come to be contextual. Realism is constituted by the experience of a myriad of individuals and the options they take. These create a stronger immediacy, and therefore the audience is made to feel more in control somehow. At the same time, the impact of heroic problem and resolution is bestowed social proportions.

Contemporary literature may now be said to be going back to the participative. The movement back to the native language is one signal indicator. The encouragement of regional literatures complements this movement. Significant segments of the audience are steeped in their regional culture, language, and literature. Audiences in Cebuano, llongo, and Ilocano have all these years been developing. Through actual literary and theatre production, the progressive political movement has its share in this development, especially in countryside areas where regional literatures are very much alive.

Bringing back the artist to a consciousness of audience has created literatures designed for certain types of audience. Currently, the concept of being artistically "true" includes striving for a mass audience, that is, the widest possible dissemination of art.

Should commercial success or failure be the measure of audience acceptance? It may well be, although the relatively easy availability of radio, television, film, and komiks, on one hand, compared to printed matter, on the other, limits the definition of acceptance. The fact that much of this technology is available more to the urban audience than to the rural, is another consideration when viewed in national terms; or that certain technologies, like television, film, books, and tapes are more easily affordable to and are preferred by the upper and middle classes; the poorer classes are usually limited, by means and by choice, to komiks and radio.

The more important question is, how far has Filipino literature gone in rekindling audience participation to regain the intercreative relationship between author and audience? Commercial success can be said to be one starting point for the author in choosing language, form, and theme, but developing the creative urge for interpreting and for expressing audience demand and need, and continually breaking ground for this, are roles that can only belong to the author.
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