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Philippine literature has manifested a popular orientation in the way both the preliterate and literate traditions have communicated with the ordinary Filipino listeners/readers who constitute the majority in a given community. For literature is one way of helping the people make sense of their lives by making complex reality intelligible through a number of conventions. In much of vernacular literature, what appears is a mode which relies on formulas or stereotypes of the imagination, and which is characterized by a refusal to be judged according to strict correspondence with reality.[1] The romance mode creates a world that is not fully equivalent to our own because it goes beyond the parameters by which life is normally bounded.

On the other hand, the development of literary criticism in the Philippines has been marked by its indebtedness to realism. A large number of Filipino works have been subjected to a critical inquiry largely determined by realistic canons. Consequently, the possibility that these works could have been shaped by a nonrealistic mode has often been ignored. This realist critical approach has resulted in a distinct bias against popular, nonrealistic works. Therefore, this article attempts to clarify the nature of the romance mode vis-a-vis realism and the ways in which the romance mode has shaped a number of popular types in Philippine literature. It raises the possibility that works in the romance mode engage reality in diverse ways.

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1. The term "mode" is used to refer to the structural features that find expression in various historical periods, and which can be revived and renewed when the need for it arises. See Frederic Jameson, "Magical Narratives: Romance as Genre," *New Literary History* 7 (Autumn 1975): 142.

THE USES OF REALISM IN LITERARY CRITICISM

The canonization of realism in Philippine literary criticism has influenced the manner in which primary texts have been analyzed and critical texts made to articulate a set of prescriptive norms for literature. For a large number of critics—both Formalists and Marxists—reality is out there in its materiality. It is within the power of the writer to render a faithful account of that reality. Verisimilitude is achieved through particularization of time and place against which the characters act out their roles in society. The singularly important phrase "texture of lived life" in realist criticism indubitably refers to patterns of social reality.[2]

Within the Marxist tradition, Georg Lukacs and his pronouncements on realism have influenced a number of critics who espouse what in recent years has been termed a "reflectionist" theory of art. For Lukacs, the highest achievement of the realist novel was reached in the works of Balzac who successfully recreated the opposition of forces in nineteenth-century France. Works written within another perspective such as modernism have been largely ignored by Lukacs for they represent a qualitatively different way of apprehending the world.[3] Lucien Goldmann has pursued the implications of Lukacs' insistence on the need for literature to "mirror" reality with more rigor, even as he argues in *The Hidden God* that a work's significance derives from its ability to reflect the world vision of a particular class.

The implications of this tendency in criticism are manifold. First of all, if realism is the only conceptual tool for analysis and evaluation, then works that delineate social realities are enshrined, while stories written for entertainment are dismissed. Moreover, the rationalist framework of realism perpetuates the imperialism of the logical mind and the consequent denigration of works resulting from the writer's reliance not on reason but on intuitive knowledge. Significance is thus bestowed on works that mirror social realities in their minute particularities. Lastly, by training its critical sight on the relationship between the writer and social reality, realist criticism tends to ignore the reader and the con-

2. Ian Watt, *The Rise of the Novel* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1957).

3. Lukacs has been one of the most powerful advocates of social realism. See, for example, *The Meaning of Contemporary Realism* (London: Merlin Press, 1979).

sciousness that not only responds to the text but helps generate the text's various meanings.[4]

As a central mode in Philippine criticism, realism has given rise to a number of critical views. In general, realist criticism favors serious, socially committed and actively engaged works. Within this conceptual framework, writings that do not hew to the radical tradition assume less significance than those which follow that tradition of Rizal and the "New Propagandists."[5] What originally emerged in the eighteenth century as a movement, and later as an analytical tool, has become normative.

This approach to Philippine literature offers a limited view of vernacular writing, much of which is meant for the masses, since realist criticism is ever conscious of the need to dissociate serious/realistic from nonserious/romantic works. It would, therefore, be instructive to focus our attention on the romance mode that has helped generate a large number of works.

SOME FEATURES OF THE ROMANCE MODE

Historically, the romance mode manifested itself in the *awit* and *corrido,* the Philippine versions of the European medieval romance. The tremendous popularity of these narratives was unabated until the first quarter of the twentieth century at which time the novel and the short story emerged. But so close was the relationship between the awit and the prose forms that structural patterns that shaped the earlier forms reappeared in the latter types.[6]

This is not to argue that the development from the awit to the novel is unilinear, causal and unproblematic, or that the novel is the culmination of a process of evolution. The earliest novels in the Philippines— Pedro Paterno's *Ninay* (1885), Jose Rizal's *Noli Me Tangere* (1887) and *El Filibusterismo* (1891) — contained not faint traces but major influences from the romance mode. Al-

4. In recent years, the reader has been rediscovered after he was banished in formalist criticism. Studies made by such critics/theorists as Jan Curstius, Wolfgang Iser and Janet Wolff have centered on the reader as a consumer of the literary product.

5. In general, critics in the Philippines have hewed to realistic canons. Among the influential critics are Bienvenido Lumbera, Epifanio San Juan, Jr., Nicanor Tiongson, and Virgilio Almario, to name a few.

6. For many novelists, there was little distinction between the earlier *awit* and the novel. This view was advanced in Iñigo Ed. Regalado, *Ang Pagkaunlad ng Nobelang Tagalog* (Manila: Institute of National Language, 1939).

though the major perspective seemed to be realistic, these novels, particularly Paterno's *Ninay,* exhibited features of the romance mode, notably in the use of the structure of a quest and in the highly stylized depiction of many characters. Moreover, the desire to use the novels to politicize through a graphic delineation of society's ills was tempered by an equally strong attempt to project a Utopian vision.

At the outset, it should be made clear that as constructs, literary types are governed by a system of conventions. They are to be seen as "fiction" and are thus not bound to tell the "truth." The *kuwento* (the literary construct) as a category is set off against the category of verifiable truth. It is for this reason that the writer is able to take liberties with his material. He can change and embellish his story, deploy strategies and devices to explore experiences, some of which might be beyond the range of the public's experience. The works in the romance mode exhibit what critic Gillian Beer calls a "peculiar vagrancy of the imagination."[7] It is this power of the imagination which the romance mode most fully explores. Moreover, in its freedom to encompass experiences that are not expected to correspond with outside reality, the imagination is able to resort to patterns familiar to itself.[8] The narrative objectifies this complex process of creation.

Thus the basic pattern utilized in romance as genre—from the Greek tales of Appuleius to the medieval romances—deals with the quest centered on a hero who is searching for another person, or a precious object, and who in the process arrives at a deeper insight into his identity.[9] The quest is initiated as a way of answering a need or satisfying a desire. Hence, the motif of a journey into some unknown world—whether the idyllic or the demonic — frequently frames the narrative. The desire is often achieved through the help of another character, human or supernatural. The world is eventually restored to its original condition of peace after an arduous struggle. As Northrop Frye points out:

> The characterization of romance follows its general dialectic structure which means that subtlety and complexity are not much favored. Characters tend to be either for or against the quest. If they assist, they are

7. Gillian Beer, *The Romance* (London: Methuen and Co., 1970), p. 2.

8. For a thorough analysis of the romance mode and its structural features, see Northrop Frye, *The Secular Scripture* (Boston: Harvard University Press, 1976).

9. Ibid., p. 54.

idealized as simply gallant or pure; if they obstruct it they are caricatured
as simply villainous or cowardly. Hence, every typical character in ro-
mance tends to have his moral opposite confronting him. . . .[10]

The romance as it appeared in the medieval ages concretized for
its audience the forces that made up the ideal of the medieval
mind. The contents of the romance (for example, *Launcelot, Tris-
tan and Isolde*) were permanent and manifested themselves with
great clarity and seriousness. Taken collectively, the medieval ro-
mance exerted a good deal of influence upon the audience in the
exploration of such themes as love of God, love of man, and love
of nature. This idealizing tendency was rooted in the symbolic
way of looking at the world, a point of view that seldom appeared
in realistic works. Caroly Erikson explains thus:

> Medieval perception was characterized by an all-inclusive awareness of
> simultaneous realities. The bounds of reality were bent to embrace — and
> often localize — the unseen, and determining all perception was a mutually
> held world view which found in religious truths the ultimate logic of
> existence. This perception, which where it is alien to modern conscious-
> ness may be likened to an enchantment, was encouraged by Neo-Platonist
> ideas of the power and number of noncorporeal beings, the presence of life
> in inanimate creation, and the significance of vision as a creative force and
> as a mode of human understanding.[11]

A consequence of this view is shown in the attitude towards
readings other than the literal. The medieval reader was accus-
tomed to search for the various levels of meaning in the text. This
feeling for the allegorization, for double and even triple meanings,
is one of the main features of these writings.[12] The layers of
meaning inscribed in the texts reinforced each other, generating a
response from the reader who perceived the narrative's discourse
as a source of normative values.

On the other hand, this idealizing tendency took on other
dimensions once the text was juxtaposed against the historical
currents. Upon close analysis, the chivalric code (which expressed
the perfection of the Christian knight), actually clashed with the

10. Northrop Frye, *Anatomy of Criticism* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press,
1957), p. 195.

11. Caroly Erikson, *The Medieval Vision* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1976),
p. 27.

12. W.T.H. Jackson, *The Literature of the Medieval Ages* (New York: Columbia
University Press, 1960), p. 58.

reality around it — the pervasive cruelty, violence and harshness that defined the medieval ages. Romance took on an added role as a means through which the people simplified and explained to themselves the complex image of history. By this traditional fiction, noted the medieval scholar J. Huizinga, they "succeeded in explaining to themselves as well as they could the motives and the course of history which was thus reduced to the spectacle of the honor of princes and the virtue of knights."[13] Romance thus became a way of coping with the complex movements in life, a comprehensible formula which had few unknown factors, a codified structure the people could understand.

The paradoxical quality of romance — being out of this world (seen in its otherwordly dimension) at the same time that it was a part of this world in its determination—would probably explain why it was able to fuse the aesthetic and ethical ideals. The romance was not only meant to entertain, but, perhaps more importantly, to assume an active role in the people's education. It was by endowing the works with a nostalgic haze — the idealized setting far back in time and the blurred sense of the historical landscape — that the romance succeeded in forging links with the audience, especially in the succeeding centuries when the works had acquired glamour and respectability.[14]

Thus as a civilizing construct, the romance propagated the code of chivalry and lauded ideals of gentility. Love, which was a major theme, created in its wake a codified system of behavior revolving around the agony undergone by lovers. In the works dealing with the quest for the Holy Grail, the same idealizing tendency characterized the heroes' attainment of a higher state of consciousness as God's chosen subjects. These discourses were truly the "supreme realization of the people's aspirations to the life beautiful."[15]

By creating an ideal world, the romance subverted the reality it could not reflect. For example, woman was given a more privileged position in love and marriage; in real life she was an object to be sold for a price. Courtly love in the texts was revolutionary, as it wilfully subverted entrenched values of feudal society in its emphasis on love without bargains, its fantasy of fe-

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13. Johan Huizinga, *The Waning of the Middle Ages* (London: Edward Arnold and Co., 1924), p. 66.
14. Jackson, *The Literature of the Medieval Ages*, p. 21.
15. Huizinga, *The Waning of the Middle Ages*, p. 105.

male domination, and its preoccupation with individual ex-
ploits.[16] This subversive force enabled the romance to elude the
label of pure fantasy. Its thematic configurations remained a tell-
ing commentary on the weaknesses and excesses of feudal society.

The romance mode would appear again and again, after the
medieval and Renaissance periods, as the need for it arose. It
would make its presence felt, not in the way it manifested itself in
the idealized world depicted in the medieval romance, but in a
displaced form, mostly in the popular literature of the eighteenth
and nineteenth centuries in Europe. Instead of knights and dam-
sels in distress, there were only criminals and prostitutes stalking
the great cities. But the motif of the quest remained in these
popular writings with the notion of searching juxtaposed with that
of "escape."

The romance mode is rooted in this notion of escape, for it
allows the reader to leave the familiar world behind, but only for
the moment, because invariably the reader is forced to return to
his/her world, hopefully with a new perception of that familiar
reality. But in the succeeding centuries, popular literature fleshed
out the escape theme in a cluster of images, all revolving around
the desire to free one's self from someone or something. Countless
stories dealt with innocent girls fleeing from evil men, children
leaving behind a life of persecution, characters running away from
a sordid past. Through these works, the reading public (mostly the
lower classes) saw their lives defined by poverty, insecurity and
oppression. Imprisonment and escape appeared to be the primary
experience of much of popular literature. In this recreated world,
images took on a multiplicity of meanings, and the conventional
distinction between illusion and reality was blurred.

Moreover, whether about criminals, orphans, persecuted ser-
vants or ill-fated lovers, these works seemed to attract the reading
public because of their ability to

> provide an over-simplification of the structure of society and the moral
> universe which allowed the reader to place himself in a world of intelligible
> values where right and wrong are clearly labelled.[17]

16. Beer, *The Romance*, p. 23.
17. John Richetti, *Popular Fiction Before 1740: Narrative Patterns (1700-1739)*
(Oxford: University Press, 1969), p. 11.

It was the clarity and simplicity with which writers of popular works rendered complex realities and ideological conflicts that enabled the reading public to identify with the experiences embodied in the narratives.

This vast body of writings may thus be examined in order to extract from it access to the denied hopes and aspirations of a culture. The linear path which realism studiously follows as it rigorously examines the "texture of lived life" is avoided by popular writers more preoccupied with pursuing a labyrinthine path strewn with desires and goals long suppressed by society. For example, the popularity of the Gothic novel in the eighteenth century might be explained if we consider these stories that revolved around vampires and monsters as embodiments of psychological and sociological features that society chose to suppress.[18] The result in the works of Mary Shelley, Hugh Walpole, among the Gothic writers, was a further questioning of the nature of reality and the categories with which it had been associated.

THE ROMANCE MODE IN NINETEENTH-CENTURY PHILIPPINE LITERATURE

In order to understand the nature of Philippine popular literature in the vernacular and its relationship with reality, we need to go back to the nineteenth century. The awit and corrido vied with the lives of saints and the *pasyon* for the public's attention. But there was no doubt that Filipinos were willing to read the ubiquitous narratives dealing with the lives of kings and princes. These transactions occurred at a time when kings and princes were not a part of Philippine society's structures. What was familiar and immediate was the reality of the people's colonial experience.

Critics and literary historians who have studied the awit and corrido consider these works as convenient means of making Filipinos passive if not oblivious to the effects of colonization.[19] Using traditional realist canons (but without making explicit their assumptions), these critics have argued that a large body of writ-

18. David Punter, *The Literature of Terror* (London: Longman Press, 1980), pp. 400-8. In this study, the Gothic novels considered escapist are shown to be ideologically determined.

19. Among those who have written on the *komedya* were Severino Reyes (*Ang Dulang Tagalog*, 1938), Julian Cruz Balmaseda (*Ang Dulang Pilipino*, 1947), and Lope K. Santos (*Tinging Pahapyaw sa Panitikang Tagalog*, 1938).

ings could have little or no significance since they merely indulged
in fantastic excursions into the world of the imagination. Singling
out the texts' contents/materials, they concluded that these awits
were escapist and necessarily ahistorical. For in the final analysis,
how would the audience see in the twelve peers of France, Prin-
cipe Baldovino, Don Juan Teñoso, and other characters dotting
the landscape of the awit and corrido, semblances of their real
selves? The problem becomes even more complex when one consi-
ders the texts' alien sources, strange cultural roots, and largely
exotic and improbable situations and adventures that properly be-
longed to the age of the troubadours.

Therefore, when measured against realist standards, these popu-
lar stories appear "unrealistic" and hence nonserious and trivial,
mainly because they had little correspondence with Philippine so-
cio-political realities. Constrained by this limited realist perspec-
tive, a number of critics have failed to consider these stories as
constructs shaped by a system of codes and aesthetic conventions
through which various realities have been customarily perceived by
the people. On the manifest level, the stories appear as ahistorical,
veering away from empirical reality. But upon a closer look, it is
possible to see how these narratives and their acceptance by the
public were conditioned by a complex of historical factors. These
stories were not bodily transported from Europe, fed to the Fili-
pino masses. A series of mediations or interventions had to take
place, at various levels, for these narratives to enjoy such popular-
ity.

These interventions ranged from the socio-political to the
aesthetic, including the mediation of language. In general, the
words were written under circumstances determined by the colon-
ial experience. Strict censorship was imposed by the authorities
who also controlled the publication of materials. But this same
authority was being questioned by a rising middle class, and with
the new prosperity there came an increasing need to appear urban-
ized. This need to be recognized as educated *indios* probably
prompted such writers as Jose de la Cruz and Francisco Balagtas,
among others, to try their hand at a form patronized by the ruling
class. The aesthetic conventions had already been laid down, but
there was the question of what language to use. The intervention
of language took place when the writers decided to use Tagalog
and assert it in print. No longer was Tagalog exclusively a medium

for oral discourse. By the eighteenth century, Tagalog had found a
new venue – printed books. Moreover, the choice of Tagalog ap-
peared to be a political act, a gesture that put into doubt the
authority of Spanish as a language of the elite and thus of domina-
tion. As important as all these mediations was the public's pre-
disposition (nurtured by the friars' use of literature as examples)
to read meanings into the texts that were pertinent to their lives.

A number of these mediating influences probably encouraged
the proliferation of presumably"escapist" works. Balagtas's
Florante at Laura (1838) and *Orosman at Zafira,* and such stories
as *Ibong Adarna, Doce Pares de Francia, Bernardo Carpio,* or *Prin-
cipe Baldovino* appeared on the surface as thrilling adventures in-
volving a number of royal personages and mighty warriors to
whom exciting and dramatic things invariably happened. The mar-
velous and the fantastic served as a colorful backdrop for love and
adventure. There was spectacle and pageantry, for example, in the
exploits of Bernardo Carpio who was driven by the desire to find
his real identity. The readers rooted for the youngest of the three
brothers in *Ibong Adarna* who were given the task of capturing a
mysterious bird which could heal the dying king. There were re-
sponsive chords touched by the love stories revolving around
Florante and Laura, Orosman and Zafira, and others. Abstracted
from the period in which these stories emerged, they seemed
bereft of any serious social or political concern. Concentrating on
the contents, one could conclude that only mindless entertain-
ment was proferred in these stories, a respite from life's problems.

But examined not as reflections but as refractions and even
negations of reality, the awit and corrido would appear to set up
an alternative world different from the nineteenth-century Philip-
pine realities. Juxtaposed against history, the texts would be
graphic commentaries on the familiar world determined by the
parameters of a colonial experience. In these works, what was
presented was a simplified ideological pattern that was more ac-
ceptable than the complex of ideological forces that conditioned
the people's lives. The unceasing struggle that was life was termi-
nated once the usurper, the tyrant and the villain were meted out
their just punishment as the story ended. Within the conventions
of the awit, it was easy for the reader to discern a comprehensible
design as the characters pursued their individual destinies, as they
encountered the pains and anguish of unjust imprisonment and

banishment, and as these individuals were reconciled with their loved ones. By using the convention of the happy ending (a distinct feature of the romance mode), the text was able to resolve what appeared to be problematic in life. The freedom that was restored as the narrative ended was a condition not allowed to exist in real life. For in life, the usurper still occupied the throne, the king was dying, the villain roamed freely, and the lovers were still pining for each other.

Like the European medieval romances, the awit and corrido remained open and expansive as a literary form, even as the stories took in diverse materials that were eventually fashioned into a comprehensible design. Written in the romance mode and thus refusing to pass themselves off as truth, these narratives were not meant to reflect contemporary reality. Instead, they appeared as constructs governed by a codified way of presenting reality and through which meanings were generated.

This structure of meaning is often not visible on the surface, but is lodged in the complex articulation that results from a series of mediations. The text is never "free," for it is determined by the writers' historical conditions, and is therefore not to be banished into a realm outside time. The anonymous authors of the awit and corrido were rooted in their specific milieu and time, and so was the system of conventions that shaped their materials. The people who responded to the texts, and who were themselves producers of meaning, were also bound to a definite historical moment. What *Florante at Laura* and *Bernardo Carpio* conveyed on the manifest level should not be taken as the texts' unchanging meanings. For surface meanings should still be situated against what the texts could not say openly. To understand what is presumably an "escapist, romantic" work such as *Florante at Laura* or the numerous awit is to go beyond and underneath what appears on the surface, into the problematic areas defined by discontinuities.[20] Criticism of these works should seek to establish the relationships between the texts' structures and those that constituted Philippine society in the nineteenth century.

The same task awaits those who see in the prose fiction of the period a fertile ground for analysis. Of these works, *Urbana at*

20. Of extreme importance to this essay's framework is Pierre Macherey, *A Theory of Literary Production* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1978).

Feliza (1858) written by a priest, Modesto de Castro, enjoyed unprecedented popularity.[21] Written in epistolary style, and passing itself off as an authentic document, *Urbana at Feliza* records a series of letters between Urbana (a student in Manila) and *Feliza* (the younger sister who stays in Paombong, Bulacan). In the process of corresponding with each other, the two characters (themselves authors within the text) touch on aspects of life from birth to death. The author did not bother to hide the exhortatory quality of his work, for at every turn, an ideal world is set off against the familiar world of vice, excesses, disorder, and injustice. In order to achieve this ideal setting, argues Urbana, *Feliza* should observe the laws of God and country, and the rules of society.

In perspective, *Urbana at Feliza* appeared to have addressed itself to issues related to both ethics and etiquette that preoccupied most urban Filipinos. Throughout this text, there seemed to be an on-going struggle between the westernized and urbanized ways of those who lived in the cities and larger towns, and the values and behavior of the barrio and mountain dwellers called *taga-bundok.* It was by projecting the ideal world populated by urbanized Filipinos that the author could contain the less desirable world inhabited by those who had not fully succumbed to Hispanization and Christianization. Still, this section of society made its presence felt, for its very absence in the ideal scheme of things affirmed its existence outside Hispanized society.

Although attempts at a realistic portrayal of life abounded in this prose work (seen specifically in the use of particularized time and place), a romantic sensibility shaped the discourse. The characters remained flat, the situations remained unparticularized, the overall design consisted of only two colors—black and white. But more importantly, *Urbana at Feliza* reinforced the subversive force of works written in the romance mode. By celebrating the patterns of life under the colonial regime and by depicting this life as the desired goal, *Urbana at Feliza* cast doubt on the belief that the old and tested ways of our ancestors were worth preserving. The text seemed to argue that the ways of our forefathers properly belonged to the past. In many ways, *Urbana at Feliza* became an example for ethical and social behavior for many Filipinos.

21. Modesto de Castro, *Urbana at Feliza* (Manila: Libreria Martinez, 1902).

THE ROMANCE MODE IN TWENTIETH-CENTURY
PHILIPPINE LITERATURE

By the beginning of the twentieth century, the romance mode had become a major shaping influence on the new literary types that were becoming more popular.[22] The serialized novels introduced in the first decade were read by a Filipino public already familiar with the conventions of the awit and corrido. Although the novel had features unique to it, such as the greater demand for correspondence between the text and reality, it is also valid to say that it shared some affinities with the romance. A number of novels used characters most of whom were two-dimensional; the basic situation was still centered on a quest for peace and love. The tendency was still an idealizing one seen specifically in a Utopian and visionary spirit to which the texts aspired. As Northrop Frye argues, the novel is a realistic displacement of romance. This is the reason why the two modes—romance and realism— could exist side by side in the novel.[23]

On the surface, a large number of novels reflected what was happening — the changes brought about by the Americans. Realism was the dominant perspective in these works that showed a careful attention to particulars of time and place. The works of Roman Reyes, Valeriano Hernandez Peña, Iñigo Ed. Regalado, to name a few, exemplified this tendency to mirror the changing realities. Moreover, the overtly political novels of the first two decades such as Faustino Aguilar's *Pinaglahuan* (1907), Lope K. Santos' *Banaag at Sikat* (1906) and Ismael Amado's *Bulalakaw ng Pag-asa* (1909) sought to depict social patterns of reality resulting from colonization. The novels thus confronted the burning issues of the period, and invariably explored them in a scientific manner even as the writers offered solutions to these social and political problems.

It is clear, however, that even these political novels contained traces of the romance mode. Regalado's *Madaling Araw* (1909) is a case in point. Society's contradictions were ably depicted; characters were created in order to flesh out ongoing conflicts. The

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22. See Soledad S. Reyes, *Ang Nobelang Tagalog: Tradisyon at Modernismo* (Quezon City: Ateneo de Manila University Press, 1982). The first section discusses the reasons for the popularity of the Tagalog novel.

23. Frye, *Anatomy of Criticism*, p. 38.

story came to its inevitable ending in an explosion of violence that destroyed the evildoers. But the ending exuded a visionary aura as a character passionately envisioned the creation of a new order out of the bloodbath. In a number of these works, a promise was made that Eden could still be recovered, and that it would be paradise on earth.

In the less political works, and by far the larger group of novels, the struggle was shifted to another area, that of the people's cultural life. The depiction of contemporary life served to heighten the contrast between what was happening in life and what the novelists would like to happen. In the older romantic works the ideal world could be established once the evil one —The Other — was vanquished by the forces of good.[24] The Other could be a scheming count, treacherous brother, or a monster. The design in the romance mode was clear, with little room for ambiguity. The same clarity was shown in popular novels structured by polarities—good and evil, the past and the present, tradition and modernization.

Historically, the identity of the colonizer had changed, and the attempt to change the people's values had become more systematic and widespread. The ideology rooted in a religious, non-individualistic matrix was being challenged by an ideology that had spawned a secular, individualistic and materialistic outlook. As the novelists must have believed, the threat emanated from the new colonizers. The threat was real and must be contained even if only through literature. The Other must be named in the novels, which then became a collective gesture of containment. Caught up in a nostalgic haze, these writers of the first half of the century sought to arrest through their narratives what in real life could not be stopped—the deepening Americanization of the Filipinos.

Once this relationship between the novel and reality is understood, it is less difficult to make sense of the novels' apparently conservative thrust. The movement is backward-looking in a gesture of escape from contemporary life and its attendant problems and ills. Like the earlier romantic works, the novels were situated

24. The category of The Other is derived from Freud as reinterpreted by Lacan. A convenient definition is as follows: "It is that which introduces 'lack' and 'gap' into the operations of the subject and which, in doing so, incapacitates the subject for selfhood, or inwardness, or appreciation, or plenitude; it guarantees the indestructibility of desire by keeping the goal of desire in perpetual flight." See Malcolm Bowie, "Jacques Lacan," in *Structuralism and Since,* ed. John Sturrock (Oxford: University Press, 1979), p. 135.

mostly in the second half of the nineteenth century. Immediately, an impression was created that the writers were distancing themselves from the contemporary period. This narrative strategy was employed in Patricio Mariano's *Tala sa Panghulo* (1913), and Roman Reyes's trilogy. Even those novels that were presumably set against the contemporary times gave the impression that the world properly belonged to the nineteenth century, as in Valeriano Hernandez Peña's *Nena at Neneng* (1905).

In the novels that used the 1900s as a backdrop, such as Reyes's *Andrea Liwaswas* (1909) and *Pusong Walang Pag-ibig* (1910), and Rosauro Almario's *Mga Taga-bukid* (1911), the ideal world was set up to contrast with the familiar world. On the one hand were characters who were obedient to their parents, faithful to their vows in love and marriage, socially committed; they constituted the inhabitants of the world being threatened. The threat was exemplified in the disobedient children, very often faithless in love and marriage, and highly individualistic. The second group was to be feared because of the confusion they could sow; hence, they must be banished from the world in order to impose order and harmony once again. Thus, these novels should be seen as the novelists' way of expressing their desire to articulate what in life could not be asserted forcefully. By holding up the westernized Filipinos who were contemptuous of traditional ways as objects of caricature, the novelists were able to affirm traditional values. By constructing models and exemplars through the other type of characters, the writers attempted to make of these literary constructs sources of lessons or *aral* for the reading public. Like the awit and corrido, these novels simplified for the readers the complex patterns of life.

As the decades of the twentieth century wore on, the conventions of the novel as defined by the early novelists increasingly determined the ways in which subsequent writers fashioned their works. The largely nonrealistic orientation of the novelists is seen in the point of view shaping the texts. Changing from one point of view to another in order to frame the narrative, the novelists intruded into the narrative. When the writers broke the continuity of the narrative by addressing the readers directly, they affirmed the fictionality of the discourse, its being a system of conventions.

By the third decade, this conventionalized way of perceiving reality had become a major factor in the emergence of the more

"escapist" works of Fausto Galauran, Antonio Sempio, Teodoro Virrey, and other novelists. Trained to treat the novels as a system of conventions—stereotyped characters, convoluted plots, inconsistent point of view, the use of rhetorical language—both the writers and the readers looked at the novels as formulas and stereotypes that did not differ radically from what had been written before. Although the novels usually drew on materials that could probably be verified as events in real life, the insights offered still dwelt on values centered on family life, relationships in a community and the ubiquitous love relationships. The silence of these novels on matters directly related to social and economic problems sprang from many factors. But a compelling set of factors could be traced to the context of production—the outlets, the manner of distribution, editorial control, the format the serial took, and the financial arrangements between publishers and writers.

On the surface, the novels affirmed the reigning order as they fell back on predictable cliches handed down from various authorities. The beliefs that the poor will always be with us, that the long suffering ones will be rewarded in heaven, and that the woman's place is in the home, to name a few, were passed off as unchanging truths. But a closer study of some novels suggests a marked opposition to these taken-for-granted presuppositions. For in such novels as Sempio's *Punyal na Ginto,* Aguilar's *Busabos ng Palad,* and other popular pieces, these values were questioned with much ardor in the course of the narrative. Moreover, it is interesting to point out the large number of novels which zeroed in on class distinction as a shaping tendency, and as the cause of the conflict and passion unleashed in the texts. The ending, which featured poor but kind girls being absorbed into the upper class after the wicked, rich characters had reformed, was one way of subverting what in life seldom happened.

The combination of subversive and affirmative tendencies in the novel could be seen in the short stories, a form that relied heavily on the conventions of the novel. An interesting illustration is the anthology, *Ang 25 Pinakamabubuting Maikling Kathang Pilipino ng 1943,* composed of the best stories published in *Liwayway.* This magazine was then under the control of the Manila Shimbunsiya, a Japanese-sponsored body for regulating cultural affairs. Juxtaposed against World War II, these stories appear as escapist

because they turned the people's attention from the grim realities of war. Instead of the infernal world, the world of idyll peopled by characters grappling with private emotions was depicted. Thus in such stories as Liwayway Arceo's "Uhaw ang Tigang na Lupa," Macario Pineda's "Suyuan sa Tubigan," and Emilio Aguilar Cruz's "Paghihintay," war was relegated to the background.

However, it appears that the reality that the texts refused to explore directly haunted the narratives. For Narciso Reyes's "Lupang Tinubuan," Serafin Guinigundo's "Nagmamadali ang Maynila," and Macario Pineda's "Sinag sa Dakong Silangan," were attempts to contain death and destruction. Because of constraints, the texts could only indirectly delineate what was going on in life. Written in an atmosphere of fear and repression, these short stories concentrated on facets of experience that constituted familiar reality when war had not ravaged both society and the people's psyche. What was present as manifest content was actually shaped by the ongoing struggle present in life but absent in the texts.

At present, *komiks* constitute the most popular reading fare in the Philippines.[25] In its history, komiks have appropriated a number of features from the awit and corrido, the novel and the short story. It is therefore inevitable that the romance mode has become komiks' most important tendency, for this mode allows both the writers and illustrators access to experiences that the other types did not fully explore.

The romance mode in the komiks is most clearly seen in the stories directly dealing with the marvelous and the fantastic, with the supernatural and the macabre. In such stories as *Darna, Dyesebel, Petrang Kabayo, Captain Universe,* the imagination is allowed to roam freely. The anti- realistic design is strongly projected, affirming the impossibility of establishing a one-to-one correspondence between the narrative and reality. The komiks become a signifier pointing only to itself as the signified reality, and not to anything outside the komiks' pages.

In a number of stories, the writers do attempt to inject some realism by depicting aspects of familiar reality that form patterns of social life. Such is the thrust in *Gilda, Roberta,* or *Pieta.* Nevertheless, this realism is tempered by certain features reminiscent of

25. Soledad S. Reyes, "The Philippine 'Komiks'," *International Popular Culture* 1 (1980): 14-23.

the romance mode. For example, the character Gilda, a woman of the night, is the displaced version of the damsel in distress, while Palos, the kind-hearted thief, is the displaced equivalent of the knight in shining armor. Moreover, these works generally fail to sustain the realistic mode, for as the story ends, the reader sees how adroitly the writer has suspended the laws of nature and of logic in weaving his tale.

Despite their unrealistic mode, komiks have played an important role in the people's lives. More than the prose works, komiks with their visual illustrations have the power to present a configuration of images which captures the structural features of the people's actual conditions. The large number of stories dealing with horrifying creatures from the nether world or even from outer space could very well image for the public the socioeconomic conditions which confront them in real life. Thus komiks function to provide the Filipino public with a collective construct through which reality becomes less baffling and mysterious. The simplification that takes place is a necessary condition for the komiks to keep generating meanings in their various narratives.

With the emergence of komiks in the second half of the twentieth century as the Filipino's most popular and accessible reading material, the romance mode is assured of an almost inexhaustible supply of writings that will turn to it as a primary shaping influence. In perspective, the ascendancy of the komiks as the people's favorite reading fare suggests the strong bonds between popular literature and the romance mode. One seems unthinkable without the other, and together they bring about writings that are a telling commentary on the world we know.