1. Early Spanish scholars (Vicente Barrantes and Wenceslao Retana) who wrote about Philippine drama failed to look for early Philippine drama because according to Doreen Fernandez, the drama they were looking for must have been that which they knew from back home: the scripted, staged, costumed Spanish comedias and autos sacramentales—and which they were of course unlikely to find among the Filipinos who were chanting epics, enacting rituals, and celebrating victories with their own kinds of songs, dances, and mimetic action.

2. **Rituals & Ceremonies** were mostly marked by some mimetic action.
   
a. Rituals for marriage, for going to war, for birth and death, for planting and harvest, for illness and victory—for all the important landmarks in tribal life, all the touchstones of survival as tribal community.

b. Christianization had not erased the Filipinos’ belief in the power and meaning of their rituals, some of which survive to this day among the non-Christian and the Muslim Filipinos and even, in Christian transformation, among the Christian Filipinos.

3. **Songs and Dances.** In 1663, Francisco Colin, S.J. wrote “that the natives had songs that they retain in their memory and repeat when they go on the sea, sung to the time of their rowing, and in their merrymaking, feasts, and funerals, and even in their work… In those songs are recounted the fabulous genealogies and vain deeds of their gods.” Dances he witnessed too: “warlike and passionate, but [with] steps and measured changes, and interposed… [with] some elevations that really enrapture and surprise”

   a. Francisco Ignacio Alcina records that the Leyte-Samar Visayans had at least 6 song types.
      
      i. **ambahan**- a 7-syllable verse of unrhymed couplets, each expressing a complete statement, was sung by a soloist, with a crowd singing the chorus.

      ii. **bikal**- was a verbal joust in song with 2 girls or 2 boys facing each other across, finding fault with each other for the purpose of arousing laughter.

      iii. **balak**- for courting; done verbally or by means of instruments.

      iv. **siday**- was sung with ambulant groups of singers who were paid for their services

      v. **parahaya**- were dirges sung by women during wakes.

   b. One notes that at least some of these songs involved not just words and music but verbal exchanges and mimetic action.
c. The dramatized song and the dance-drama are certainly among the earliest forms of Philippine drama.

4. **Customs.** Non-ritualistic and nonceremonial customs of the early Filipinos also qualify as drama because in some cases an element of pretend has entered the practice or game i.e. (1) during lamayan, (2) pamanhikan.

   a. The indigenous drama of the Filipino, therefore, was described and recorded by the Spaniards, but not recognized as such since it did not have the stages, costumes, scripts, and conventions that they had learned to expect from their own tradition. In fact however, this drama—the various imitations of life done in ritual, dance, or even play—was community-based drama at its purest.

   b. They were created by the people for their needs and presented for very direct purposes—to bring about a particular good, to teach a definite role to the young, to consolidate the community in its common goals. In context, it was drama of a very high order.

5. **Theater in the Spanish Colonial Period**

   a. Soldiers of Adelantado Miguel Lopez de Legazpi in the late 16th century are believed to have been the one who brought over from Mexico the metrical romances of chivalry and of the lives of saints and martyrs, which were popular in their day and which, in indigenized form, became the native awit and corridor.

6. **Comedia.** The first dramatization were various declamaciones graves, loas, and coloquios—verse recitations, religious in content, taught by the friars to their Filipino students for such significant and festive occasions as the arrival of church notables, the feast of saints, or the inauguration of churches or schools.

   a. First comedia was written by Vicente Puche, a Jesuit.
   b. First full-length play was taught to elementary school children of Cebu, who presented it to honor the first bishop-designate of Cebu, Fray Pedro de Agurto.
   c. The first play in the vernacular written by a Spaniard was on the martyrdom of Santa Barbara.
   d. Finally, the most famous comedia of all, the one in 1637, celebrating an actual victory of Cristianos over Moros. For the first time in the Philippines, the Filipinos got the idea of moros y cristianos practiced in a theatrical mode.
   e. Comedia = moro-moro (not Muslim moro but ‘Turks’)

7. **The Komedyas.** Certainly, some of the komedyas, and this is obvious even only from the titles, come directly from the metrical romances, the awit and corridor which were the popular and secular reading matter available to the folk.

   a. The pattern for the vernacular komedyas was verse, in 6-, 7-, 8-, or more generally 12-syllable lines, usually in quatrains, and in enough pates, bahagi, jornadas, or
actos to fill three to five hours for three to five or seven or thirty days. (Like fellow their Asians, Filipinos’ sense of time for drama is definitely non-Western, their pace leisurely, their enjoyment unhurried. Certainly a marathon performance.

b. Basic plot formula: a Christian princess falls in love with a Muslim prince; and/or a Muslim princess with a Christian prince; opposition from royal parents side from religion; war is declared between to camps; then happy ending.

c. Favorites scenes of Filipinos: batalya (battle); palasintahan or love scenes; comic scenes where a clown made jokes; the scenes of magic and enchantment called mahiya; and scenes of pathos, such as that of a king deposed, a queen spurned, a princess exiled by a cruel father.

d. Barrio folk poets: Husang Sisiw and Francisco Baltazar.

e. Komedya was certainly the major entertainment from of at leats the second half of the Spanish era

8. Religious Drama. Drama as part of pedagogy and to serve as audiovisual reinforcement in the Jesuits’ teaching of religion.

a. Many creative priests found ways of arousing interest in church rituals by dramatizing, for example, portions of the Passion of Christ during Lent, St. Helen’s search for the true Cross in May, and Joseph and Mary’s search for an inn on Christmas eve. These dramas and dramatizations, probably meant to attract the people to church as well as to impress them the meaning of the feast, were the germ and the basis of Philippine religious drama.

b. These religious dramatic observance would be classifies according to length:

   i. The short dramatizations such as the salubong, Siete palabras, osana, and santakrusan.
   ii. the full-length (and longer than full-length) dramas such as the sinakulo (8 days long) and the tibag (komedy-style play o the search for and finding of the cross).

9. Theater in the American Colonial Period. By the 19-th century, the Western variety of theater, that is, scripted, costumed, and staged plays, were a prominent reality in the Philippines.

a. More inputs were being received in the drama scene. Drama troupe from Spain were coming in to perform and inject new influences into the local theater.

b. The first manila theaters were built in the 1820s or 1830s, the year Huseng Sisiw died.
c. Groups of amateur actors put on mainly repertories of Spanish play, a fact which made Spanish dramaturgy and Spanish theater available to the Filipino audience and writer.

d. The writing of contemporary plays about Philippine subjects (instead of Moro-Cristiano battles and religious topics) also started in the 19th century.

10. The Zarsuela. The turn of the century saw the next logical steps: the Filipinization of the zarzuela by means of its birth in the vernacular.

a. Zarsuela is a play with music, and is named after the palacio de la Zarsuela near Madrid, where entertainments called “fiesta de las zarzuela” were presented for the kings.

b. The Filipino sarsuela, as it developed, was principally about domestic life: obedient or disobedient children, negligent or devoted parents, problems brought about by gambling or drinking or politics or poverty, and most of the time, problems and complications involving love (rich boy-poor girl and vice versa; conflicting suitors, each favored by a parent; love between servants, children, parents).

c. Filipino writers like Severino Reyes debut his “Walang Sugat” during this time.

d. Sarsuela, with its music and dances and party scenes, appealed to the music-loving Filipino, especially since the stories were neither about imagined Moro and Christianos nor about biblical characters but about men and women recognizable and even identifiable with oneself.

11. The Dramas were mostly in prose and predominantly romantic and/or tragic and/or comic. Without the lightening effect of song, they came to bear the “heavier”—and usually more lachrymose—themes that today one associates with soap operas and movie tearjerkers.

a. If the 20s and the 30s were a theater world, with audiences happily viewing reflections of their own lives in the dramas and sarswela on stage, one might ask why these eventually faded from the dramatic scene. There are at least 3 reasons:

   i. English language had by the 30s become established as the language of the educated, the intelligentsia, and the elite.

   ii. Emergence of two newer entertainment: vaudeville and the movies.

   iii. Sarswelas and dramas themselves had become stereotyped.

12. Vad-a-vil. Filipino vad-a-vil was introduced in 1916 by Sunday Reantaso upon his return from the US, but the credit for really establishing the form belongs to Lou Borromeo whose troupe performed at the Savoy and the Empire and introduced chorus girls, jazz, minstrel songs, skits, variety acts, etc.

a. Vad-a-vil was drama only incidentally and fragmentally. It was a variety show, which usually included a comedy skit—the drama portion.
13. **Philippine Theater in English.** The writing and staging of Philippine plays written in English started before the Pacific war, but took on impetus after 1945, when the American presence returned, even more strongly, since it came with “liberation”.

   a. Wilfredo Ma. Guerrero was an authentic voice of his generation that lived the situations and spoke the kind of English he wrote.

14. **The Return to the Vernacular.** English was still not the language of the heart, much less of the gut, of the majority. Forces cooperated with the many drama troupes to bring theater back to the vernacular.

   a. Emergence of Proletarian theater and street theater.
   b. The theater style was influenced by Chinese revolutionary theater.
   c. The significance of this theater was that it took Philippine drama beyond the stages of entertainment, escape, and exposition, and into the further stages of ideas, analysis, and persuasion.

15. **The Contemporary Scene.**
   a. Most of the plays written and presented are in the realistic temper, reflecting the problems, concerns, ideas of the present-day Filipino.
   b. Majority of the plays being written are in the strain of social realism, where man is seen as an individual functioning in and being acted upon by society.
   c. There are also plays of psychological realism, about problems created in individuals by their particular traumas, environments, networks of family and heredity, and opportunity—plays about the expatriate, the homosexual, the alienated; about the generation gap; about father-son conflicts; about marital discord.