



THE HISPANIC CULTURE OF KAPAMPANGAN NOVELS DURING THE AGE OF U.S. IMPERIALISM

LOIDA L. GARCIA

Bataan Peninsula State University
2110 Dinalupihan, Bataan, Philippines



ABSTRACT

This study aims to scrutinize the influences of the Hispanic culture among the extant Kapampangan novels authored by vernacular writers during the age of US imperialism in the first decades of the 20th century. The investigation is a pioneering attempt that hopes to provide a full-length study on the themes of the century old manuscripts in order to show the cultural conditions that framed the stated fictions.

Initial inquiry implies that the extant fictions have been published by sequence which further indicate that they have been widely patronized; hence they warrant revival not only as an indigenous literary legacy but also as significant writings worthy of exploration. The manuscripts are representatives of a distinct Kapampangan culture that has been a product of the more than three centuries of Spanish conquest which has later been succeeded by the American occupation.

It is professed that the novels would provide the contemporary readers a varied perception as to the extent of the colonial effects that Spain had exhibited and that a close reading method anchored on new historicism will shed a wide perspective on the significance of the Kapampangan novels in the dome of literature.

Keywords: cultural conditions, extant fictions. Hispanic culture, Kapampangan novels, US imperialism, vernacular writers

INTRODUCTION

The research is an initial endeavor to explore the Hispanic culture of the Kapampangan novels during the American imperialism in the onset of the 20th century so this is intended to provide an available access to the extant Kapampangan novels that have failed to capture the interest of the reading public and the regional literary canon.

It is the objective of the study to identify the Hispanic culture of the early kapampangan novels written and produced during the US imperialism. The inquiry focuses on the themes of the novels that portray Hispanic influences specifically on their beliefs, traditions and symbols. The investigation specifically analyses the most customary and recurrent themes in Spanish

literature that have been adopted by vernacular writers when they started scribbling their fiction. Juan Crisostomo Soto and Aurelio Tolentino have both struggled under the Spanish regime and advocated for independence from the new US rule. ZoiloGalang has been a product of the dual cultures of Spain and the US.

History professes that in the Spanish conquest that lasted for more than three centuries in the Philippines in which Pampanga was established as a province in 1571, the colonial power of Spain had inevitably subjugated the literary sight of the early Pampango writings from the folk songs, folk verses, poetry, religious texts, zarzuela, plays and novels. An extensive research conducted by Manlapaz (1981, p.3) revealed that

collected manuscripts and studies on Kapampangan writings yielded pre-Spanish literature in the forms of folklore that consisted riddles, proverbs and folksongs classified according to different types as well as folktales plus several customs and beliefs. Castro (1981, p.3) has affirmed that the pre-Spanish legacy like the *basaltu* (folksong) and *O Caca, O Caca* ("O Brother, O Brother) was inspired by nomadic *beluga* (Negritos) of the Zambales mountains. Castro further explains that the lack of extant manuscripts was because the Spaniards destroyed whatever they found in Pampanga upon their arrival and popularized their own culture of poetry, song and dance. From the long dominion of Spain over the province of Pampanga and the whole Philippine islands, their interventions and manipulations on literature had persisted and become part of the literary landscape of the writers.

The Kapampangan novels had flourished after the United States had bought the country from Spain and asserted their authority to prove that they were the better world power. Interestingly, the new genre had flourished and the novels' publications dated in 1907-1923, during the onset of the new colonial lord; the Americans. The US policy tried to change the political, literary and cultural conditions that the Kapampangans had borne under the three century-rule of Spain yet the culture that has been stamped has been deeply rooted.

The narratives being the most unexplored literary form need to be investigated for the imprint and traces of the Hispanic culture or the influences of the new foreign conquest that would clearly manifest the dual cultural contexts which is yet to give distinction to the early manuscripts. From the present perspective though, this literary conquest is dim-lighted by the persistent dominion of the Hispanic culture and the early Kapampangan novels are verifications of it. The influences of the Spanish dominance are greatly exhibited on the recurrent themes that manifest the tradition and orientation of the Hispanic culture.

Material and Methods

The study is focused on the extant and available Kapampangan select novels published between 1907-1923. The novels have been read and patronized during the first three decades of the

American occupation. The fictions are limited to the extant manuscripts written by Kapampangan writers and these are currently available in their original texts as holographs, typescripts or in microfilms.

The novels include *Lidia*(Lydia) published in 1907 by the renowned vernacular playwright Juan Crisostomo Soto (1867-1918), *IngBuac Nang Ester*(Ester's Hair strand) -First Part, Second Part and Third Part which were published in 1911-1915 written by another prolific Kapampangan author Aurelio Tolentino (1875-1915), the novel *Maring*, published in 1913 also by Tolentino and the recently translated two-part novel *IngCapalaran/ IngGalalNingBie*(The Fate/ The Prize of Life), published in 1923 by the historian-playwright ZoiloGalang (1895-1959). All the stated novels were published as serials in newspapers and have become instantly popular.

It is the ultimate goal of this study to disclose the Hispanic culture imbued among the themes of the Kapampangan novels during the US imperialism period. In order to meet the stated objective, the inquiry engaged the literary close reading method anchored on the theory of New Historicism. This was done by close monitoring and investigating of the texts to observe reliable and accurate information and details that yield the Hispanic references in the manuscripts.

The literary close reading technique is employed because in so doing, the texts are analyzed not only on the literal level but importantly on the implied and sometimes hidden allusions that the novelists want to convey. Fisher and Frey (2012, p.8) stated that the practice of close reading is not a new one and in fact has existed for many decades as the practice of reading a text for a level of detail not used in everyday living. In this study, the focus is to see the connection of the texts and the contexts by taking into consideration the manner in which the texts were produced, how they were written and the prevailing cultural conditions that might have influenced the authors and their works. The 20th century manuscripts need to be close-read to operate cautious observations on the making of these novels and how they manifest the social, political, economic and cultural situations widespread during that time.

A most recent study of the close reading method was done by Smith (2014, p 81) who had found the strategy to be most effective in literary analysis. The author has employed this on her lessons about *The Odyssey* and got very satisfied on the responses delivered by her students. The readers were able to uncover the truth about the literary texts and accurately interpreted the implied details by using the techniques on close reading.

The study is anchored on the theory of New Historicism for its need to highlight the connection of the writer and his texts. The cultural inferences of the manuscripts as evolved by the novelists may well be resurfaced through the use of a theory that focuses on the socio-historical milieu of the author and his work. Stephen Greenblatt (1989, p. 12) as cited by Bertens (2001, p. 176) had detailed that 'The work of art is the product of a negotiation between a creator or class or creators equipped with a complex, communally shared repertoire of conventions and the institutions and practices of society.'

The century old Kapampangan manuscripts then, are manifestations of the social, economic, political and cultural-historical conditions that dominated during those times. The authors are consequently molded or trapped in the context that governed their existence. As Bertens (2001, p.177) has quoted, 'the literary texts are directly involved in history and literature is not simply a product of history but also actively makes history.' From this view, it is inevitable that the extant Kapampangan novels are actual incidents from the socio-cultural situations of the authors and the prevailing context of that time and the theory on new historicism will direct the proper perspective of the investigation.

Results and Discussion

Cautious scrutiny of the manuscripts reveals the Hispanic culture of Kapampangan early novels as manifested by their recurrent themes. The universal themes of love, women, religion and family are anchored on the influences of Spanish customs and traditions existing in both the Philippines and Spain. The Spanish romanticism and realism in the 19th and 20th centuries have been depicted by the early novelists as they delve specifically on passionate love, women's honor, the

Catholic religion and strong family ties that have become common subjects on the early fictions.

THE SPANISH ROMANTICISM AND REALISM ON: Passionate Love

In the first Kapampangan novel, *Lidia* which was published in 1907, Hector's love for Lidia has been depicted to highlight passionate love that leads to self-destruction. Deeply wounded by Lidia's closure of their relationship and in spite of all his efforts to bridge their gap, Hector finally realized that their love has turned hopeless so he committed suicide to end his misery. But the fiction was not all romantic but likewise coupled with Spanish realism. The author, Crisostomo Soto, claims on his *Foreword* that his characters are real and although he does not give their real names, they can still be recognized from the accounts of the novel. He insists that *Lidia* is real and a little more insinuations would reveal her true identity.

In Zoilo Galang's *IngCapalaran / Ing Gala / Ning Bie* (The Fate/ The Prize of Life) the characters of Luzing and Conrado are representations of a loyal and faithful love hence, when Conrado was accused in court by Luzing's mother, on charges of theft, the misery and desolation had almost prompted the lovers' death. Yet, the sweethearts turned realistic when they resolved to face the wrath of the mother at the time that Luzing was ready to face her end. Their fate has not been dictated by destiny but by their own decisions.

Passionate love is likewise shown on the three-part novel *IngBuac Nang Ester* (Ester's Hair strand) wherein the two pairs of lovers, Gloria and Ruben, also Ester and Oscar have preferred to face the gallows just to attest their mutual love. Oscar has faced the guillotine to prove to Ester that there is love that goes beyond forever and Gloria has turned savage and physical in order to ward off the advances made by Gerardo and remained pure to be worthy of Ruben's love. Again, realism was installed in the novel as the lovers defied all their woes to be reconciled and get married.

In *Maring*, the main character has refused material pleasures and wealth to substantiate her fidelity to her ill-stricken husband. Maring has resorted to all sorts of self-sacrifices and even denied her own personal comforts to persist being a

good wife. A woman advanced of her time, she calculated all her actions and faced her challenges to overcome her adversities. Bound in a marriage with her former captor, Maring has manifested that love begets love and being passionate about it is what it takes to be rewarded in the end.

Woman's Honor

The theme of woman's honor has been clearly detailed on the early Kapampangan novels as they depict the status of women as worthy of man's love and the society's recognition. It was the Spaniards who inculcated earnest regard for woman's honor when the missionaries published and spread the religious pamphlets and literature pertaining to the proper conduct of women. The first book ever published in the Philippines in 1593, *Doctrina Christiana* was all about the teachings of the Church and in the 19th and 20th centuries, women solemnly regarded the book of conduct *Urbana and Feliza* as their mirror to proper womanhood.

In the novel of Soto, *Lidia* has wallowed in silent misery against her fiancé Hector for she preferred to believe that he had deliberately flaunted her love letters for others to read which caused her deep shame and felt stripped of her decency. The woman's honor and unblemished reputation has been emphasized to show what it means to live in shame and depression once it becomes tainted.

Similarly, in the novel *Ing Capalaran /Ing GalalNingBie* (The Fate/ The Prize of Life) , Luzing has preferred to get isolated from the community when Conrado was jailed because her mother has discovered their plan to run away. The woman suffered from illness and wished for death because of the 'talks' that she had caused in the town. Gossips about Conrado attempting to rob her of her jewels had plagued her sensibilities. Even Conrado acknowledged the humiliation and pain that the girl endures due to their aborted plan of elopement. The moral values of women had been a treasure kept and cherished by each family.

Correspondingly, in the novel *IngBuac Nan Ester* (Ester's Hair strand), Gloria would prefer death over her loss of dignity as the rejected lover Gerardo kidnapped and tried to rape her. She was willing to

kill to save her honor and she remained vigilant on her fear that her captor might succeed on his plans. She wrestled and used all her might to thwart her abductor and made sure that the villain will suffer for staining her honor.

Moreover, in *Maring*, the lead character has repeatedly protected herself from the sexual attempts of men who thought of her succumbing to their offer of financial gain. Regardless of her poverty-stricken condition, Maring has remained firm and turned physically violent in her need to save her morality. All the novels emphasize the old dictum that a woman's honor is crystal-like; once broken could never be the same again.

The Catholicism

Strong faith in God brought about by the Catholic religion from Spain has scrupulously centered on the lives of the characters. The novels are full of details on the religious activities which have been a trademark of Spanish culture. The lavish fiesta celebrations, the dancing during special occasions, the processions of patron saints, the kneeling and praying before the altar, the Christmas celebration, attending mass, advice of confessions, the images of Catholic saints, are all manifestations of a strong faith in the Catholic Church.

Lidia has often prayed to the *Virgen de Correa* to ask guidance from what she believed Hector has done which caused a disgrace to her womanhood. The families of Gloria and Ruben would often call for God's help whenever they are faced with problems and supplicated for His guidance. Luzing's mother interviews her daughter's suitor, Conrado, who their patron saint is in their town for her to gauge if he is a devout catholic like her family. Maring would always hope for God's helping hand during the times that she loses optimism.

The utterances of the different patron saints in every town during fiesta celebrations and of *santas* and *santos*, the ritual of prayers and church attendances are all indicative of a firmly-ingrained religious tradition that the novelists spontaneously displayed. There was neither an account of loss of devotion nor a minor detail in all novels which will prove otherwise the strength of the Catholic faith in the 20th century.

Family Ties

'Family First' is another theme that is clearly detailed in the novels like what is common in the Spanish culture in which it is the most important unit in their society. As reflected in the fictions, parents are the most important authority in a person's life and children were not supposed to defy their parents as this was a great sin to God. The whole family is affected when a member suffers or is confronted with any complications. In *Lidia*, Lidia's uncle hit Hector upon knowing that his niece's fiancé' had emotionally hurt his niece and it was the final blow for Hector. Discerning that when the family decides against him, then there is not a slightest chance of reconciliation between him and his sweetheart Lidia..

While in *IngBuac Nang Ester*, Ester has agonized over the false accusations hurled against Ruben, her brother and their father is suffering from illness. Ruben on the other hand is deeply hurt for tainting the good image of his father and their family. Gloria's mother always passes out whenever she thinks of the ill fate of her daughter. In *IngCapalaran*, although Luzing's mother hinders the love affair of her daughter with Conrado, the lovers could only respect the parent's decision, though their parting leads them into depression. Conrado acknowledges in his letter to Luzing that although aware that he had her heart, the girl's mother owns not only her heart but her life and soul.

Moreover, the story of *Maring* aptly calls for the strong family ties which have prompted the main character to make sacrifices on behalf of her husband and two children. Maring is the sole bread winner but has remained dignified in providing for her children and attending to the medical needs of her ill husband who was her former captor.

All the stated novels have become popular and well recognized by the reading public mainly because of their realistic portrayal of the themes greatly accustomed with them and in the community.

CONCLUSIONS/SUGGESTIONS

The recurrent themes of passionate love, women's honor, the Catholic religion and strong family ties as depicted on the 20th century novels are manifestations of the Hispanic culture. All these

themes are presented in a manner that would expose the situations of the characters in that particular period of time. The first three decades of US rule was not able to re-fashion the Hispanic influences innate among the writers and their fictions in terms of themes.

Passionate love which has been a product of Spanish romanticism has been widely expressed that focused on love as the ultimate happiness that makes life worth living for. Along with romance is the portrayal of realism that man's actions contribute to his happiness and destruction. The novels depict life as something man earns by living it the way he chooses. This portrayal is the authors' subtle way of inciting insurgence against the colonial power.

The high esteem for women's honor and dignity has been vividly established that shows the resilient impact of Spanish religious literature that built the innate tendency of women to value their dignity and which has been part of their symbol for many generations. The society has been molded to show their worth as human beings by showing proper manners from the characters shown by the fictions. This was a manipulation of Spain for the colonials to stay submissive. Comprehensive research may attribute the allegory of a woman to the Motherland.

The deeply-seated impact of the Roman Catholic doctrine is undoubtedly given emphasis as the events and conditions called for strong faith in God no matter how great the misfortunes are. The personalities may appear to be realistic but they are readily motivated to seek first God's guidance through religious rituals. This theme pronounces that God will guide man's action if it is for his own good and not to rely on the friars. The revolutionary activities of the novelists verify the call for freedom behind the theme.

And lastly, the familial love, which has been a classic description of Spanish culture, is rooted in the novels as the characters persist in giving priority to their family. Personal comfort and interest are set aside to give way for the family honor and the bond is tightly woven that leads to self-denial. Apparently, the authors want readers to seek for their own good

and refrain from self-sacrifices. Active participation in the government is called for.

The characters are brought to life based on the actual situations that readers are very adapted with like the details on the religious and social activities encouraged by the Spaniards. The texts show the fiesta celebration, the procession of patron saints, the dancing and entertainments, the amusement attractions like theaters, the cock fighting; all depict the Hispanic culture that up to the present are still avidly observed and looked forward to by both Filipinos and Spanish. The distinctness of the Kapampangans is a product of this historical landscape.

It is highly suggested that in view of the current availability of the stated 20th century fictions, researchers and scholars consider a comprehensive study on the socio-cultural conditions and the political views that entailed the making of the novels. Their impact to the personality of the Kapampangan people can be viewed in comparison with the present cultural setting prevalent in the region. The undertaking of more investigations on the seemingly long-forgotten novelists and their fictions would stir a national patriotic consciousness that have been manifested among the literary legacy. It is hoped that this study will encourage in the least an interest on Kapampangan novels.

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About the Researcher: Dr. Garcia is an Associate Professor of the Bataan Peninsula State University, Dinalupihan Campus in Bataan, Philippines. She has been in the academe for 26 years teaching language and literature courses. She has enjoyed a scholarship grant from the Commission on Higher Education under the Faculty Development Program (CHED-FDP). She holds the degree of PhD major in Literature from the University of Santo Tomas (UST) Manila, Philippines. At present, she performs her multi-disciplinary tasks of molding university students through classroom instruction and beyond. The current research has been an initial attempt to revive the century old Kapampangan novels hoping to stir the interest of academicians in the field of regional literature.