The Literary Forms in Philippine Literature

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The diversity and richness of Philippine literature evolved side by side with the country's history. This can best be appreciated in the context of the country's pre-colonial cultural traditions and the socio-political histories of its colonial and contemporary traditions.

The average Filipino's unfamiliarity with his indigenous literature was largely due to what has been impressed upon him: that his country was "discovered" and, hence, Philippine "history" started only in 1521.

So successful were the efforts of colonialists to blot out the memory of the country's largely oral past that present-day Filipino writers, artists and journalists are trying to correct this inequity by recognizing the country's wealth of ethnic traditions and disseminating them in schools and in the mass media.

The rousings of nationalistic pride in the 1960s and 1970s also helped bring about this change of attitude among a new breed of Filipinos concerned about the "Filipino identity."

Pre-Colonial Times

Owing to the works of our own archaeologists, ethnologists and anthropologists, we are able to know more and better judge information about our pre-colonial times set against a bulk of material about early Filipinos as recorded by Spanish, Chinese, Arabic and other chroniclers of the past.

Pre-colonial inhabitants of our islands showcase a rich past through their folk speeches, folk songs, folk narratives and indigenous rituals and mimetic dances that affirm our ties with our Southeast Asian neighbors.

The most seminal of these folk speeches is the riddle which is *tigmo* in Cebuano, *bugtong* in Tagalog, *paktakon* in Ilongo and *patototdon* in Bicol. Central to the riddle is the *talinghaga* or metaphor because it "reveals subtle resemblances between two unlike objects" and one's power of observation and wit are put to the test. While some riddles are ingenious, others verge on the obscene or are sex-related:

Gaddang:

Gongonan nu usin y amam If you pull your daddy's penis

Maggirawa pay sila y inam. Your mommy's vagina, too,

(*Campana*) screams. (Bell)

The proverbs or aphorisms express norms or codes of behavior, community beliefs or they instill values by offering nuggets of wisdom in short, rhyming verse.

The extended form, *tanaga*, a mono-riming heptasyllabic quatrain expressing insights and lessons on life is "more emotionally charged than the terse proverb and thus has affinities with the folk lyric." Some examples are the *basahanon* or extended didactic sayings from Bukidnon and the *daraida* and *daragilon* from Panay.

The folk song, a form of folk lyric which expresses the hopes and aspirations, the people's lifestyles as well as their loves. These are often repetitive and sonorous, didactic and naive as in the children's songs or *Ida-ida* (Maguindanao), *tulang pambata* (Tagalog) or *cansiones para abbing* (Ibanag).

A few examples are the lullabyes or *Ili-ili* (Ilongo); love songs like the *panawagon* and *balitao* (Ilongo); *harana* or serenade (Cebuano); the *bayok* (Maranao); the seven-syllable per line poem, *ambahan* of the Mangyans that are about human relationships, social entertainment and also serve as a tool for teaching the young; work songs that depict the livelihood of the people often sung to go with the movement of workers such as the *kalusan* (Ivatan), *soliranin* (Tagalog rowing song) or the *mambayu*, a Kalinga rice-pounding song; the verbal jousts/games like the *duplo* popular during wakes.

Other folk songs are the drinking songs sung during carousals like the tagay (Cebuano and Waray); dirges and lamentations extolling the deeds of the dead like the *kanogon* (Cebuano) or the *Annako* (Bontoc).

A type of narrative song or *kissa* among the Tausug of Mindanao, the *parang sabil*, uses for its subject matter the exploits of historical and legendary heroes. It tells of a Muslim hero who seeks death at the hands of non-Muslims.

The folk narratives, i.e. epics and folk tales are varied, exotic and magical. They explain how the world was created, how certain animals possess certain characteristics, why some places have waterfalls, volcanoes, mountains, flora or fauna and, in the case of legends, an explanation of the origins of things. Fables are about animals and these teach moral lessons.

Our country's epics are considered ethno-epics because unlike, say, Germany's Niebelunginlied, our epics are not national for they are "histories" of varied groups that consider themselves "nations."

The epics come in various names: *Guman* (Subanon); *Darangen* (Maranao); *Hudhud* (Ifugao); and *Ulahingan* (Manobo). These epics revolve around supernatural events or heroic deeds and they embody or validate the beliefs and customs and ideals of a community. These are sung or chanted to the accompaniment of indigenous musical instruments and dancing performed during harvests, weddings or funerals by chanters. The chanters who were taught by their ancestors are considered "treasures" and/or repositories of wisdom in their communities.

Examples of these epics are the *Lam-ang* (Ilocano); *Hinilawod* (Sulod); *Kudaman* (Palawan); *Darangen* (Maranao); *Ulahingan* (Livunganen-Arumanen Manobo); *Mangovayt Buhong na Langit* (The Maiden of the Buhong Sky from Tuwaang--Manobo); *Ag Tobig neg Keboklagan* (Subanon); and *Tudbulol* (T'boli).

The Spanish Colonial Tradition

While it is true that Spain subjugated the Philippines for more mundane reasons, this former European power contributed much in the shaping and recording of our literature. Religion and institutions that represented European civilization enriched the languages in the lowlands, introduced theater which we would come to know as *komedya*, the *sinakulo*, the *sarswela*, the playlets and the drama. Spain also brought to the country, though at a much later time, liberal ideas and an internationalism that influenced our own Filipino intellectuals and writers for them to understand the meanings of "liberty and freedom."

Literature in this period may be classified as religious prose and poetry and secular prose and poetry.

Religious lyrics written by ladino poets or those versed in both Spanish and Tagalog were included in early catechism and were used to teach Filipinos the Spanish language. Fernando Bagonbanta's "*Salamat nang walang hanga/gracias de sin sempiternas*" (Unending thanks) is a fine example that is found in the *Memorial de la vida cristiana en lengua tagala* (Guidelines for the Christian life in the Tagalog language) published in 1605.

Another form of religious lyrics are the meditative verses like the *dalit* appended to *novenas* and catechisms. It has no fixed meter nor rime scheme although a number are written in octosyllabic quatrains and have a solemn tone and spiritual subject matter.

But among the religious poetry of the day, it is the *pasyon* in octosyllabic quintillas that became entrenched in the Filipino's commemoration of Christ's agony and resurrection at Calvary. Gaspar Aquino de Belen's "*Ang Mahal na Passion ni Jesu Christong Panginoon natin na tola*" (Holy Passion of Our Lord Jesus Christ in Verse) put out in 1704 is the country's earliest known *pasyon*.

Other known *pasyons* chanted during the Lenten season are in Ilocano, Pangasinan, Ibanag, Cebuano, Bicol, Ilongo and Waray.

Aside from religious poetry, there were various kinds of prose narratives written to prescribe proper decorum. Like the *pasyon*, these prose narratives were also used for proselitization. Some forms are: *dialogo* (dialogue), *Manual de Urbanidad* (conduct book); *ejemplo* (exemplum) and *tratado* (tratado). The most well-known are Modesto de Castro's "*Pagsusulatan ng Dalawang Binibini na si Urbana at si Feliza*" (Correspondence between the Two Maidens Urbana and Feliza) in 1864 and Joaquin Tuason's "*Ang Bagong Robinson*" (The New Robinson) in 1879, an adaptation of Daniel Defoe's novel.

Secular works appeared alongside historical and economic changes, the emergence of an opulent class and the middle class who could avail of a European education. This Filipino elite could now read printed works that used to be the exclusive domain of the missionaries.

The most notable of the secular lyrics followed the conventions of a romantic tradition: the languishing but loyal lover, the elusive, often heartless beloved, the rival. The leading poets were Jose Corazon de Jesus (*Huseng Sisiw*) and Francisco Balagtas. Some secular poets who wrote in this same tradition were Leona Florentino, Jacinto Kawili, Isabelo de los Reyes and Rafael Gandioco.

Another popular secular poetry is the metrical romance, the *awit* and korido in Tagalog. The *awit* is set in dodecasyllabic quatrains while the *korido* is in octosyllabic quatrains. These are colorful tales of chivalry from European sources made for singing and chanting such as Gonzalo de Cordoba (Gonzalo of Cordoba) and *Ibong Adarna* (Adarna Bird). There are numerous metrical romances in Tagalog, Bicol, Ilongo, Pampango, Ilocano and in Pangasinan. The *awit* as a popular poetic genre reached new heights in Balagtas' "Florante at Laura" (ca. 1838-1861), the most famous of the country's metrical romances.

Again, the winds of change began to blow in 19th century Philippines. Filipino intellectuals educated in Europe called *ilustrados* began to write about the downside of colonization. This, coupled with the simmering calls for reforms by the masses gathered a formidable force of writers like Jose Rizal, Marcelo H. del Pilar, Mariano Ponce, Emilio Jacinto and Andres Bonifacio.

This led to the formation of the Propaganda Movement where prose works such as the political essays and Rizal's two political novels, *Noli Me Tangere* and the *El filibusterismo* helped usher in the Philippine revolution resulting in the downfall of the Spanish regime, and, at the same time planted the seeds of a national consciousness among Filipinos.

But if Rizal's novels are political, the novel *Ninay* (1885) by Pedro Paterno is largely cultural and is considered the first Filipino novel. Although Paterno's *Ninay* gave impetus to other novelists like Jesus Balmori and Antonio M. Abad to continue writing in Spanish, this did not flourish.

Other Filipino writers published the essay and short fiction in Spanish in *La Vanguardia*, *El Debate*, *Renacimiento Filipino*, and *Nueva Era*. The more notable essayists and fictionists were Claro M. Recto, Teodoro M. Kalaw, Epifanio de los Reyes, Vicente Sotto, Trinidad Pardo de Tavera, Rafael Palma, Enrique Laygo (Caretas or Masks, 1925) and Balmori who mastered the *prosa romantica* or romantic prose.

But the introduction of English as medium of instruction in the Philippines hastened the demise of Spanish so that by the 1930s, English writing had overtaken Spanish writing. During the language's death throes, however, writing in the romantic tradition, from the awit and korido, would continue in the novels of Magdalena Jalandoni. But patriotic writing continued under the new colonialists. These appeared in the vernacular poems and modern adaptations of works during the Spanish period and which further maintained the Spanish tradition.

The American Colonial Period

A new set of colonizers brought about new changes in Philippine literature. New literary forms such as free verse [in poetry], the modern short story and the critical essay were introduced. American influence was deeply entrenched with the firm establishment of English as the medium of instruction in all schools and with literary modernism that highlighted the writer's individuality and cultivated consciousness of craft, sometimes at the expense of social consciousness.

The poet, and later, National Artist for Literature, Jose Garcia Villa used free verse and espoused the dictum, "Art for art's sake" to the chagrin of other writers more concerned with the utilitarian aspect of literature. Another maverick in poetry who used free verse and talked about illicit love in her poetry was Angela Manalang Gloria, a woman poet described as ahead of her time. Despite the threat of censorship by the new dispensation, more writers turned up "seditious

works" and popular writing in the native languages bloomed through the weekly outlets like Liwayway and Bisaya.

The Balagtas tradition persisted until the poet Alejandro G. Abadilla advocated modernism in poetry. Abadilla later influenced young poets who wrote modern verses in the 1960s such as Virgilio S. Almario, Pedro I. Ricarte and Rolando S. Tinio.

While the early Filipino poets grappled with the verities of the new language, Filipinos seemed to have taken easily to the modern short story as published in the *Philippines Free Press*, the *College Folio* and *Philippines Herald*. Paz Marquez Benitez's "Dead Stars" published in 1925 was the first successful short story in English written by a Filipino. Later on, Arturo B. Rotor and Manuel E. Arguilla showed exceptional skills with the short story.

Alongside this development, writers in the vernaculars continued to write in the provinces. Others like Lope K. Santos, Valeriano Hernandez Peña and Patricio Mariano were writing minimal narratives similar to the early Tagalog short fiction called *dali* or *pasingaw* (sketch).

The romantic tradition was fused with American pop culture or European influences in the adaptations of Edgar Rice Burroughs' *Tarzan* by F. P. Boquecosa who also penned *Ang Palad ni Pepe* after Charles Dicken's *David Copperfield* even as the realist tradition was kept alive in the novels by Lope K. Santos and Faustino Aguilar, among others.

It should be noted that if there was a dearth of the Filipino novel in English, the novel in the vernaculars continued to be written and serialized in weekly magazines like *Liwayway, Bisaya, Hiligaynon and Bannawag.*

The essay in English became a potent medium from the 1920's to the present. Some leading essayists were journalists like Carlos P. Romulo, Jorge Bocobo, Pura Santillan Castrence, etc. who wrote formal to humorous to informal essays for the delectation by Filipinos.

Among those who wrote criticism developed during the American period were Ignacio Manlapaz, Leopoldo Yabes and I.V. Mallari. But it was Salvador P. Lopez's criticism that grabbed attention when he won the Commonwealth Literay Award for the essay in 1940 with his "Literature and Society." This essay posited that art must have substance and that Villa's adherence to "Art for Art's Sake" is decadent.

The last throes of American colonialism saw the flourishing of Philippine literature in English at the same time, with the introduction of the New Critical aesthetics, made writers pay close attention to craft and "indirectly engendered a disparaging attitude" towards vernacular writings -- a tension that would recur in the contemporary period.

The Contemporary Period

The flowering of Philippine literature in the various languages continue especially with the appearance of new publications after the Martial Law years and the resurgence of committed literature in the 1960s and the 1970s.

Filipino writers continue to write poetry, short stories, novellas, novels and essays whether these are socially committed, gender/ethnic related or are personal in intention or not.

Of course the Filipino writer has become more conscious of his art with the proliferation of writers workshops here and abroad and the bulk of literature available to him via the mass media including the internet. The various literary awards such as the Don Carlos Palanca Memorial Awards for Literature, the Philippines Free Press, Philippine Graphic, Home Life and Panorama literary awards encourage him to compete with his peers and hope that his creative efforts will be rewarded in the long run.

With the new requirement by the Commission on Higher Education of teaching of Philippine Literature in all tertiary schools in the country emphasizing the teaching of the vernacular literature or literatures of the regions, the audience for Filipino writers is virtually assured. And, perhaps, a national literature finding its niche among the literatures of the world will not be far behind.

Ref.: http://www.seasite.niu.edu/Tagalog/Literature/literary_forms_in_philippine_lit.htm

Look also here: **www.Literature.PhilippineCulture.ph**