

MIDSUMMER AND MAYDAY EVE: A DUALITY

Ferdinan N. Cortez

Member, University Research Pool
University of Saint Louis
Tuguegarao City, Philippines

© 2014 The Author(s). **Open Access** - This article is under the CC BY license (<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>).



INTRODUCTION

Literature is life, and life is literature. Anything that is mirrored in literature is a parcel of reality. It is also a reflection of the life of the author. The themes in literature were derived from the observations and principles of the author. Such is based on Jacques Derrida's point: "No one can ever write what he hadn't experienced". In this premise, anything that is written in novels and short stories are "hidden experiences and principles of the author". He might have been triggered to pen it down by many factors, to expose something, to awaken or to entertain. Literature is divided into prose and poetry.

The most notable genre of Literature is fiction. This is due to the fact that while novel is long, fiction could be an excerpt from a novel, thus making it more popular. The elements employed in novel are also synonymous to fiction, or more famously known as the short story.

Fiction as a genre is powerful. As it mirrors life, it could change life itself. The writer does not change the world. The readers do. For in fiction, characters are camouflaged. It is different from journalism, where facts are presented. In fiction, the author is very powerful. In his hands lies the life of a character. He may make the character live, or die. He can present the cancer of the society, as what Rizal did, and the readers came to know about the evils, for the characters are very similar with what they see.

It is therefore in reading carefully a work of fiction that we come to know about the real dimension, the clarity of what is offered and our own understanding. But to understand better the works, one should take a glimpse at the biography of the author, for it will always have a link in his obra maestra, the kind of people he mingled, the setting the society where he lived.

Just like analyzing poetry, where one has to read the lines many times to better understand it. Who knows it better? The author. But the author may say something about poetry, but will not explain it. If he dared explain, it should never have been published. Fiction is what we really see, only it is camouflaged. Partly imagination, and reality.

Purpose of the Study

The aim of the study is to compare the works of two Filipino authors known for their fiction, Nick Joaquin and Manuel Arguilla. This duality will employ in depth analysis on the styles and theme, specifically:

1. Do both authors have the same technique in syntactic presentation?
2. Do they employ both techniques in characterization?
3. Do they present the same sense of nationalism?

Significance of the Study

Studies like this are very scarce, yet, Literature Subjects are offered in Liberal Arts, Literature I and 2 are offered in all courses. This study will benefit the following:

Professors: it will give them a tool to utilize as they teach fiction in their classes.

Literature Students: they will come to know what nationalism is all about and how they are presented in fiction.

Administration: this study might give them the idea to encourage faculty members to dwell on Literary Studies.

The Researchers: He was able to learn styles and techniques in writing fiction.

Future Researchers: it will give them the beacon to dwell deeper on studies pertaining fiction.

Literature Review

Fictionist always intertwine their beliefs and principles, the call of the times and love for country, In Sionil's Poon, the author lays down the first thread to start the unfolding of the theme. He involves Istak with his greater quest, the quest for the greater meaning of his life. With this a foundation, the journey pattern became the next strand to be laid. Istak, on the prodding of Don Jacinto and Apolinario Mabini accepts the responsibility of giving the message to Emilio Aguinaldo, the President of the short lived Philippines Republic. He rides to

the Ilocos with the purest intention of merely giving the message to the president. The third is interwoven into the other strands to develop the theme. (Francisco, 1990)

In Poon, three forces are developed: Love, Death, and Poverty. These are the forces that prodded the characters of Poon to quest and to journey. Love compels Istak to be righteous most of the time. Death levied upon his shoulders both the Mosaic role of delivering his people to the land of opportunity and the messianic role of delivering the message to the President. This message may save Filipinas if it will reach the president on time. Death, too, allows Istak to assess himself in terms of sacrifices of the young soldiers who gave their lives to free Filipinas from foreign invasion.

“This is our gift not to him but to Filipinas. Honorable a patriot, But cripple, I am not a patriot. But do you measure the sacrifice of this poor man beside me has made? He lies still, his hands no longer feel. He is so young, so very young- what had life promised to hold for him? Honorable cripple, you know the answers. And God,- do I take your name in vain? I don't even know why I am here when I could have run easily. It must be pride or stubbornness of which men of the north have plenty. If it is pride, what I can be proud of? I have nothing to show, nothing which I can built myself, why am I here? I will search the depths and will find nothing there. Nothing but DUTY, DUTY, DUTY.” (P. 200).

Such a scene in Poon exhibited Sionil's sense of Nationalism.

Such an importance of approach in Literature is also used in Studies like the Study of Sales in A Literary Approach in The Book Of Revelation. She said to read Revelation accurately, a person must have a great sense of symbolism and a rather thorough knowledge of both history and the Old Testament. The Book of Revelation can be read with profit, if a person remembers that it is symbolic or allegorical. Surely, just like in fiction, the symbols meant something important to the people for whom the book was written. (Sales, 1993)

Rigor (2000) mentioned the work of Hagedorn, The Dog eaters as an example of Textual Montage, a style also used by Sionil in his novels. The letter sounds natural, personal, sincere and original. With all the Grammatical, mechanical and spelling errors intact, the letter gets interesting to the reader.

Postmodern fiction, as viewed by modern readers, teems with possibilities. One such possibility derived from a close encounter with Dogeaters is the problematization of dominant values. This value concerns the Filipinos' craving for food: peppery sweet lechon kawali, grilled bangus, pinakbet and of course, azucena. Such possibility, when analyzed in fiction, presents the experiences of the author. (Rigor, 2000)

Nationalism in Literature had been prevalent during the Pre-Hispanic times. Such a spirit prompted Rizal and his colleagues to use their pen to awaken the people. Tree, the second novel of F. Sionil Jose still burns with that spirit, as viewed by postmodernists. In this novel, Sionil's character, Esperidion, has several quests: that of his son, his parents and of Baldo and Benito. All set up for love of country. (Francisco 1990.)

METHODS

This study involved the use of expository research method using critical analysis especially in the duality of the works used. Comparative technique was used as a primary tool. This standard analytical- reader's response was employed. Relying on data about the authors, their styles and the direction of themes was used. Postmodernist theory was used by the researcher.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

A fictionist does not only write what he feels as radiated by his characters. He also personifies just like an element of a poem. Not only do the setting portray, they magnify. A short story does not only entertain, it mirrors. In the same manner as F. Sionil Jose did not write his famous Rosales Saga to impress foreigners, but he mirrored the social conditioned of the country. He did not build imagery, he painted them. Thus, he is an artist and an aesthete. To which if you look at the structure, he is the former, and when one reads deeper he is the latter.

Literary Criticism today is Post humanist and deeply adversarial in nature, committed essentially to an analysis of the textual structures and images of oppression and exploitation. The primary aim of which is to critique consciousness and cultures to show the agenda of communication rooted in hegemonic and logocentric reality frames. (Hornedo. 2002). This attempt to put into a duel the works of Manuel Arguilla and Nick Joaquin would contrive in our analysis on how it is to read a short story, and a deeper understanding on how they present human nature.

Many writers had made an attempt to do so only to find out that they had accomplished nothing but to entertain and there is no social significance. They have framed their characters in text, described the place, added a little conflict and they ended up either to let the readers understand them better or the work has been converted into a satire. Fiction is an art, and sometimes it imprisons history. Thus, chronicles like Pigafetta had been the early writers to make an attempt. But theirs was not fiction. It was had really happened. Many readers conclude that even the writings of Marco Polo were considered as fiction. But as centuries wore off, and those places he described became more accessible, they agreed he had been there.

According to F. Sionil Jose, the National Artist:

“Fiction is when you merge social issues in the web of your plot, when you write it honestly and your characters offer a prerogative in action. However, couple it with history, for in that manuscript you are writing would emanate a vigor for the readers.”

Fiction therefore is more powerful than journalism. In journalism, the writer should be so careful so as not to present a bias article. A fictionist can camouflage his characters and he can even bring them catharsis. The works of the fictionist is not limited on the characters, the setting and the other elements but on what is being believed by the authors. His perceptions in life: lust, greed, being human. His perceptions on the spirit: heaven, hell, and mundane vengence. It is in this angle that this duel shall take place, and some notations of the experts shall be included henceforth.

Manuel Arguilla and Nick Joaquin

Both are contemporaries as men, but as writers, they represent two Filipino perceptions. Arguilla appeared to be a romantic of the pre war period, Joaquin an abstract oracle of the post war. (Hornedo 2002). They are both patriots in a different way, the former is always enamoured with the north bloom in the idyllic colors of Amorsolo, and the latter obsesses in digging the bones to expose the chilling secrets of the centuries in the dimension called the galleon days. Reading their works, one would say Arguilla is a tender light, but he was the opposite. He was their ranging Borgia bull against the Japanese. In that commitment, he lost his life. Nick Joaquin might be construed as aristocratic, Hispanic, or a soulscape; but he is gentle, as narrated by Doreen Fernandez.

“Just when I met Nick Joaquin, I don’t remember, because the awed moment has been eclipsed by other meetings. I have been with him, example- he on the center, I on the periphery- at one summer’s UP Creative Writing Center Workshop. He came for the sessions on the short story. The practice then was to circulate the unsigned pieces for discussion- first by the writing fellows, then by the faculty and only then would the writer be identified. Nick commented on the short story- jokingly but pointedly. The author acknowledge her work, thanked everyone for criticism and burst into tears. Nick, horrified, and contrite, exclaimed he’d never wanted to cause tears- and did not return to the workshop for many summers. For Nick is deeply kind, with a very tender core, which he covers up with blusters and jokes.” (Budhi 2002)

Arguilla, as described by the National Artist Jose:

“He hated the Japs so much that if it is possible, he would strangle them with his bare hands. He later on joined the underground movement, planning guerilla attacks, punishing the enemies on solid ground. He is a fire, and his eyes cannot hide the tremors of hatred that emanate from his very soul. It was the blaze of patriotism.” (4th Creative Writing National Workshop.)

Such descriptions can now be a springboard on what they wrote, and what they aspired for, the kind of prose, and to what purpose. In between the lines would be the hidden soul of the two men, logocentric and hegemonic. This is what post- humanist is all about, an analysis of the text and what they represent. Both are Filipinists, and their love for the country is beyond question. It is the focus of this paper dwell deeper on the essential element of their works, thus this duel.

ARGUILLA: MIDSUMMER

One of the shortest narratives written by a Filipino writer in English is Arguilla’s MIDSUMMER. Arguilla’s setting is Negreban, in the Middle of Summer as the title suggests, and there are no names given to the characters. Ilocano terms were also used, as in *ading*, *manong* and *ledda*. Reading the opening paragraph, you can immediately sense how he painted the scenery; a country, or more appropriate, a barrio lad is traversing a road. He is wearing a hat, and his carabao is pulling a cart. There was not a house in sight, on the left side of the road is a gorge of a stream, its banks covered with sunburned cogon grass. Farther, beyond the shimmer of the quivering heat waves rose ancient hills not less blue than the cloud palisaded sky. . .

The description included the grating of the wheels, rustling of falling earth and the shuffle of the weary bull. He even hinted the thin indigo lines which was the sea. Then, just like being out in a reverie, the woman appeared. Or shall we say a barrio lass?

“The man in the cart did not notice her until she had rounded the spur of the land and stood unmoving beside the road, watching the cart and its occupant come toward her. She was young, surprisingly sweet amidst the sparse surroundings. A gaily striped kerchief covered her head, the ends tied at the nape of her neck. She wore a homespun bodice of red light cloth with small white checks. Her skirt was also homespun and showed a pattern of white checks with narrow stripes of yellow and red.”

This opening of Arguilla could be likened to a boy meets girl in some paperbacks. But then, there is a big difference. The characters are nameless, only referred to as “the man, the woman,” or “he and she” or “manong and ading”. It presupposes that it could happen to anybody, this rendezvous. It gives an aura of Adam and Eve, only the setting is the cogon covered gorges, the arid land and the scorching heat of summer, not paradise. Yet Arguilla was good in shifting his point. When the water filled jar on her head tilted after she staggered, water splashed down on her bosom, the single bodice instantly clung to her flesh, molding the twin hillocks of her breast. Such a sight adds more meaning to the setting. For when he left and the lad chose the same place where to eat his

lunch, he muttered to himself: “the under part of her arm is white and smooth, and her hair is straight and black.”

The presence of the bull too, and cart is strictly rural. The hat, the description of the well and the jute sack filled with food are typical Ilokano. Notice the coconut shell, polished, where he placed rice, on top is an egg already broiled hard. He has also dried shrimps and a cake of sugar (tagapulot).

Notice the way the lad invited the girl.

“Won’t you join me ading?”

“God reward you manong.”

And just like the good trait that Filipinos possess, the girl invited the boy when there was hardly any shade left.

“I told mother about you.”

The scene where they were talking about salt signifies the hardship of that place during that time. Yet, hardly and patient Ilokanos pushed their limit to work. Rice and salt would suffice for the hungry years.

Another scene was when the boy was eating and the girl unconsciously tugged the rope tied to the petroleum can used in fetching water. There was miniature flood, and only the tube containing salt was spared. The girl wanted to fetch water, as she said she was to be blamed, but the young man smiled. Finally, she surrendered the rope, but she stayed behind him, watching the muscles on his back ripple with the effort. He also filled her jar, they ran out of water and she has to go and get.

The scene is typical Ilokano. Or more so very Filipino. The hospitality and the invitation given to strangers and almost in most cases are being practiced in many rural areas even today.

“Our house beyond that point.” she said, pointing to the spur of land topped by sickly bamboos. “We have no neighbors.”

In here, Arguilla was pointing to the fact that Filipinos are freedom loving people and are very independent.

The last lines are significant. He saw a vision of republic, though hazy.

“He felt very strong. He felt that he could follow the slender, lithe figure ahead of him to the ends of the world.”

Arguilla has a sense of putting his emotion into fiction, and he could camouflage his characters in a very artistic manner. He is a Commonwealth Filipino as said by Dr. Florentino Hornedo. He believes that all is well in the world where he lives and loves, and that is Nagrebcan in Bauag, La Union. He has a way of creating conflict, as in his short story *How my Brother Leon Brought Home a Wife*. The conflict is whether the father can accept Maria, or whether Maria can endure the

life in the barrio, for the memory of Ermita beach is still fresh in her mind.

Midsummer has a simple conflict, yet in conjecture, very complicated. Arguilla, the commonwealth writer, tries to preserve the tradition, the traits of a Filipino. He therefore wrote the last line to signify that despite the looming condition, there is still hope of being independent.

He is also a painter whose hue is the barrio of Nagrebcan. The words he chose are cleverly colorful, despite the desolation of the place. The characters are plain and simple, illustrating the Filipino’s affection for simplicity, though at times they could be baroque.

The aridity of the surroundings does not only exactly picture the place, it implies the feelings of the Filipinos on a time when they were subjects of foreigners. On why he wrote in English is already moot and academic. It would be the same as asking why Rizal wrote his novels in Spanish.

JOAQUIN: MAYDAY EVE:

The attention getter in this story of Joaquin is the introduction which is very long. A fragmented sentence that encapsulates the setting and the period of prose again, Doreen Fernandez who really know Nick Joaquin said: “the very first story I ever read by a Filipino writer was Nick Joaquin’s *May Day eve*-and I fell hard. The paragraph long opening sentence, the unbearable childhood fragrances of ripe guavas, the sadness of a love that died, made me wonder the writer could so create a world as to transport someone in the 20th century into 19th. Today, 38 years and decades of teaching later, I still teach it, finding someone new each time, from the layout of Intramuros to the images of love’s secrecy: the trap of a May night . . . the snare of summer . . . the terrible silver nets of the moon. (Budhi 2002)

Such was the first impression of the writer. *Mayday Eve* is a story set in Intramuros, in a time when rich ilustrados go to Europe, hungry for knowledge and return home with plenty of stories to tell. They are welcomed as heroes, and there were dancing. Though the first part of the story was such as the party was about to break up. There are two main characters that give life (or death?) to the story. Don Badoy Montiya and Dona Agueda. They are ensnared in the throes of Hispanic era, and scorched in that *May Eve*. “The party should end at ten, but it was already almost midnight when the carriages came lining up the front door and the young lads would not like to settle in yet- not in a tropic night like that, the mystic *May night*, while the girls rush to the windows and look at the scurrying with their canes and coats, their black moustaches so vivid in the dark night. The girls began to tell one another how care free men were, and how awful a girl can be, so they watched the young men with their elegant apparel, while above is the young evil moon prowling in a corner. “

The just couldn't sleep yet. They were at the window and they were ogling at the young lads in the cobblestone. Anastasia has to pull their hair to put them to bed. "It is Mayday Eve," she said to quiet the girls." The witches aboard the night. It is a night of divination, a night for lovers who cared, might peer in a mirror and would there behold face of whoever it was they fated to marry. . . "the girls shrieked with fear, it was Agueda, the prettiest of the girls who dared to go and try what Anastasia had said.

It is in this part where Joaquin displayed his ability in applying twist in fiction. There was this second generation setting, and a child asking to Agueda what happened after Anastasia informed her about the mirror. It is just like transforming this part to the present, for Agueda, one of the girls in that Mayday Eve is now talking to her daughter about that experience she had.

"And what did you see Mama? Oh, what was it?"

But Dona Agueda had forgotten the little girl on her lap: she was staring past the curly head nestling at her breast and seeing herself in the big mirror in the room.

It was the same room and the same mirror but the face she now saw in it was an old face- a hard, bitter, vengeful face framed in graying hair and so sadly altered, so sadly different from the other face like a white mask, that fresh young face like a pure mask that she had brought before this mirror one wild May midnight and years ago. . .

"I saw the devil," she said bitterly. "I opened my eyes and there in the mirror, smiling at over my left shoulder was the face of the devil. He had a curly hair and scar on his cheek- . . ."

"Like the scar of papa?"

"Well, yes. But this of the devil is a scar of sin, while that of your papa is a scar of honor. Or so he says."

"Go on with the devil."

"Well, he had moustaches."

"Like those of papa?"

"Oh no. those of your papa are dirty and graying and smell horribly of tobacco, while this of the devil were very black and elegant- oh, how elegant!"

At this point, there is a turnaround in the story. It went back to the time Agueda really went down to see the mirror, and Don Badoy Montiya appeared, reflected on the mirror. The reader then is transformed into riding a time machine, or just like a VHS tape, Forward and Rewind.

Contrastive Review:

Nick Joaquin had this style of a moving camera as when he wrote:"But alas, the hearts forget, the heart is distracted; and May time passes; summer ends, the storm break over the

rotripe orchards and the heart grows old; while the hours, the days and the months and the years piled up and piled up, till the mind becomes too crowded, too confused: dust gathers in it, cobwebs multiply, the walls darken and fall into ruins and decay; the memory perishes. . ."

And suddenly, Don Badoy is pictured as a very old man, past sixty, coming home after a meeting with the conspirators, his mind still resounding with the speeches and his patriot heart still exultant as he picked his way up the steps to the front door and inside into the slumbering darkness of the house; wholly unconscious of the May night.

On the hall, chancing to glance at the sala, he shuddered, his blood ran cold- for he had seen a face in the mirror there- a ghostly candlelight face with the eyes closed and the lips moving, a face that he suddenly felt he had seen there before though it was a full minute before the lost memory came flowing . . . came tiding back, so overflowing. The actual moment and so swiftly washing away the piled hours and days and months and years that he was left suddenly young again: he was a gay young buck, fresh from Europe: he had been dancing all night, he was very drunk: he stopped in the doorway: he saw a face in the dark: he cried out, and the lad standing before the mirror jumped with fright and almost dropped the candle, but looking around and seeing the old man, laughed out with relief and came running.

The style of Joaquin in juggling the time frame of the fiction is very apparent here. For this is now the present and he is looking at his grandson. Suddenly, that Mayday eve came rushing back, when he was young . . . and he met Agueda.

This is now the time when Joaquin pictured the evolution of a revolution that will culminate in the near future. A revolution that will give dawn to that dark night haunted by bats.

He said he, too, experienced looking at the mirror when he was still a young buck, and he saw the devil. But what a beautiful devil, he was bewitched.

And suddenly, he was sobbing, and thought of Agueda. Who is already dead.

Joaquin perceived independence at the point of view of the freedom lovers in the Hispanic Era, Arguilla was hopeful for a republic during the Japanese occupation.

Both love their country, but differ in presentation in fiction. Joaquin is demanding, sentimental, allured to the dark. Arguilla is indefinite, having no names for his characters.

Joaquin use long, complex sentences, while Arguilla was clearer. He made use of simple sentences.

CONCLUSION

Both authors are astute writers of English. While Joaquin is more complex in his syntactic presentation because he used series of sentences separated by commas, Arguilla used precise sentences. Both, however, followed the traditional Subject verb structure. Joaquin used Hispanic terms, while Arguilla used Ilokano terms.

The authors don't have the same techniques in characterization. Arguilla used simple characters.

Both present a sense of Nationalism. However, in the Postmodernist point of view, Joaquin is sentimental, peeping at

the window of hope for freedom, Arguilla enamored by the thought of a republic.

REFERENCES

- Francisco, A. (1990). *The Francisco arcellana sampler* (philippine writers series). Manila: Creative Writing Center.
- Sales, B. (1993). *A literary approach in the book of revelation*. Manila: Creative Writing Center
- Arguilla, M. (1933). *Midsummer: a son is born*. Philippines
- Torres, M. (2011). *May day eve by nick Joaquin*. Retrieved January 3, 2012 from <http://www.slideshare.net/marjorietorresKPOPaholic/may-day-eve-nick-joaquin-by-marjorie-torres>
- Hornedo, F. (2000). *The power to be: a phenomenology of freedom*. Manila: University of Santo Thomas Publishing House.