SOCIAL REALITY IN SELECTED PHILIPPINE SHORT STORIES:
A FANTASY THEME ANALYSIS
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ABSTRACT
This study was undertaken to give a clear picture of the looming issue of the country, poverty. This made use of Fantasy Theme Analysis (FTA) of Ernest Bormann to unfold the sentiments of poor Filipinos who are represented by Tura, Pablo, Santos, Crispin who are characters in “Rice and Bullets” of Hernando Ocampo, “Rice” and “Caps and Lower Case” of Manuel Arguilla and “Hunger in Barok” of N.V. M. Gonzales. Through (FTA), this study successfully presented the pattern of reaction of characters as to how they battled life’s challenges, how they stood by and subverted their moral principles and how they competed against the rich in order to survive. Moreover, this study showed a social reality that does not only exist in short stories but also apparently is existent in the present society. The characters of Tura and Pablo are representations of poor Filipinos who choose the wrong path to stay good fathers to their children. On the other hand, the characters of Santos and Crispin are representations of tricycle drivers, laborers, poor tenants, and other Filipinos who do much physical labor. Lastly, it is hoped that through a deeper understanding and value-laden discussions of Philippine short stories, young readers of today will become new breed of leaders who can establish a well-balanced and fair society.

Keywords: poverty, social reality, fantasy theme analysis, bourgeoisie, proletariat

1. Introduction

Poverty has been a social problem in the Philippines since time immemorial. Many organizations and individuals have been trying to help the government to address this issue; yet it seems that until now solution to this problem remain distant. Various programs have been organized for the reduction of the number of poor families in the country; yet concrete results are still not attained. For a number of years, this battle against poverty has always been number one among political candidates, government leaders, civic organizations and many concerned citizens.

In many faces and situations, this social reality has been repeatedly recreated. In TV programs and “teleserye”, poverty is the most loved topic that reflects objective realities of life in the Philippines. In cyberspace, many women have been into chatting, hoping to meet a rich foreigner who can bring them to what they believe a promise land. In factories where human labor is maximized, workers who are mostly poor and uneducated are exploited, disrespected and
maltreated. In many instances, they are not fairly paid for the services they have rendered and sometimes they get laid off without just grounds, making the streets and placard their refuge. In movies, the life of poor people who engage in unacceptable activities like sex tourism, drug trafficking, robbery and the like always becomes the subject for recreation.

These scenarios might be disheartening and heartbreaking but they are what we see in our society where poverty is widespread and the bourgeoisie hold the power. This unfortunate social reality moreover, does not only dominate the screens but also becomes creatively expressed in rhetoric. In articles, poems, essays, dramas, novels and short stories, the life of poor Filipinos has become the common theme. Writing about the suffering and struggles of majority of Filipinos has become the constant fight of a number of dreamers and writers who wish for equality to prevail in the country.

As explained by Chee (1981), literature to be worthy of praise must reflect with understanding, sensitivity and faithfulness, the life, problems and aspirations of the people. Also, it must be committed to the values of freedom, justice, and humanity. In this sense literature is not just used as a means of expression of personal emotions but also a tool for making greater changes. This is supported by Trestiza (1987), who wrote that an achievement of art is to write about social realities in a search for a better country.

As a reflection of life, it has been proven how effective literature’s influences can be and how it can be a catalyst for social change. Since pre-Hispanic times, literature has been a faithful record of history and has been a witness to the rise and fall of the country (Ramos, 1998). In support Bacatan (1994) mentioned how literature can be an effective means of illustrating the changes and development of a particular society.

In order to realize the positive change a number of Filipinos aspire, literature must be read and taught. It must be taught to students in different universities so as to expose them to the real life of Filipinos and teach them the values of equality, justice, sharing, humility, understanding, etc. It is also through the teaching of literature that the cries and anguish of the people in this country will be possibly heard.

Literary critics also recognize this role of literature in the development of society. They believe that literature is not merely an expression of ideas of the writer but rather a way of shaping life. Literature enables people to feel the aspects of life more deeply and meaningfully (Trestiza, 1987). It is in this that literature must be significantly understood.

One way to achieve a meaningful and active understanding of the messages depicted in various literary works is a methodology called fantasy theme analysis. Fantasy theme analysis helps readers examine and understand messages and values that are inherent in every story (Kidd, 1998).
Bormann (1972), proponent of fantasy theme analysis, called the messages shared by different individuals to understand the world they live as fantasy themes. For him, these shared messages will then create stories that will chain out to a bigger group. In addition, Arsenaults (1997) stressed that theme analysis requires an investigation of the messages expressed in stories being transacted between group members and later passed on to the public. In fantasy theme context these stories are sometimes called dramas.

Bormann (1973 as cited by Arsenaults, 1997) noted that to make drama more convincing, it must possess plausibility, activeness, and suspense and must have sympathetic characters. In support, Kerr (1989 as cited by Dajao, 2002) believes that a good drama has a descriptive line of interesting characters that connect with each other in a variety of ways.

It is for the above-stated views and concern that the researcher got interested to undertake a study that would look into the greater significance and realities depicted in short stories so as to make meaningful understanding of Philippine literature.

2. Theoretical Framework

This study made use of fantasy theme analysis to analyze the selected Philippine short stories as to dramatis personae’s dialogues or conversations, setting, evidence of symbolic convergence and the social reality depicted in them. In analyzing the dramatis personae in the stories, questions regarding the opposing force the characters face, values they represent and their rhetorical vision are also answered. Analysis of these elements would lead to better and successful analysis of the social reality depicted in short stories.
3. The Problem

This study aimed to investigate the social reality in selected Philippine short stories through the use of Fantasy Theme Analysis. Specifically, it sought to answer the following questions: (1) Who are the dramatis personae of the selected Philippine short stories in terms of (a) opposing force/obstacle they face, (b) central values they represent, (c) rhetorical vision they live in? (2) What is the setting of the fantasy themes? (3) Is there an evidence of symbolic convergence in fantasy themes? (4) What social reality is defined by the selected Philippine short stories?

4. Significance of the Study

One of the main goals of education is to develop the personality and mode of students' being. Thus, literature is believed to be the answer in the attainment of this goal. This study is significant because of the following: (1) this would give literature students an in-depth and mature understanding of Philippine literary pieces. By looking into social realities, young readers would be inspired to strive hard to be good to change the face of the society. (3) This study would also be beneficial to literature teachers as they deepen their discussions on literary types and guide their students in finding realities embedded in various literary pieces. Teachers as agents of change can influence their students to be their partners in bringing the rhetorical visions of many characters in different fantasy types to realities. (4) Through this study, readers can glean the reality faced by millions of Filipinos for many years. By having been made aware of the sufferings of poor Filipinos, readers could create a community of new Filipino citizens who are more socially concerned, involved and responsible. (5) Lastly, this study gives recognition to many prolific writers who have dedicated their lives to giving courage and strength to wounded brave Filipinos, who have continuously brought the truth of life to everyone. Without these writers and their works, Filipinos would most probably have lost their identity and self-pride in their own land.

5. Methodology

5.1 Research Method

This study used the qualitative type of research to analyze the social reality embedded in selected Philippine short stories. In fact, Bormann's Fantasy Theme Analysis (FTA) also known as Symbolic Convergence Theory was employed to answer the basic questions that were tackled in this study and that would lead to the interpretation of the social reality each selected short story depicts.

Since the interpretation of the social reality is greatly dependent on the characters, the researcher made use of their conversations with other characters,
opinion of other characters about them, and the descriptions of authors about the characters, as bases for the analysis and interpretation.

5.2 Research Materials

Since this study mainly involved an analysis to identify the dramatis personae, setting, evidence of symbolic convergence and the social reality embedded in selected Philippine short stories, no questionnaires and other self-made materials were used in the course of the study and in data gathering.

6. Analysis and Interpretation

6.1 The dramatis personae of the selected Philippine short stories in terms of opposing force they represent:

Tura. Tura is the main character of “Rice and Bullets” who wanted nothing but food for his family. Because of his hunger and ignorance, he was easily convinced by a strong fellow in the person of Mr. Remulla to join the rally against the Chinese merchants.

Tura was obviously innocent or it was probably his desire to bring rice for his family that took his sense of reason. This was shown when his wife asked about the three stones inside his jute sacks and he answered by saying,

“Mister Remulla said we must have three big stones in our sack. He said these stones would represent the three biggest islands in our country” (p.154).
“Are you sure there will be no trouble” (p.155)?
“How could there be? Mister Remulla knows what he is doing. He said that is what they do in America. He came from America. He ought to know” (p. 155).

The statements above show that Tura did not anticipate any trouble nor was he pessimistic about bringing home rice. Furthermore, it was obvious how much respect Tura had for someone from a foreign land. Such respect of Tura for Mr. Remulla was brought by his suppressed inferiority.

The opposing force faced by Tura in the story is the situation in which he and his family have no rice to eat while the rich merchants have overflowing sacks of rice in their warehouses. Also, his ignorance complicates his life and makes him controlled by a more powerful person.

Pablo. Pablo is a character in the story “Rice”. He is also a father just like Tura who likewise worked hard and fed his family through farming. As a character, Pablo started as a compliant tenant to the Señora, the owner of the land that Pablo and other farmers tilled. Señora is described as a heartless landlady who lent rice to farmers and who doubled the amount of borrowed rice in payment
As a farmer, Pablo ironically can hardly feed his family. Aruguilla clearly illustrated this in the lines below:

“Before him, as far as his uncertain gaze could make out, stretched the rice fields of the Hacienda Consuelo. The afternoon sun brought out the gold in the green of the young rice plants. Harvest time was two months off and in the house of Pablo there was no rice to eat... “(p.133).

With Señora's overbearing attitude and wicked style, Pablo with the other farmers was left with nothing every harvest. Having no choice, Pablo was compelled to borrow rice over and over again to feed his family. This situation was always like this since he started working in the Señora's farm. For many years of hard labor, Pablo became poorer and saw how the Senora had become more callous to her people.

Because of these opposing forces (represented by the Senora and the starvation faced by the farmers), Pablo's suppressed courage and bravery which had been concealed by fear for many years were ignited. He thought that the only way he could survive was through stealing rice. He believed that his plan was not stealing at all for he would only take what was originally his.

**Crispin.** Crispin is one of the tenants of Mang Cesar who owned a vast track of land in his place. Most of the people in the place usually went to Mang Cesar to ask for a hillside to clear, and later pay him with rice after each harvest.

When hunger plagued in Mindoro and dried the river in Barok, many landowners and tenants were affected including Crispin's family who had been eating sweet potatoes for three weeks since the drought. This is shown when Mang Cesar asked,

“Your sweet-potato patch did not yield this year?”
Crispin said, “For three weeks now we've eaten nothing but sweet-potatoes. Providence wills it so, perhaps.”

The words of Crispin show frustration of how much he wanted rice for his family's meals. He was there in Mang Cesar's place to borrow rice but was refused for what was left of Mang Cesar's was only enough for his family and animals.

Though Crispin did not say anything about it but it was obvious by the way he looked at the horse, Potro, that he felt a little envious towards the animal because it was better-fed than him. Potro with other three horses had always had its share of food in Mang Cesar's household.

Crispin as a character in “Hunger in Barok” faced the hardship brought about by the drought in Mindoro. His struggle to survive during those times of famine was the opposing force he faced in the story.
**Santos.** Santos is a proofreader in a small publishing house who received a minimal wage of forty-five pesos every month. At first, when Santos got the job, he thought he would receive so much and that his family would be able to pay the house rent on time and save a little amount for his family. But earning forty-five pesos a month was not that simple. With a boss who was as ill-mannered and inconsiderate as Mr. Reyes, Santos lived a wretched life. To survive and give his family a better life, he meekly accepted the humiliation from his boss for the petty mistakes he committed in his works. The paragraph below illustrates how unkind Mr. Reyes is and how he threatens Santos of losing his job.

"Look here, Santos," Mr. Reyes had wound up, "I am not asking you to do a perfect proof reading job. I know that’s impossible. Errors in the text of articles and stories--,” he paused, and then went on with a grim smile, “I can overlook them when they do not happen too often. But for God's sake, see that titles, sub-titles, names and legends under all illustrations and pictures are letter-perfect. You’ve got to keep your eyes open, man. If you can’t do the work, we will have to get someone who can. That's there’s to it.

The last words of Mr. Reyes showed his heartless character towards Santos. Knowing that the man could not afford to lose his job, Mr. Reyes seemed enjoy the fear he saw in Santos’ eyes. He never had time showing a kind gesture to Santos which made the man’s every passing day in the proofreading job a torment.

What complicated Santos’ problem was his way of gaining new friends in the new environment. He thought that by owning the mistakes of others, he would gain their regard and friendship; he was, however, mistaken. He only gave them the chance to place on him the blame for every mistake they had committed.

Every day in the office, his boss’ treatment and that of his colleagues seemed to become part of his daily routine. He might have been hurt yet he had no time for his emotional outburst for his job was more important to him. For him, having no job was more tormenting than the emotional and physical torture he suffered from that office.

In the story “Caps and Lower Case”, the treatment of Mr. Reyes and colleagues to Pablo, the minimal pay, and the physical pain he felt are the opposing forces Pablo faced. These are the opposing forces that greatly affect the development of Pablo’s character.

6.2 The dramatis personae of the selected Philippine short stories in terms of central values they represent:

The main characters of the four short stories represent courage, fortitude and the amazing love of a family man. They are all symbols of strong and true
fatherhood and they all demonstrate willingness to risk their life to protect and feed their family.

In the story, “Rice and Bullets”, Tura, despite his ignorance and physical weakness, fought his fear and took courage to join other hungry men in rallying for rice. Given the chance to steal, he forgot his own sense of honesty by joining the mob in ransacking the warehouses of Chinese merchants. He was blinded by his desire to feed his family and ignored the rain of bullets from the guns of the policemen.

Though his imminent action was illegal and immoral, Tura still showed how it was to be a good husband and a father in ways that he knew. His act might be condemnatory for some individuals but for Tura it was his selfless expression of his deep love for his family. The lines below show how Tura thought of his family even in his last breath.

“Oh, no! No! You cannot take that away from me. You cannot take that away from me. That is for my wife, for my children. Tura dived face downward, face foremost, for the scattered grains of rice on the ground. Here, here. Tura heard himself calling his wife and children, as his fingers clutched at the rice. Here is the rice for you. You need not live on salabat anymore. You need not be hungry anymore.”

Even at the brink of death, Tura did not show a little grimace of pain and a sign of defeat. With blurring sight, he still tried to hold to on the sack of rice gradually slipping from his weakening fingers. Looking at the grains, he still thought how those small crystal-like particles could appease the hunger of his family.

Like Tura, Pablo is a good man at the beginning of the story who later decides to change when his family starves. At first, Pablo argued with Andres when the latter convinced the other farmers to steal rice from the truck of the Señora. Pablo, however, just changed his mind when his daughter, Sabel cried, “Itay, I am hungry (p. 135).” Hearing this from his daughter brought pangs of pain to Pablo. Though he wanted to be a good father in ways that the society sets, he could not continue seeing his family starve to death; hence, he joined the other farmers in their plan to steal rice.

Pablo’s act of stealing might not be tolerable but his willingness to risk his life for the survival of his family is a concrete proof of the magnanimity of the man’s love for his family. Such is a representation of true fatherhood.

While Tura and Pablo both chose a different path to fight poverty, Santos and Crispin shared the same means of facing their problem. They both exemplified the values of optimism, patience, hard work and humility. Though Santos and Crispin suffered much from their work, both were still positive that their lives would one day change. They remained patient and humble in accepting their present situation. They might be physically tired working; yet, they continued to be strong for their loved ones.
The attitude shown by Santos and Crispin is exemplary. They did not allow their poverty and suffering to distort their moral principles. Having struggled so much, they patiently bore the pain because that was the best option they thought they had. They had to be the most determined persons that they could possibly be for they were their family’s source of strength too.

Crispin showed his strength and his willpower to endure hunger by choosing to plant the rice seeds lent by Mang Cesar. Though he could have pounded the rice seeds to temporarily satisfy the hunger of his family, he opted to plant upland rice. Crispin was not defeated by his suffering. His wisdom triumphed over the temptation of consuming the rice to satisfy his family's hunger in a day or maybe in a few days.

On the other hand, Santos portrayed overwhelming courage and fortitude as he faced his day-to-day challenge. His willingness to suffer and bear the emotional and physical pains in order to continuously give the needs of his family presents a true picture of a loving father. He would rather meet death alone than bring his family to his grave by quitting from his present job.

The four characters in the story may have shown varying pictures of fatherhood but they all present magnificently a powerful and selfless love for their families. They all show the value of courage, fortitude, strength, hope and true fatherhood.

6.3 The dramatis personae of the selected Philippine short stories in terms of the rhetorical vision they live in

Tura, Pablo, Crispin and Santos are four characters taken from different stories. They are characters who give life to the complexity of the role a father plays in the family.

Tura and Pablo adopt the pragmatic vision by choosing the practical way to survive. They set aside their moral principle for it was not the immediate answer to their problem. On the contrary, Santos and Crispin did not forsake what they knew was moral. Despite the absence of abundance, they continued to patiently endure and surmount their everyday challenge for their survival. Obviously, Santos and Crispin lived the righteous vision which puts first what is upright no matter how difficult the situation is.

The four short stories showed two dominant rhetorical visions, the righteous and the pragmatic visions, of people who have been ill-equipped in life. This tells us that when people are financially hard up, they only have two options. They either continue to strive and wait patiently for their luck or they put that luck in their hands no matter what it takes.

7. Setting of the Fantasy Themes

The four short stories show similar setting, a place where disparity between the rich and the poor in terms of privileges, rights and societal status is extremely
obvious. Also, the setting of the four short stories shows a picture of how poor Filipinos could patiently and humbly work hard for the family, how far they could submit themselves to oppression just to live and how they could be overcome by the evil in them in order to survive.

8. Evidence of Symbolic Convergence in the Fantasy Themes

The fact that the four characters’ reactions to their life situations are repeated in books, movies, television news and programs, and in actual reality is a concrete proof that there is chaining of experiences and that people share common pattern of reaction to what they face in life. Thus, there is symbolic convergence as to the experiences of Filipinos in the country. Moreover, this convergence tells readers that poverty in the country is widespread and would remain a battle to be fought by all Filipinos.

9. Social Reality Depicted in the Selected Philippine Short Stories

The social reality presented in the four short stories centers on the depressing situations of Filipinos as represented by the main characters of the short stories namely: Tura, Pablo, Crispin and Santos.

“Rice and Bullets” and “Rice” present a reality of how poor Filipinos could sacrifice and submit themselves to oppression just to live and how willing they are to struggle for the love of family. The two stories also show that poor Filipinos get tired too and that their weakness can also trigger the evil in them. When poor Filipinos had had enough miseries, they could defy the moral law and could also subvert their values to stay in the race of survival.

“Caps and Lower Case” and “Hunger in Barok” illustrate different types of characters portrayed by Crispin and Santos who show a picture of poor Filipino fathers who remain good persons and choose to bear humbly their yoke. They individuals whose fighting spirit, strength, and perseverance are worth-emulating.

Mass poverty, dehumanization and social conflict are the realities that are depicted in the four short stories.

10. Conclusion and Recommendations

10.1 Conclusion

The short stories of Hernando R. Ocampo, Manuel Arguilla and N.V.M. Gonzales express similarity in their theme that centers on the struggles, aspirations and hopes of poor Filipinos known as proletariat as they continue to compete against the bourgeoisie. Also, manifesting in short stories is the inherent evil of man that pushes him to destroy himself in order to survive. Since the short stories were
written in different periods in the past, it reveals a looming reality that is existent since decades ago.

The short stories understudy present two common attitudes of poor Filipinos in surmounting their problems. These attitudes do not only live in books but they come alive anywhere in our society.

Santos and Crispin are characters who symbolize strength, determination, hope and perseverance. They are those Filipinos who face life’s challenges with much positive attitude, honesty and meekness despite how miserably desperate their situation is. They are the laborers, janitors, tricycle drivers, tenants, construction human resources and other lowly-paid Filipino workers who remain honest and hardworking despite the weakening of their body.

On the contrary, Tura and Pablo are clear representations of poor Filipinos who opted to subvert their values for survival. They are those Filipinos who are defeated by the evil in them and by their desire to survive.

Though the society bore witness to these struggles of poor Filipinos, it seems it has become deaf and blind to the clamor for equality of destitute families. Confronted every day with different kinds of violence, the society seems to gradually embrace the harsh reality that change for a better society would be a lifetime battle.

Since several attempts to find functional solutions to poverty and to address the gap between the bourgeoisie and proletariat have gone down the drain, the depiction of this social reality in short stories is hoped to have a positive take off in educating the young. By meaningful discussions of these short stories in literature classes, the young learners will be opened to the reality and will be taught of the values of sharing and respecting humanity. Lastly, it is hoped that through a deeper understanding of Philippine short stories, young readers can glean the real message and start the change in their generation.

10.2 Recommendations

In the light of the findings, the researcher recommends the following:

1. That literature Filipino writers who dedicate themselves and their works in exploring the Filipino heritage be recognized and be introduced to young learners so as to pay tribute to their everlasting compassion for their country.
2. That the students who are members of the new generation will actively participate in programs initiated by the university, government and other organizations that aim to help the poor in the society.
3. That teachers will stress in their classes the significance of sharing and the value of equality.
4. That teachers will emphasize the significance of studying Philippine literature to their students and will encourage them to engage in thematic analysis of various literary pieces written by Filipino authors.
5. That programs and activities that recreate the life in the past be organized to strengthen the appreciation of students towards Philippine literature and culture.

6. That other researchers may study the other works of Hernando R. Ocampo, Manuel Arguilla, and N.V.M. Gonzales that depict other sufferings of Filipinos.

References


