The Mission Play of Santa Clara

A Historically Contextualised Study in Historical Representation

Frederick Hale
North-West University
halef@hope.ac.uk

Abstract: The chain of more than twenty Franciscan missions established in Alta California, then part of Mexico, between the 1760s and 1820s became the target of many critical historians and other writers at least as early as the 1850s, *i.e.* a few years after California was annexed by the USA in 1846. Their accounts of meaningless pseudoconversions and conditions of virtual slavery at the stations became standard features in much of the historical writing by *e.g.* Theodore H. Hittell and Hubert Howe Bancroft well before 1900. In response to such criticism, and at the behest of a retired president of Santa Clara College, Martin Merle crafted a drama in which life at the Misión Santa Clara de Asís was portrayed in primarily idyllic terms in the 1840s. The present article is an exploration of that positive presentation of Santa Clara. Merle's play is juxtaposed with earlier writing about the Franciscan missionary endeavours. It is argued *inter alia* that his portrayal of the head of the mission, Padre José María del Real, as a heroic, morally upright figure diametrically contradicts earlier criticism of him as a womanising despot. Furthermore, Merle accepted the closure of this mission after the annexation but interpreted appreciatively its legacy as incorporated in the Catholic educational, cultural, and spiritual fruits which were in full accord with its historical purpose.

Keywords: Milton V. Merle, Franciscan missions, California, Santa Clara University, Mexican-American War, religious drama, *The Mission Play of Santa Clara*.

Introduction[1]

The establishment of Roman Catholic missionary endeavours in various Spanish and Portuguese colonies was a seminal development in the proliferation of Christianity in the Americas, and the closure of many of the Jesuit, Franciscan, and other *reducciones*, or model communities, has been represented in a considerable number of literary, dramatic, and cinematic productions.[2] Many of these have illuminated the confrontations of Jesuit missionaries with governmental authorities. The suppression of the Society of Jesus beginning in the 1750s with the expulsion of its missionaries from the Portuguese colonies in 1759 and those of France and Spain, respectively, in 1764 and 1767, culminated in the papal dissolution of the order in 1773. It would not be revived until 1814 by decree of Pius VII, after which Jesuit missionaries gradually returned to some of their previous mission fields. The consequences of this series of political and ecclesiastical actions stimulated the creative imaginations of writers from Voltaire, who incorporated the matter as a theme in *Candide*, through Fritz Hochwälder in his drama *Das heilige Experiment*,[3] to Robert Bolt, who crafted the script for the internationally renowned film of 1986, *The Mission*, which can be readily interpreted as vivid advocacy of liberation theology when that phenomenon was being criticised by Pope John Paul II and Joseph Ratzinger, who succeeded him as Benedict XVI.[4] Less well known outside specialised circles, however, is the secularisation and closure of the famous chain of twenty-one Franciscan missions in the vast Alta California province of Mexico before its annexation by the United States of America in 1846.

Like the fate of the Jesuit stations, that of their Franciscan counterparts became the subject of both heated debate and artistic representation for the public. The present article is an analysis of a key development in the dramatisation of this latter closure, namely Martin V. Merle's celebratory *The Mission Play of Santa Clara*, which premiered in 1913. Specifically, this study focusses on that portrayal of the threatened termination of a major Franciscan station and its place in the history of writing about the Franciscans' disputed endeavours in California. The emphasis will be on how that Catholic dramatist's commitment to the undergraduate college (and subsequently university) which arose from the ruins of that mission station and where he earned his master's degree as well as his desire to interpret the consequences of the American

1 This article was written while I was a Visiting Scholar at Fjellhaug International University College in Oslo. I express my gratitude to its obliging library staff for assistance in my research.

2 Frederick Hale, "Literary Images of Jesuit Missions to the Guaraní" in *Missionalia* 22, no. 1 (April 1994), 42-60.

3 Frederick Hale, "Appropriating the Closure of Jesuit Missions: Fritz Hochwälder's *Das heilige Experiment*" in *Acta Theologica* 28, no. 1 (June 2008), 58-75.

4 Frederick Hale, "*The Mission* As the Cinema of Liberation Theology" in *Missionalia* 23, no. 1 (April 1995), 72-91.

annexation of California positively profoundly shaped the thematic impulse of his play.

Extremely little of a scholarly nature has heretofore been published about Merle's *Mission Play*. In his commendable survey of the history of Santa Clara University published nearly half a century ago, Gerald McKevitt devoted a single sentence to it and misleadingly described the work as thematically about the secularisation of the Franciscan missions.[5] More recently, Lee M. Panich, a professor of anthropologist at Santa Clara, noted in an article about the place of Native Americans at the antecedent Franciscan mission that themes of European and Christian enlightenment of Native Americans were present in the *Mission Play* and included a photograph of an early performance on the campus of that institution.[6]

In the present article it is argued that Merle's scenic representation of the Santa Clara mission placed this piece unambiguously on the laudatory side of the late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century debate over the upliftment or enslavement which the Franciscan enterprise in California brought to Native Americans. Furthermore, it led him to interpret the American annexation of 1846 as a benign and eventually propitious historical development for California and Catholicism there. A pupa in the cocoon of war soon become a butterfly of Catholic educational endeavour, particularly as manifested in the establishment of Santa Clara College as the immediate and unmistakable heir of the mission.

The Historical Context of Franciscan Missions in California

The general history of the Franciscan missionary undertaking in California is well known and does not require detailed recapitulation here. In brief, although Alta California had been part of the massive Spanish colony of New Spain, the colonial administration did little with it until the eighteenth century, and even then not a great deal. In the 1760s Spanish Franciscans under the leadership of Junípero Serra began to undertake evangelisation of Native Americans in California. They quickly established a string of stations extending from the first, San Diego de Alcalá at what is now the city of San Diego, in 1769, to a small number in and slightly north of present-day San Francisco. The seventh in this series was Misión Santa Clara de Asís, which was founded near the southern end of San Francisco Bay in 1777. By 1823 there were twenty-one such stations, chiefly very near the Pacific coast. At these stations, regular religious life was amalgamated with agricultural and other forms of labour, leading to the development of settled communities with *inter alia* herds of cattle, flocks of sheep, and field crops.

5 Gerald McKevitt, *The University of Santa Clara: A History, 1851-1977* (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 1979), 143.

6 Lee M. Panich, "Archaeology, Indigenous erasure, and the creation of white public space at the California missions" in *Journal of Social Archaeology*, 22, no. 2 (June 2022), 159-160.

The attainment of Mexican independence as a sovereign country in 1821 marked the end of Spanish colonial administration but did not immediately spell the termination of this chain of missions. They continued to function along familiar lines for more than a decade, their Franciscan religious personnel largely though not exclusively Spanish. However, in 1833, apparently fearing a possible attempt by Spain to recover Mexico and return it to some sort of colonial status, the Mexican Congress elected to secularise and nationalise the missions (the loyalty off whose Spanish personnel to the new country was suspect) in California, a measure that began to become effective the following year. Demands made by migrants from further south in Mexico for agricultural land also contributed to the forced surrender of mission property. Franciscan priests from Spain were replaced by Mexican-born counterparts. By 1836 nearly all of the missions had been removed from Franciscan control. Grazing land was generally divided into *ranchos*, thereby accelerating the development of private agriculture in Alta California.

But the final chapter in this episode of missions history had not yet been written. In the early 1840s several of the missions were restored to the Franciscans, and most of these were still functioning, albeit on a drastically reduced scale, at the time of the American annexation of California in 1846. Among them, Santa Clara was secularised in December 1836. Seven years later its ownership was returned to the Franciscans. According to the historian Engelhardt, Santa Clara had been among the wealthiest of the missions in California, but its decline had been "remarkably rapid" after its secularisation.[7]

An empirically demonstrable and utterly germane element in the history of the Franciscan missions during the tumultuous time with which Merle's play deals is the assurance given by Commodore John D. Sloat, the American commander who raised the Stars and Stripes in Monterey on 6 July 1846 to signify the annexation of California, that ecclesiastical and other property would be fully respected. His proclamation, which was widely circulated that year and published in numerous American newspapers, was also reproduced *verbatim* in the London press, not surprisingly, because the United Kingdom briefly showed interest in adding California to its empire.[8] Sloat's reassuring, unqualified words contrasted with the Mexican law of thirteen years earlier that had allowed the expropriation of the missions: "All persons holding titles of real estate, or in quiet possession of lands under color of right, shall have their titles and rights guaranteed to them. All churches, and the property they contain, in possession of the clergy of California, shall continue in the same rights and possession they now

7 Zephyrin Engelhardt, *The Franciscans of California* (Harbor Springs, Michigan: Holy Childhood Indian School, 1897), 334.

8 "Proclamation. To the Inhabitants of California", *The Morning Post* (London), 27 October 1846, 3.

enjoy."[9] As this assurance obviously supported the Franciscans' claim to perpetual possession of their vast holdings, Engelhardt quoted parts of it in the fourth volume of his history of the order's missionary endeavours in California.[10] As will be seen below, the eventuality that not all of the Yankee conquerors of California would respect even documented property rights looms large as a pivotal theme in Merle's *Mission Play*.

Nineteenth-Century Critical Observations of the Missions

Critical contemporary and retrospective commentary of the Franciscan missions, generally focussing on alleged maltreatment of their Native American communities but in some cases also highlighting sexual immorality among the priests who led them, became a fixture in Anglophone accounts at least by the 1850s, *i.e.* the decade following the American annexation of California. This historiographical development coincided with the "Know Nothing" party and other anti-Catholic nativist movements elsewhere in American society.[11] One of the severest of these testimonies came from the pen of Hugo Reid, a young Scottish immigrant who arrived in the Los Angeles area in the early 1830s and married a *Gabrieleña* or Tongva woman. He published his critical remarks about Franciscan malfeasance in a series of twenty-four "letters" which were published in 1859 in the *Los Angeles Star*, where he was identified as "an educated man" and "a person of great honesty and worth".[12] Reid's comments were subsequently issued as a privately published book. Excerpts from the latter appeared from time to time in the California press during the latter half of the nineteenth century. A sample of Reid's denigrating comments about the shape of missionary work and relations between the indigenous people of the Los Angeles area and the Franciscans who sought to evangelise them richly illustrates the tone of his perceptions.

The "conversions" effected among the evangelised residents of southern California Reid dismissed as essentially a sham. In his blanket indictment, priests were accompanied by what he labelled "vagabonds, under the name of soldiers" to bring

9 "Proclamation of Com. Sloat. To the Inhabitants of California", *The Pittsburgh Daily Gazette and Advertiser*, 8 October 1846, 2.

10 Zephyrin Engelhardt, *The Missions and Missionaries of California*. IV. *Upper California*. Part III. *General History* (San Francisco: The James H. Barry Company, 1915), 554.

11 Ted C. Hinckley, "American Anti-Catholicism During the Mexican War" in *Pacific Historical Review* 31, no. 2 (May 1962), 121-137; John C. Pinheiro, "'Religion without Restriction': Anti-Catholicism, All Mexico, and the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo" in *Journal of the Early Republic* 23, no. 1 (Spring 2013), 69-96"; Peter Guardino, "'In the Name of Civilization and with a Bible in Their Hands:' Religion and the 1846-48 Mexican-American War" in *Mexican Studies / Estudios Mexicanos* 30, no. 2 (Summer 2014), 342-365. For the broader history of hostility to the Roman Catholic Church and its adherents in ante-bellum America, see Maura Jane Farrelly, *Anti-Catholicism in America, 1620-1860* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018).

12 "The California Indians", *Los Angeles Star*, 23 July 1859, 4.

the local people to Christianity. They managed to snare "some few", he asserted, by offering them "cloth and ribbons" and teaching them to utter the Spanish phrase *Amar a Dios* ("To love God"), after which such individuals were baptised and put to work at the mission. Their superficial conversions to the religion of their Spanish overlords, however, caused them to lose status within their tribes and left them powerless to resist subjugation. Reid presumed to judge that there was simply no spiritual change of heart: "They had no more idea that they were worshiping God than an unborn child has of Astronomy." Moreover, this Scotsman believed that their "religion, as Catholics, consisted in being able to cross themselves, under an impression it was something connected with hard work and still harder blows."[13]

In other cases, according to Reid, conversions were simply forced. He recounted, again without indicating the source of his information, how on one occasion "soldiers" from a mission had ventured to what he called "Rancho del Chino" (perhaps meaning the Rancho Santa Ana del Chino in the Pomona Valley), where they "tied and whipped every man, woman, and child" before driving some of the terrorised people back to their mission. There these captives were simply forced to accept the imposition of the colonialist religion: "On arriving home the men were instructed to throw their bows and arrows at the feet of the priest, and make due submission.–The infants were then baptized, as were also all children under eight years of age; the former were left with their mothers, but the latter kept apart from all communication with their parents." Under such duress, the displaced women accepted baptism, and the captured males did likewise as a means of maintaining some degree of family unity. Christian marriage vows were then said among many of these involuntary converts, and the superficial result was that these members of a "contaminated race" became what Reid described with no mean irony as "followers of Christ (?)".[14]

Reid was not alone in the severity of his comments about the spiritual ineptness and exploitative authority of the Franciscans. In 1882 the novelist and historian Frances Fuller Victor, who would subsequently serve as one of Hubert Howe Bancroft's ghostwriters in his works about the American West, contributed a very lengthy, tripartite article, "Studies of the California Missions", to the monthly periodical *The Californian*. She did not mince words in assessing the mixed harvest of fruits of the missions, combining condescension with castigation and contempt. Victor acknowledged that the agricultural ventures had enjoyed considerable success but judged that despite impressive "temporal results" the Franciscans in question did not really grasp "how much of a failure was the spiritual part of it". She granted that Junípero Serra and his *confrères* were sincere but myopic, a band of brothers "willing to devote their lives to benefiting a portion of the human race whom they considered

13 Hugo Reid, *The Indians of Los Angeles County* (Los Angeles: Privately printed, 1926), 47-48.

14 Reid, *The Indians of Los Angeles County*, 49.

most unfortunate in not possessing a knowledge of the Saints of the Romish Church, and for a ruler, the King of Spain". The first generation of Franciscan missionaries passed from the scene "before they fully realized that even the next generation of Indians would not be capable of citizenship". The subsequent Franciscans in California were even more blatant parasites in Victor's construction of the region's history; they lived like

> absolute lords each of an extent of country equal to a European state, with one, two, or three thousand slaves subject to his will, and an army of soldiers at his bidding to maintain this subjection, or at any time to increase the number, if desired, by capture of more gentiles; with rapidly increasing herds, growing orchards, ripening harvests, and a commerce requiring a fleet of coasting vessels, all under the sanction of both Church and State–these Franciscan friars, raised to poverty and self-abnegation, were actually able to live like kings.[15]

Victor's evaluation of the Native Americans who failed to thrive under the patronage of the Franciscans was sympathetic but hardly respectful. "We are not honest if we lament very greatly over the extinction of the Indians," she confessed.

Victor quoted approvingly an unidentified source who had asserted that "we might as well lament over fossils of a species which has passed away, as to become sentimental at the decadence of the barbaric types of humanity that refuse to rise and assimilate with the new order of things, but retreat before the advancing light of progress, and seek unavailing refuge in the darkness of an era that is passing away." To this historian, the demise of the Native Americans in California seemed inevitable: "There was nothing in the system to infuse new life in the veins of a barbarian race, doomed from the creation to that passing away which the missionaries, however unintentionally, hastened."[16]

Among the principal Anglophone founders of historical writing about California, Theodore H. Hittell concentrated a considerable amount of his attention on the convoluted saga of the Franciscan missions. A transplanted Pennsylvanian, he launched his career as a lawyer in San Francisco and became known for his multivolume *History of California*, published in the 1880s and 1890s. Its critical evaluation of the Franciscan missions was one of the targets of clerical resentment at Santa Clara, and Merle's laudatory construction of the endeavour there was a crystal-clear example of rhetorical counterpunching.

15 Frances Fuller Victor, "Studies of the California Missions – II" in *The Californian* 5, no. 30 (June 1882), 524.

16 Francis Fuller Victor, "Studies of the California Missions–III" in *The Californian* 6, no. 31 (July 1882), 26.

According to Hittell, within a few years of the closure of the Franciscan missions, virtually nothing of the order's endeavours remained apart from "crumbled and crumbling walls, rotten timbers and heaps of broken tiles". He granted that "some" of the missionaries had been men of "admirable character" who were devoted to "their unswerving belief that they were accomplishing good" and the importance of their efforts to harvest the "immortal souls" of the indigenes. But their legacy was nil. Hittell contrasted this with the accomplishments of ancient Greece and Rome and, despite his unabashed anti-clericalism, included "the chapels of the early church" in his brief catalogue of artifacts of the ancient world. At least "their influence survives in civilization," he acknowledged. He thought that all great works "in the right path" bear fruit and make a "beneficent impress" on the future. But the Franciscan missions in California were simply "not of this kind". Their founders "looked only to the aggrandizement of a system and dominion that had long outlived their usefulness", Hittell judged. "It did not contemplate or in any proper sense regard the progress of true civilization. It evolved no germs out of which were to spring higher and better forms. It was barren and unprofitable."[17]

Far more renowned in the general annals of California historiography was Hubert Howe Bancroft. An Ohioan who relocated to booming San Francisco in 1852, he established himself as a book publisher but in the 1880s began to publish detailed volumes under the collective title *History of California*, some of which are known to have been penned by associates. Broadly speaking, Bancroft was less severe than Hittell in his indictment of the Franciscans. However, he could record that in the 1830s Native Americans in the Monterey district took a lengthy document to the Mexican authorities in that coastal city listing grievances at their mission. It represented the indigenous "neophytes" as "living in slavery, being grossly ill-treated, starved, and overworked, naming several instance where women had ied or want of a little atole". In the same paragraph, however, Bancroft acknowledged that several Natives had come from San Luis to Monterey to testify that the charges were "false".[18]

The Defensive Franciscan Historiographical Reaction

Before the end of the nineteenth century, a Franciscan historian had mounted a spirited historiographical defence of the order's endeavours among the Native Americans

17 Theodore H. Hittell, *History of California*, volume I (San Francisco: Pacific Press Publishing House and Occidental Publishing Co.,1885), 508. For a more detailed synopsis of Hittell's anti-clerical attitude towards the Franciscan missionaries as an autocratic lot who virtually enslaved the indigenes, see Robert W. Righter, "Theodore Henry Hittell: California Historian" in *Southern California Quarterly* 48, no. 3 (September 1966), 296-297.

18 Hubert Howe Bancroft, *History of California*. III. *1825-1840* (San Francisco: A.L. Bancroft & Company, Publishers, 1885), 682.

of California. Born in Germany in 1851 but having resided in the United States since childhood, Zephyrin Engelhardt had become a Franciscan in the 1870s and served as a missionary to various tribes since early in his vocation. His hefty tome of 1897, *The Franciscans in California*, offered a wealth of factual information (much of it derived from the works of Bancroft) but very little objective authorial detachment from its subject. Indeed, the book was dedicated "To Father Junípero Serra and his [*sic*] Band of Seraphic Laborers on the Pacific Coast".[19] Moreover, in his Preface Engelhardt lamented that although a great deal had already been published about the "noble pioneers" who had borne both Christianity and civilisation to California, "very little that is reliable" had hitherto appeared in print. It was history written in a counter-celebratory mode: "Ignorance and malice, through exaggeration and misstatements, have succeeded in making the old Fathers appear in so strange a light that even their friends fail to recognize them." Engelhardt did not mention Hittell in this book but highlighted his own partial disdain for Bancroft, despite his necessary reliance on the latter's works in the absence of other sources. He urged readers to take Bancroft's accounts *cum grano salis*, for "his bigotry and his ignorance of Catholic affairs at times make his statements extremely doubtful."[20]

Like Bancroft, Engelhardt believed that the roots of the eventual secularisation of the missions in California lay in the late eighteenth century. He acknowledged that there had been tensions between missionaries, including Serra, and Spanish colonial officials from the early years of the Franciscan endeavour, but he attributed them to the ineptness and myopia of those bureaucrats. However, Engelhardt credited Governor Pedro Fagés for rejecting proposals by Adjutant Inspector Nicolas Soler as early as 1787 for drastically reducing the number of Franciscans in California and opening more of that province to Spanish settlement. From Engelhardt's perspective, such suggestions were "absurd" and, had the governor implemented them, would have had dire consequences for the missions. He quoted Bancroft as suggesting that the "pity" for the indigenes which Fagés professed to have may have been either "real or affected" in response to "excessive severity on the part of the missionaries toward their neophytes". At any rate, Engelhardt asserted that the affection which converts had for the *padres* at the mission stations disconfirmed claims of mistreatment. "Very likely there were Indians at the missions too lazy to work who invented cruelties, or exaggerated the punishments received for idleness and other vices, in order to revenge themselves on the Fathers," he judged by way of rationalisation. "Whoever has lived among Indians will understand the situation very well."[21]

19 Zephyrin Engelhardt, *The Franciscans in California* (Harbor Springs, Michigan: Holy Childhood Indian School, 1897), unpaginated dedication.
20 Engelhardt, *The Franciscans in California*, i.
21 Engelhardt, *The Franciscans in California*, 108-112.

Engelhardt subsequently wrote historically about *The Missions and Missionaries of California*, the third volume of which, covering the Franciscans there, was published in 1913, *i.e.* the year when Merle's *Mission Play* had its premiere at Santa Clara University. He quoted approvingly and at considerable length an early nineteenth-century observer who had defended the restrictions on the converted indigenes' liberties. The Franciscans "came to make sociable men and, above all, Christians of savages devoid of every kind of law and government," this writer had reasoned. Without having the discretion to impose some measure of restraint on the Native Americans at their stations, they never would have been able to accomplish what they had. Because of this benevolent authoritarianism, "the wealth was produced upon which now some eyes are gazing with envious cupidity, and which without that license would never have been produced." What would have been made by the converted indigenes, he asked rhetorically, "who are now about to be incorporated into civil and Christian society, if they had been left to their full liberty, which according to their character and national bringing-up is nothing but abject idleness?"[22]

In 1908 Engelhardt contributed the article titled "California Missions" to *The Catholic Encyclopedia*. This piece is particularly revealing with regard to his eagerness to shape its content to fit his strategy of portraying his fellow Franciscans' endeavours positively but the Native Americans under their aegis significantly less so and in need of paternalistic guidance. Engelhardt granted that young women were accommodated in the *monjério*, or "nunnery" at the mission, even though they were not actually nuns, while young men had their living quarters elsewhere. He defended this strict segregation of the sexes, calling the *monjério* an "important" component of the mission system made necessary by "the carnal propensity of the Indians". Otherwise, his depiction of the Franciscan missionaries was quite benign. Through their "extreme kindness", Engelhardt explained, "the natives were won by means of presents in the shape of food, clothing, and trinkets of which the Indians were very fond." He acknowledged that "once baptized, the neophytes were not permitted to leave the mission for the purpose of going back to their pagan homes for any length of time without permission from the missionary" but clearly did not perceive this as a form of incarceration. Rather, it was ostensibly a matter of group harmony, as "the neophyte community was like one great family at the head of which stood the *padre*, under which title the missionary was universally known." Within this paternalism, "the Indians looked for everything concerning their bodies as well as their souls." Engelhardt was not it doubt about the beneficence of this system. In support of his judgment, he adduced a quotation gleaned from a popular history of California that had been published in London in 1839 and penned by a Scotsman, Alexander Forbes, who had lived in what is now Mexico (*nota*

22 Zephyrin Engelhardt, *The Missions and Missionaries of California*. Volume III. *Upper California* (San Francisco: The James H. Barry Company, 1913), 423.

bene not the state of California).[23] Engelhardt quoted that Protestant's verdict that "the best and most unequivocal proof of the good conduct of these Fathers" lay in the "unbounded affection and devotion invariably shown towards them by their Indian subjects. They venerate them not merely as friends and fathers but with a degree of devotedness approaching to adoration."[24]

A close reading of Forbes's book, however, indicates how through selective citation it could be exploited rhetorically in a tendentious effort to construct a favourable image of the Franciscan missions. On the page of Forbes's book opposite that in which he had lauded the diligence and benevolence of these chiefly Spanish religious personnel, that Scotsman had presented a scathing indictment of their missionary endeavour and linked it to a critique of the propagation of Christianity generally. Forbes had posed a rhetorical question: "In the first place, what have the natives of California gained by the labours of the missionaries?" Little that was commendable, he thought. "They have transformed the aborigines of a beautiful country from free savages into pusillanimous, superstitious slaves," he averred; "they have taken from the enjoyment of the natural productions of a delicious country, and ministered to them the bare necessities of life, and that on the condition of being bondsmen forever." Rather than remaining "free as the wind" in their natural habitat, those who had entered mission life had joined a "wretched herd of human animals which are now penned in the missionary folds."[25]

Forbes had then presumed to discern the emotional stage of these two-legged beasts of burden. He declared that "the natives in this part of America were and are very low in the scale of even savage happiness" but judged their state as "domesticated animals" and not even as "civilized men" as they resided on missions to lie even below that natural level.[26] But about this, as well, Engelhardt remained silent. He chose to ascribe credibility to those segments of Forbes's account that bolstered his rhetorical strategy for defending the Franciscan missionaries and neglect those which countered it.

José María del Real: The Anti-hero as Hero

As discussed below, Merle's construction of Padre José María del Refugio Suárez del Real as a calmly heroic character who more than nearly any other individual prevented the Santa Clara mission and its property from falling into the hands of land

23 Zephyrin Engelhardt, "California Missions", *The Catholic Encyclopedia*, Volume III (New York: Robert Appleton Company, 1908), 180-181.

24 Alexander Forbes, *California: A History of Upper and Lower California from Their Discoverey to the Present Time* (London: Smith, Elder and Co. Cornhill, 1939), 231.

25 Forbes, *California: A History of Upper and Lower California from Their Discovery to the Present Time*, 231-232.

26 Forbes, *California: A History of Upper and Lower California from Their Discovery to the Present Time*, 232.

speculators is a lucid example of how a playwright, when crafting a play in a celebratory mode, could overlook the oft-alleged shortcomings of that historic individual in order to focus attention on his supposedly heroic role. Well before 1913, accounts of this priest's moral weaknesses had surfaced, and the Franciscan historian had been informed of them by an eyewitness. Bancroft, for example, had written in 1886 that del Real, no less than his brother and fellow Franciscan Antonio, was a "black sheep in the fold" but more adept at "concealing his irregularities".[27]

When Engelhardt published his *Franciscans in California* in 1897, however, he chose not to mention del Real's indiscretions–if he was aware of them, and it is conceivable that at that time he was not. However, in 1905 James Alonzo Forbes, a son of the previously mentioned Scottish immigrant James Alexander Forbes, a layman who helped to administer the mission at Santa Clara, enlightened him in detail. The younger Forbes had spent much of his early life at that station and indeed been baptised by del Real in 1850. He recalled that priest as being "a man of fine appearance and very popular with the fast set". Furthermore, Forbes alleged that while in Monterey that Franciscan, together with clerical colleagues, "led beastly lives reeking with concupiscience". After being transferred to Santa Clara, del Real had cohabited with a woman who bore several of his children, three of whom–two sons and a daughter–Forbes knew. That unofficial family had resided in a house opposite the mission church. After the girl's death, her father arranged to have her buried in the sanctuary of the church and have a plaque in her memory mounted on one of its walls. However, at some point Father John Nobili, his Italian Jesuit successor at Santa Clara, ordered the removal of the plaque and had the remains of del Real's daughter exhumed and re-interred in the mission's cemetery. Turning to a no less serious offence, about which Forbes presumably did not have first-hand knowledge, he asserted that "people who ought to know" had accused this wayward priest of being an "accessory" to the murder of two men, one of whom had arrived at Santa Clara to celebrate his first Mass and succeed del Real as its leader. Without attempting to provide details of the alleged crime, Forbes suggested that the motive for it could be found in del Real's attachment to Santa Clara and particularly his common-law wife there.[28]

The Genesis of *The Mission Play of Santa Clara*

Apparently Robert Kenna, the Jesuit Irish-American president of Santa Clara College, conceived the idea of including a historical play about the Franciscan missions in the festivities commemorating the fiftieth anniversary of that institution's founding in

27 Hubert Howe Bancroft, *History of California*. Volume V. *1846-1848* (San Francisco: The History Press, Publishers, 1886), 689.

28 Maynard Geiger, *Franciscan Missionaries in Hispanic California, 1769-1848: A Biographical Dictionary* (San Marino, California: Henry H. Huntington Library and Art Gallery, 1969), 251.

1851. In July 1900 he wrote to a friend and former fellow student at the College, Clay M. Greene, who had become a moderately well-known playwright in New York, and broached his vision of a dramatic piece which he believed could challenge the negative writing which Hittell and others had published for more than a decade. Writing in a celebratory vein from a perspective vastly different from those which both Native Americans and critical historians would take half a century and more later, Kenna waxed almost eloquent: "In the heroic lives of the early missionaries there were stirring scenes, glorious deeds, wonderful selfsacrifice, and [unintelligible word] fidelity etc etc.," adding that to his regret there might not be "plot enough for a sound play". Nevertheless, this priest maintained an idealised vision of his professional forebears at Misión Santa Clara de Asís: "These marvelous men founded 21 missions, and brought most of them to a great perfection: and they saw them surrounded by large fields of rich grain, and vast herds of many kinds of cattle, while thousands of the children of the forest docile to their trusting gave promise of a new civilization – many of them were trained mechanics, skilled musicians + good farmers etc." He accused especially Hittell of being "unjust, biassed and even brutal in his work".[29]

However, Greene rejected the idea. With the decennial performances of the internationally renowned *Passion Play* at Obeammergau in Bavaria fresh in his memory, he proposed instead that something akin to that Easter drama be staged at Santa Clara College and offered to write and direct it himself. This was done in the late spring of 1901, and the effort, titled *Nazareth*, received enthusiastic reviews.[30] It was revived in 1903 under the direction of Martin Merle, who was then a student at Santa Clara College,[31] and for decades it continued to be offered to the public there.

In the meantime, Merle continued his meteoric career as a dramatist in California. Some of his plays handled secular themes, but his *The Light Eternal*, which dealt with the Diocletian persecution of of Christians in the early fourth century, received enthusiastic reviews when it opened in San Francisco in 1905.[32]

Kenna did not abandon his vision, and as a retiree he approached Merle, who accepted his proposal to craft a historical play about the Franciscan missions. According to an account published in the *San Jose Mercury and Herald* a fortnight

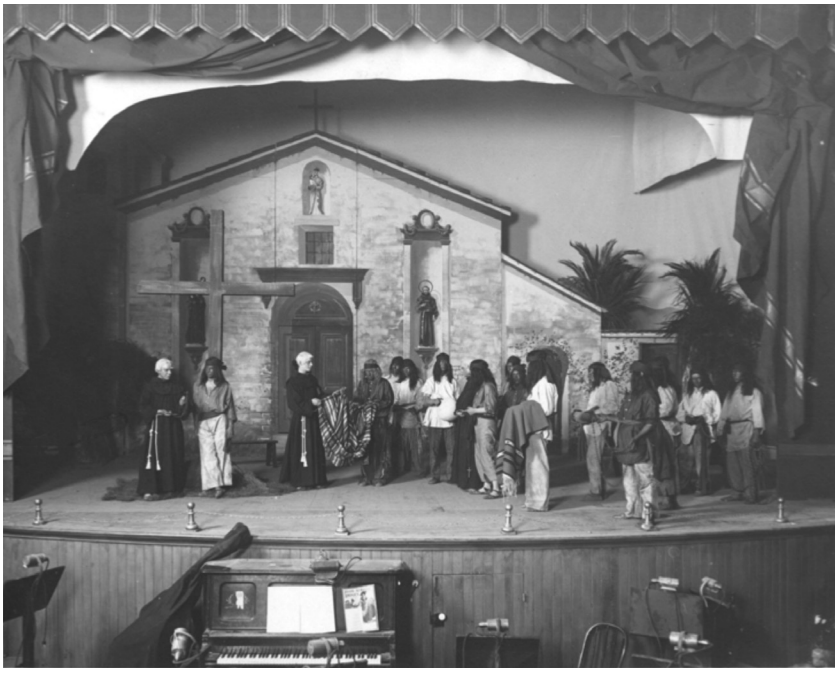
29 R.E. Kenna (Santa Clara College) to Clay M. Greene, 11 July 1900 (Clay M. Greene Collection, MSS.2016.01.11, Archives & Special Collections, Santa Clara University).

30 See, for example, "Successful Presentation Sacred Drama 'Nazareth'", *San Jose Mercury*, 1 June 1901, 8; "Rich in Its Scenic Effects and Striking Situations Is Santa Clara's Passion Play", *San Francisco Call*, 1 June 1901, 9; and "Passion Play Again Produced with the Greatest Success", *San Francisco Chronicle*, 4 June 1901, 3.

31 "Will Revive Passion Play", *The San Francisco Call*, 16 May 1903, 14.

32 "The Majestic", *The San Francisco Call*, 14 November 1905, 9; "College Man and His College Play Are Hits", *San Jose Daily Mercury*, 15 November 1905, 12; and "Light Eternal to Come Back", *Oakland Tribune*, 20 November 1905, 10.

before the premiere of *The Mission Play*, in 1907 that Jesuit and Merle attended another revival of *Nazareth* and the following morning discussed Kenna's desire to have such a drama written, in the first instance for the college. Merle accepted this proposal, but other obligations prevented him from fulfilling his commitment for several years. In the meantime, Kenna retired and his health deteriorated. He gave up the ghost in May 1912.[33] Shortly before doing so, however, in his "feeble hand" and writing in a "faint and hardly intelligible scrawl" Kenna reminded Merle of his promise. The young dramatist reportedly rearranged his priorities and prepared to compose such a historic play. "Old musty books were perseveringly studied; dust-covered manuscripts conned; and the tedious mission chronicles patiently read," wrote an anonymous journalist, presumably relying on Merle's testimony. "Only when his imagination was flooded with scents and pictures of those romantic times, and his memory master of the historical incidents of the period, did he enter upon the actual composition of "Santa Clara, the mission play."[34]



An early twentieth-century performance of *The Mission Play of Santa Clara* in the theatre of Santa Clara University. Courtesy of Archives & Special Collections, Santa Clara University.

33 "Death Ends Career of Noted Catholic Educator", *The San Francisco Call*, 27 May 1912, 3.
34 "'Santa Clara' the Fulfillment of Rev. Father Kenna's Deathbed Request", *San Jose Mercury and Herald*, 4 May 1913, 15.

Synopsis of *The Mission Play of Santa Clara*

Merle's dramatic interpretation opened in the voluminous theatre at Santa Clara University on 14 May 1913 and received enthusiastic reviews.[35] Its plot in three acts with an epilogue unfolds entirely on the grounds of the Santa Clara mission in July 1846, *i.e.* in the immediate wake of Commodore John D. Sloat's proclamation in Monterey that the United States of America has annexed Alta California. The mission is under the leadership of a Franciscan *padre*, José María del Real, who serves as a sagacious voice of Christian fidelity and acceptance of the American conquest, despite his initial dismay. His interest is in preserving his mission's viability, regardless which flag flies over California. Other *Californios*, however, express different and conflicting opinions about the imposition of American hegemony. Don Fernando Castanares, a local *grandee*, adamantly insists that the takeover will be resisted to the death. However, his clever son, Don Luis, is of a more compliant mind. After assaulting Don Fortuno Altimirano, an aide to the Mexican *commandante* in Monterey, he flees to Santa Clara, where his nationalist father expresses intense dismay at both his son's impertinence in striking a political official and that young man's willingness to subordinate himself cheerfully to Yankee rule. A veteran military official from Monterey, Don Antonio Alvarado, pursues Don Luis to the mission, where he is outfoxed by his elusive prey with the cunning co-operation of Padre José.

The American annexation is portrayed as a mixed blessing. One of the American land agents, Jack Mosely, appears at the mission, whose acreages and buildings he covets. Countering Padre José's assurance that the Franciscans hold title to the property, this conniving Yankee declares that American rule will invalidate such historic claims. The villainous Mosley bribes a mentally ill Native American, Soquel, to steal the land grant document from under the altar, thus depriving the Franciscans of evidence of ownership. In the meantime, a heroically portrayed American army officer, Captain Harry Mallison, arrives at Santa Clara, befriends Padre José as well as Don Luis, and expresses a deprecating opinion of Mosely and his ambitions.

Soquel succeeds in stealing the land grant and giving it to Mosely, who briefly absconds with that document. However, Don Luis, determined to support the continuation of the mission under American rule, rides swiftly to Monterey to register the property with the new American authorities. In the meantime, while a parching drought rages, Mosely has convinced the starving Native Americans to besiege the mission. He is taken captive but escapes. Don Luis returns with a unit of the United States cavalry. With Padre José praying fervently for relief from the drought, heavy rain

35 For a representative sample of the critical acclaim, see "Drama Produced in Mission City Is Picturesque", and "Artists Give Mission Play", *The San Francisco Call*, 15 May 1913, 11; "Santa Clara Mission Play Is Given With Great Success", *The San Francisco Examiner*, 15 May 1913, 7; and "Mission Play a Great Triumph", *San Francisco Chronicle*, 15 May 1913, 2.

begins to fall, thus ending the hunger and alienation of the indigenous population. Mallison and Padre José are on very cordial terms at the curtain falls on the final act, a microcosm of the continuing prosperity of the Santa Clara mission in the United States of America.

At the end of his two-page summarising Preface, Merle professed that the work offered historical verisimilitude. Without identifying his particular sources, he assured readers that he had woven "the main facts" of the mission's history at the time of the American annexation into "a play of more or less historical accuracy". Merle added, perhaps tongue in cheek, that the events reproduced on the stage "may have occurred and the persons existed – we have no evidence to the contrary."[36] At any rate, his portrayal of the mission before annexation is explicitly crafted to highlight the idyllic life enjoyed by its community. Before the curtain is raised for the first act, a suave, young *caballero* identified as *El Prologo* appears on the stage and invites the audience to enter the "golden days" of yesteryear, a "light-hearted, careless, and free-swung" era that offered "old-world peace and calm" before "the Gringoes" arrived and "with ruthless hand" brought that halcyon age to an abrupt end.

Portrayal of Life at the Santa Clara Mission

Merle's depiction of quotidian life at the mission before the American conquest is an amalgam of romanticised idyll and unalloyed ethnic stereotyping. The *Prologo* invites the audience to leave their "restless" lives and enter the "golden days" of the mission when "laughter and dancing and song" prevailed. The past was a time of "drowsy old-world peace and calm" when the inhabitants of Santa Clara "laughed" and, with all of California "young and gay" had "never a care".[37]

Within this nearly paradisiacal setting, however, the evangelised Native Americans are portrayed as enjoying an undemanding life of ease while evincing certain characteristics associated with stereotypes of their ethnic group. According to Merle's stage directions, they project an image of "lazy, idle careless life" which pervades the first scene. As the curtain rises on Act I, a cluster of "Mexican, Indian and Half-breed idlers" loiter on the veranda. Others squat nearby on the ground gambling. Wearing "bright and gaudy" attire, most smoke long cigarettes which they have rolled. One of the indigenes crouches before a dried skin stretched across a "rude, primitive easel" and explains to a child the meaning of the "crudely drawn figures and pictures" on that medium.[38]

It is immediately acknowledged, however, that there is a gap between faith and life. When a young Franciscan priest, Padre Felipe, emerges from the chapel together with

36 Martin V. Merle, "Script "The Mission Play of Santa Clara"" (typescript), Milton V. Merle Collection, Special Collections, Santa Clara University, unpaginated Preface.
37 Merle, "Script "The Mission Play of Santa Clara"", 1.
38 Merle, "Script "The Mission Play of Santa Clara"", 3-4.

several Mexicans and three Native Americans, the gamblers hastily conceal their dice and cards and bow their heads as he blesses them. Moreover, immediately thereafter, a trio of "fashionably dressed" *cabelleros* who approach the chapel condescendingly toss coins to the impoverished souls in front of it who join a "wild scramble" for the lucre. Those who are not sufficiently fortunate to get any of it shout "Caramba!", an interjection conveying the approximate meaning of "Damn it!" Immediately thereafter, an aged Native American beggar, dressed in "rags", approaches several groups in the shadow of the church asking for alms. He is not only rejected but subjected to "jeers, laughter, rebuffs and curses".[39]

Absent from the text of Merle's play is any reference to enslavement and captivity. The only explicit comment on how the Franciscans acquired vast tracts comes with Padre José's insistence that members of his order had sacrificially toiled to create "a land of peace and prosperity for the Indians to whom God gave this land of plenty". This remark counters Mosely's accusation that the missionaries "came in here and stole the land from them". The construction of the dialogue carefully distinguishes Spanish colonialism from the Franciscan evangelisation that followed in its wake. In the same exchange, Padre José explains that members of his order have "made a stand on the rim of a civilization that has taken much from the Indian – and repaid him with nothing in return!"[40]

Apart from the pitifully created Soquel, the Native Americans in Merle's play then disappear almost entirely. In their absence, that mentally ill and opportunistic member of the flock becomes a quasi-Judas figure, a morally debased man who is willing to sacrifice the judicial autonomy of the mission for the paltry sum of five *pesos* but who ultimately repents and begs Padre José for forgiveness. However, at the same time Soquel faults Mosely for tricking him and begins to assault that Yankee before Padre José intervenes.[41] In the Epilogue, the same cleric assures Mallison that "the Indians are going about their duties peacefully and with faith – as before."[42] Again, however, there is no hint of slavery or other forms of captivity to trigger negative impressions of the Franciscan undertaking. The collective portrayal of Native Americans and *mestizos* established early in the first act is not developed further or nuanced by the creation of individuals. In short, the representation of this component of the ethnically pluralistic population of Santa Clara erodes more than it confirms the idyllic promises of the *Prologo*.

39 Merle, "Script "The Mission Play of Santa Clara"", 5.
40 Merle, "Script "The Mission Play of Santa Clara"", 33.
41 Merle, "Script "The Mission Play of Santa Clara"", 126.
42 Merle, "Script "The Mission Play of Santa Clara"", 142.

Constructing the Clash of Civilisations – Or of Values?

The foundational misdeed in the *Mission Play* is Mosely's efforts to deprive the missionaries of their property and thereby unethically terminate the golden era to which the *Prologo* refers. To a considerable degree, Merle constructed his defence of the Santa Clara mission (and by implication the Franciscan enterprise in California generally) in the dialogues between characters–*Californios* and Yankees, *Californios* and other *Californios*, and Yankees with other Yankees. Especially those involving Padre José, Mallison, and Mosely highlight the moral dichotomies which carry the ideational content of this historical drama. It must be emphasised that this is not primarily a matter of pitting one nationality against another or justifying the American annexation of Alta California. Rather, the lines demarcating morality from immorality run through both national camps, not between them. A consideration of the principal characters and their verbal interaction with each other underscores this essential point.

In the opening conversation between Padre José and the elegantly attired *grandee* Don Fernando Castanares, it is evident that both of these *Californios* are dismayed by the news of Sloat's proclamation in Monterey annexing California. The Franciscan is clearly alarmed, presumably because of the uncertainty this may entail for his mission's future. Don Fernando evinces both nationalistic resentment at this humiliation and extreme disappointment in the willingness of his son, Don Luis, to welcome the annexation by socialising with the Yankee military personnel, whom he calls "heretics" and "accursed Gringos". Adding to Don Fernando's anguish, of course, is the fact that the "insolent" Don Luis has immersed himself in hot water by striking Don Fortuno Altimirano in the face.[43] By oblique contrast, Padre José's reply to the young man's worried father evinces equanimity and evenhandedness. "I side with no one," he assures Don Fernando. "I only suggest that we look at both sides of the wall." Moreover, this priest's memories of Don Luis are heartwarming from an ecclesiastical perspective. He recalls how the lad was baptised as an infant in the mission church. "One hundred candles lighted in the Church, and the dancing and feasting at the rancho! … Never has a king received greater homage than the christening of Don Luis!" Moreover, Padre José responds to Don Fernando's threat to disown his son by shaking his head disapprovingly. Even more revealingly to Merle's judgment of the outcome, in the same early conversation the priest counters Don Fernando's threat to spit on the Stars and Stripes by calmly suggesting, "It may come to pass that these americanos are not so bad as we think. They may even allow us to go on in the future as we have in the past – in quiet and peace – undisturbed."[44]

Padre José's conversation with Don Luis shortly after the latter's return to Santa Clara underscores further complexities of *Californios*' supposed attitudes towards the annexation. The young fugitive describes Don Antonio Alvarado as "fat", "*pomposo*",

43 Merle, "Script "The Mission Play of Santa Clara"", 6.
44 Merle, "Script "The Mission Play of Santa Clara"", 8-9.

and a "bag of wind". He insists he has no fear of the "*bobos*" (fools) who are chasing him from Monterey. Don Luis predicts that a Yankee influx will be welcomed in that port, where female *Californias* will soon flirt with and marry migrants from the United States. Further ahead, he believes, American rule will end petty rivalries among the local residents, promote greater agricultural productivity, and – three years before the influx of Forty-niners got underway – he professes that in the new era California would yield its gold. Finally, in an unveiled if implicit reference to a common stereotype of the *mañana* attitude towards work supposedly prevalent among Hispanics, Don Luis declares, "The Americanos give us the kick — and wake us up!", a boot for which he professes gratitude.[45]

This optimistic idealism, initially dismissed summarily by Don Luis's defiantly patriotic father, is immediately juxtaposed with the cynical portrayal of the dastardly Jack Mosely and his accomplices, Risdon and Andrews. Wearing black clothing as a sign of his evil nature, and with a "rascally face" from which protrudes a long, black cigar, Mosely exudes vulgarity. "Damn this heat!" he exclaims. His ungrammatical speech reinforces his uncouth image. "I don't trust no Indian," Mosely informs Andrews. Not surprisingly, Mosely sneers at Soquel and pressures him rhetorically into co-operating with the attempted dispossession of the Franciscan land by stating that unless that recalcitrant Native American's son received food and water soon he will die, and he again echoes vulgarity by uttering "Then be damned to you – and your kid!" To the unchristian use of that verb is added a disingenuous promise as Mosely, raising his right hand, assures Soquel that "So help me, God!" he has come only to "look over the land grants", not to deprive the mission of its land. No less insincerely, he swears "by the saints" that he will pay Soquel when he receives the document.[46]

In a different mode, some of the villainous Mosely's character also comes to the fore in his initial encounter with Padre José. The former attempts to present himself as a gentleman but is no match for the hospitable and nearly debonair Franciscan. He informs his host that thousands of Americans can be expected to enter California in the short term. Mosely then refers to "our new possessions" and, before extracting another black cigar from his pocket, states that the missionaries will "have to give up this place". When Padre José reminds his guest of Sloat's assurance that ecclesiastical property rights would be fully respected, Mosely dismisses that as "a little joke of Uncle Sam's". The two men's attitudes are contrasted intimately when the Franciscan asks him whether he "dare threaten the Church" and Mosely responds with a curt "O hell! There's no use arguing with a Greaser!" and, spitting, strides out of the residence.[47]

The encounter of Captain Harry Mallison with Padre José is, of course, vastly different in terms of the American's personality and moral standards as well as the

45 Merle, "Script "The Mission Play of Santa Clara"", 15, 17, 18.
46 Merle, "Script "The Mission Play of Santa Clara"", 19, 20,23, 24, 25, 27.
47 Merle, "Script "The Mission Play of Santa Clara"", 29, 30, 31, 32, 35.

ethical stance which Merle sought to highlight in his interpretation of the mission's history. The result of their harmonious interaction is foreshadowed by the Franciscan's urging the still defiant Don Fernando to suspend his resistance to the annexation. Referring to the *Californios* residing nearby, Padre José informs him, "I will advise them to accept the inevitable," adding that "in our hour of trial we must not forget we are a law-abiding people."[48]

When Mallison arrives with a cavalry troop shortly thereafter, he is described positively as a "young man of open, frank and honest manner". To his surprise, he finds Don Luis at Santa Clara to herald his advent. Padre José echoes this welcome and offers him a portion of the mission's wine, despite Don Fernando's unveiled hostility to this visitor. In contrast to his unscrupulous compatriot Mosely, Mallison assures the Franciscan head, apparently sincerely, that he and the American military forces have come to "give protection to you and your children, and those who will come after you". Reinforcing the contrast in Mosely's and Mallison's motives *vis-à-vis* the mission, Padre José informs the young cavalryman that a certain "insolent bandit" among the American government's land agents had already threatened to seize the mission. Mallison responds by calling Mosely a "skalliwag" [*sic*] who lacks a conscience but is powerless to do anything that is "not within the law".[49]

Whatever slight subtlety there might have been in the respective portrayals of Mosely and Mallison in their initial encounters with Padre José disappears when the two Americans then meet at the mission in the Franciscan leader's presence. The captain informs the unconscionable land agent that he is wise to his ways and that he would be held accountable for anything "nasty" that happens in his dealings with the personnel at Santa Clara: "I mean to see that people get a square deal." Mosely refuses to take this warning seriously and replies with his trademark vulgarity to Mallison that it is "none of your damned affair" and that he is "carrying your authority too damned far".[50]

The Annexation and the Ultimate Fruition of Santa Clara

With the benefit of hindsight two-thirds of a century after the annexation of Alta California, the loyal Anglophone American Merle portrayed that development as a thoroughly beneficial historical development. That it would be a blessing for the Spanish-speaking population of the area is never in doubt, despite the deep misgivings of Padre José and some of his secular compatriots who did not share the enthusiasm of the youthful Don Luis. Well before the conclusion of *The Mission Play*, the recalcitrant nationalist Don Fernando undergoes an ethno-political *metanoia* which presages the eventual outcome. In his earlier defiance, this *grandee* was eager "to desecrate the

48 Merle, "Script "The Mission Play of Santa Clara"", 37.
49 Merle, "Script "The Mission Play of Santa Clara"", 40-45.
50 Merle, "Script "The Mission Play of Santa Clara"", 48-50.

American flag" as a sign of his resistance to the annexation. After the United States military forces drive out the evil Mosely and eliminate his threat to the mission, Don Fernando can shake hands with the uniformed Captain Mallison.[51]

The Epilogue is replete with symbolism which points to the fruition of the mission as the planting of Christianity in the area, *i.e.* the evolution from missionary endeavours to religious life indefinitely embedded in society but still evincing the legacy of the missionary ideal which planted the seed. The stage directions emphasise the rebirth of Santa Clara. An adobe wall is bedecked with vines and flowers, while poppies and mustard grow profusely along the nearby road leading out from the gate. The garden is full of roses and other flowers "blooming in a tangled profusion", while the green turf is also "studded with flowers". In an unmistakable symbol, the atmosphere of quietude and tranquillity is interrupted only by the splashing water of the fountain; the waters of life flow in the Misión Santa Clara de Asís. Even Soquel, now forgiven and noticing Padre José asleep, respectfully removes his hat and drops to one knee in a sign of apparently sincere gratitude.[52]

When Padre José awakens and enters into another conversation with the convalescent Captain Mallison, he comments on the Native American residents of Santa Clara. In an unveiled counter to the assertions cited above about the insincerity of their conversions to Christianity, this Franciscan assures the military man, "The Indians are going about their duties peacefully, and with faith – as before."[53]

The dialogue between these two quite different characters confirms the integration of Santa Clara after the annexation with the life of larger American society. Padre José assures Mallison that he is welcome to remain at the mission, whose ongoing purpose is apparently compatible with American authority. Though wounded, and despite his feeling of attachment to Santa Clara (where an attractive *señorita* has caught his eye), that military man believes he must return to active duty in his profession. Before departing, however, he assures Padre José that California is "destined for a golden future". In it, Santa Clara "will ring in History's pages". The mission there will be a "sign-post of Western civilization".[54]

This final theme of the legacy of the Misión Santa Clara de Asís becoming embedded in the cultural landscape of the United States was especially poignant at that time and place, not least with regard to the metamorphosis of Santa Clara College into Santa Clara University the previous year. This was reflected most graphically in the architectual emphasis of the campus. The mission church, hving survived the devastating 1906 earthquake, remained intact. Furthermore, in May 1912 the *San Francisco Chronicle* reported that new buildings at the university had purposefully

51 Merle, "Script "The Mission Play of Santa Clara"", 99-100.
52 Merle, "Script "The Mission Play of Santa Clara"", 141.
53 Merle, "Script "The Mission Play of Santa Clara"", 142.
54 Merle, "Script "The Mission Play of Santa Clara"", 143-144.

been designed to reflect the Santa Clara's historic roots.[55] This was undoubtedly a conscious architectural fruit of the missionary legacy of the campus. Moreover, it was in full accord with the emerging popularity of the Mission Revival style in California and related styles in Texas, New Mexico, and Arizona.

Conclusion

For all its acknowledged artistic strengths, *The Mission Play of Santa Clara* is arguably most valuable today as a lucid example of celebratory history, missionary rhetoric, and selective historical interpretation. The extent to which Merle was familiar with the empirically demonstrable testimonies of several critics of the Franciscan missions does not emerge from the extant documentation of this play's archivalia. Robert Kenna's desire to promote the creation of a dramatic counterweight to the scathing indictment by Hittell is rhetorically understandable, but he appears to have been oblivious to the fact that it was not an artefact of that historian's imagination but had decades of precedents in the observations of eyewitnesses to the Franciscan missionary endeavours. Considered within the nineteenth- and twentieth-century historical context of critical and laudatory writing about the conveyors of Christianity and their relations with Native Americans, *The Mission Play* sheds light not only on the proclivities of men like Merle in shaping historical writing but also on the willingness of contemporary drama critics to endorse such efforts.

55 "Group of Handsome Buildings for Santa Clara University", *San Francisco Chronicle*, 26 May 1912, 30.