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## Mirroring and Reliving History through Rizal's Novels: An Intertextual Reading Using Casper's and Dilthey's Frame

Prof. Rhoderick V. Nuncio

Departamento ng Filipino, CLA, De La Salle University  
rhoderick.nuncio@dlsu.edu.ph

**Abstract:** This paper shall juxtapose history and literature using Linda Casper's concepts and William Dilthey's theoretical take on lived experience. The paper shall use Jose Rizal's novels as a summative reference to the allegorical, historical and philosophical significance of time, textual meaning, fiction and past-to-present day reality to understand the predicament of reader of history/literature as interpreter and reader of history-literature alluded to as the significant other through meaningful and lived experience.

**Key Words:** Jose Rizal's novels, fiction, reality, reader, lived experience

*It is in this way that literature, the text of our lives, prefigures, anticipates and signifies us, enable us to fulfill history as a people and as individual.*

-Linda Casper, 1996:1

*Potentialities of the soul are evoked by the comprehension...of physically presented words. The soul follows the accustomed paths in which it is enjoyed and suffered, desired and acted in similar situations. Innumerable roads are open, leading to the past and dreams of the future; innumerable lines of thought emerge from reading.*

-William Dilthey, 1993:159

### Introduction

It is with great pride for the Filipino people to triumph amidst the grueling unfolding of Philippine history. Such unfolding of time (history) mirrors the anguish within our native soil; desperation tattered in revolutionary flags; howling and cries of which death resembled. On the other hand being victorious, emancipated, and glorious for our country's liberation is another story. This historical inquiry is not a dogmatic predisposition but more of an experiential questioning.

Nevertheless, those points remain, since 1896 historical records stand before us but in its entirety *feelings* also unfold. These are elements of human drama explicitly hidden between pages of history books. To expound it,



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creative literary writers nourish the facts and emotions, characters and lived characters, events and experience. It is thus where literature enters. History and literature become one. It is a marriage that deals with the passing of time and of memory to relive those buried feelings or the elements of human drama. Hence, Philippine historical novels serve as great literary corpus and as document of history.

The readers on the other side immerse themselves in the literary realities of the novel through historical understanding and expression. For this the experience may well serve as a basis to interpret the text and its meanings creatively and imaginatively becoming it real and active in the hearts and minds of the readers.

### Awareness through Time

Literature and history both deal with memory.(Casper:1) In Rizal's *Noli me Tangere* we easily remember the likes of Father Damaso. We tend to generalize the cruelties, malevolence of the Catholic priest during the Spanish colonization. It is imprinted in our minds that this particular novel corroborates with historical facts. Father Damaso also represents the disenchanting meaning of Christianity that extends the *dark ages* of this proud and mighty religion. All these memories enliven in our minds as literature speaks as history. And this awareness according to Dilthey is always pre-imposing from past, present and to the future in which we tend to realize this by knowing the fact that the present is the living fullness of reality. Consequently, the past is passive, cannot be changed; the

future is active and we feel that it contains infinite possibilities (Dilthey:149).

It is true that history books narrate the cruelties of the Spaniards, however, such historical narration only confines the dates and events, nothing more nothing less. Linda Casper noted that "we hold as historical facts what comes to us through recorded, documented memory (sic)-literal truth in history (1996:2). This is not to discount that history does not bring out the essence of such event or date insofar as remembering is concerned. But history alone is restricted to assess what took place beyond the events or dates interpreting away from the data and factual requisites; otherwise, it ceases to become a social science that belords objectivity as its domain. Thus, this is where literature comes in. Literature renders events and dates with human touch, with emotions and feelings. The facts remain facts but it live within the hearts of the writer and the readers. Hence, total picture, say a dinner between *principalias* and priests is vividly recalled in *Noli* where Ibarra almost killed Fr. Damaso by a table knife had Maria Clara not intervened.

There is an actual projection, there is action taking place in our minds, though now more of a larger picture-the resistance of the weak against the strong. Literature rekindles this. Linda Casper suggested that authentic memory of what had transpired can be equated as that of becoming ourselves. This can be compared with William Dilthey's *interiorization*. Self-understanding is indispensable in order to understand other persons and their experience of life (Quito,1990:35). Orientation of the self with the past makes one understand the



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meaning of history and its importance in the present. Simoun or Ibarra can be anyone today as long as their importance is textualized in our lives. By enabling history to live in us, literature is our access to the past and also to the future...(Casper:2).

The intermingling of history and literature is important in inculcating the awareness that what has transpired before will still persist today because the message is still realized and signified by a historical and textual being. It is historical in the sense because of man's lived experience and textual because man inheres and shares meanings. Without such then it will be impossible for us to understand the content and even the context of a particular historical event mirrored in literary novels.

### Historical and Textual Meanings

Literature and history are ultimately about the souls, individual and national, which literature nourishes (1996:2). Literature in a way becomes a hermeneutical framework in any other discipline as well as for history. In this respect it becomes part of the whole context of interpretative analysis and criticism. Like for instance, Andres Bonifacio would not have any inkling about Rizal's meaning of revolution had *El Fili* was not written. He read Rizal's two novels...Hugo's *Les Miserables*..some novels, and a book on the French Revolution (Agoncillo,1982:177). Andres Bonifacio molded this meaning and thus his ideals and life became part of history. This is to show how influential literature is, how pre-dominating such novels in Bonifacio's mind. In his time it can be inferred that such literature was a **lived experience**. He felt that the society was

disintegrating with the Spaniards dividing the interest and the welfare of the Filipinos. These were in fact the same with that of the story in *Noli* and *El Fili*. The 1896 revolution was imminent and during that time such experience was about to burst out. Dr. Quito adds that "experience of...revolution...pain, ambition, frustration are some of these inner experiences that are meaningful and have made a mark on our lives. In the course of anyone's life, these experiences are lived more or less intensely and over a span of time."(1990:35)

This is the richness of literary creations because there is an interface and exchange of ideas, learnings, values and creativity. Historical novels are among the best way in this context. When it speak of nationalism or patriotism, the intellectual readers react and reflect. Furthermore, comprehending historical facts about the revolution, say, the 1896 uprising could be experienced as long as the reader or the individual intermingled with character, time, events and setting imaginatively. *Noli me Tangere* and *El Filibusterismo* require such.

### Understanding Fiction from Reality

Is *Noli me Tangere* or *El Filibusterismo* a historical fiction or is it a historical document? Reading the two popular novels of Rizal in the outset without historical background will nonetheless render its content as entirely fictional. Understanding the historicity of these two novels requires the understanding of what had transpired during the Spanish Era. History then will serve as the backdrop of the novel, otherwise the certainty or validity of the text will remain questionable. Thus if a foreigner reads these novels, his impression will



altogether render it as fictional. One innocent reader may also ask if these novels are true to life-a question that oftentimes asked. In reading historical novels one must at least be knowledgeable of history. Yet, sometimes history is within the novel itself. In this case, the reader relies now and put the burden of truth to the text itself.

In literature, the similar actualities during the Spanish era can be scenes of life in the present. It does not change recorded history but it invites everyone to make changes in one's life. It is like communicating with the text with its evoking meanings and sensibilities which one appreciates because of his or her lived experience. It is gazing through or mirroring into the past. Literature is, in this sense, transfigurative, and in a way that cuts across the distinction between fiction and truth.(Danto,1978:19) However, the characters, plot, setting are also relevant as long as these are true and meaningful to associate and compare to our present lives. Facts transcend from its grassroots when we speak of historical novels. Its truthfulness is subjective; only particular to one's lived experience. What makes up the essence of truth in literature according to Casper is its mixture of fact, conscience and art. Casper parallels on the other hand Rizal's novels with the three elements in mind that "it is by observing these truths in impartial proportion to reality that Rizal's novel became documents of our history, the prelude to Revolution. Without its being consumed, truth burns in the *Noli me Tangere* and *El Filibusterismo*."(1996:2)

## Interpretive History

Obviously, history plays a vital impact to historical novels. Interpretative history in this way takes its strength from Dilthey's hermeneutical framework. It allows one to understand the text emphatically because understanding in this respect is contextualized. Dilthey puts that "a meaning can be re-created through the poet's or writer's intention. This transposition accentuates the highest form of understanding in which the totality of mental life is active" (Dilthey:160).

History as an interpretative tool for literature aligns its objective in explaining the cohesion of plot and of the entirety of the story. The blending of history and literature in historical novels thus entails a connection between the two though relatively. Fact and imagination: objectivity and imagination: neither preeminent nor exclusive of the other, enable novels to be historical documents.(Casper:3) Facts reside in history whereas imagination in literature. Historical novels are not entirely fictional as mentioned before, the truth and meaning are left already to the readers. Their interpretations make the novel not only a literary piece but also a portion of one's life and experience. The novels' life depends on the readers-true also with other literary forms and genres. The characters in the novel stimulate the readers and help for the interpretation of events. In pure historical works, historical persons are there to serve as antecedent to facts, as evidence of the event. Whereas in historical novels, the characters are alive. They continue the battle and they even communicate with the readers. That is why revolution is depicted with a different tone in historical novels of Rizal because there exists an a posteriori morality or values-in short, a moral



lesson or an action from an unfinished revolution, so to speak. In *El Filí*-a novel that serves as document of the 1896 revolution-a message finds its way to the hearts and the minds of the youth. The youth as the hope of the Fatherland is one of the great messages invoked by Jose Rizal. The youth in the novel represented by Isagani and Basilio and their classmates are characters whose message is directed to the lived characters today-the youth. Perhaps in the history that is yet to come, this message will be a protagonist, a reality in the making.

## Conclusion

It has been established in this essay that history and literature can be combined but not loosely juxtaposed. There are many things which make a good literary piece exceptional but none of these will suffice the one that points to the reader's experience and self-awareness in which for instance those historical novels written by Rizal. It is in this context that an intertextual dialogue between history, literature and especially the readers becomes effective.

We must keep on mirroring the lessons from history and relive the same battles, struggles, and victories deep within our flesh and spirit as Filipinos. In the end, historical novels share fact and imagination-a blending of which Philippine revolution/ history is documented according to Casper. But such documentation or narration is merely lifeless if the historical and textual man is disjointed or if placed secondary to interpretation. For this being, according to Dilthey is the primary element in every interpretative discourse. Concrete, historical,

lived experience must be the starting and ending point, for...life itself is that out of which we must develop our thinking toward which we direct our questioning.(Palmer,1995:99)

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