# *The Kit*: Foregrounding the spoof verse based on PRRD's COVID-19 ramble

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**Abstract:** This study described the stylistic features in Mixkaela Villalon's spoof verse based on President Rodrigo Roa Duterte's (PRRD) press conference interview last March 9, 2020 in the onset of the COVID-19 (Corona Virus Disease 2019) outbreak in the Philippines. Villalon's The Kit was selected due to its creative take on the COVID-19 outbreak which have caused public dismay on social media on PRRD's statements. Using humanistic approach, the verse's elements were stylistically analyzed that determined the following features: a) the kit as the object of the spoof verse, b) use of historical allusions to foreground the speaker's intentions, and c) code-switching to show the speaker's tone. Results showed that the foregrounded spoof verse may be nonsensical in its semantic meanings, specifically because it was featured by historical allusions; but when the reader moves to the lexicon, these allusions manifest an excellent metaphorical sense, which is the main feature of the spoof verse. The apparent lack of kits is ordinary yet unfortunate as he mentions that being plagued is just part of human history. Apparently, the spoof verse exhibited absurdity in which there is no eventual way of fighting off this pandemic since history has shown us that this is inevitable.

**Key Words:** The Kit; stylistics; foregrounding; pandemic; covid-19

## 1. INTRODUCTION

In 2020, the COVID-19 (Corona Virus Disease 2019) outbreak reached the Philippines. During a press conference interview regarding the outbreak, PRRD (President Rodrigo Roa Duterte) was asked whether there are enough testing kits in the country should the COVID-19 cases increase. He initially responded with sense but later on rambled with a history-inspired narrative as he mentioned the Bubonic Plague, the Spanish Flu, the Middle East, the Roman Empire and even witch-hunts (Malasig, 2020). His ramble did not even answer the question making

it "irrelevant". PRRD's rambling answer during the interview prompted Villalon in writing the spoof verse that encompasses PRRD's nonsensical response.

In past interviews, PRRD made an impression to the public that he rambles a lot (Malasig, 2020). Instead of answering questions, he went on cursing during his speeches and dreading critiques at his administrative moves (Arguelles, 2019; Maboloc, 2018a; Maboloc, 2018b). He even holds press conferences where he speaks a lot but does not hold any meaning (Bautista, 2017; Baviera, 2019; Kreuzer, 2018; Ithrana, 2017) which results to lengthy rambles (Chalk, 2018). However, this does not mean

that PRRD's answer doesn't make sense specifically in dismal situations like the COVID-19 outbreak. His perspective toward this crisis is very important and should be understood. This study attempts to dismantle the speaker's meaning and intent toward the outbreak specifically in the lens of Villalon, to whom is a recipient of such irrelevant response. Subsequently, this study does not account his response in the interview but recognizes the elements of the spoof verse. It is only fitting that the analysis is stylistic (based on linguistics and literary analysis) in which this spoof verse is creative in a sense. In addition, this study will not cover other followed up spoof verse such as "Duque," "Corona," and "Imee Marcos".

### 1.2    Research Objectives

Specifically, this study sought answers to the following questions:

1. What are the foregrounded features of the spoof verse?
2. How is the poem interpreted using its features?

## 2. METHODOLOGY

### 2.1. Theoretical Framework

Ricouer (2017) claims that any literary text (hence, the spoof verse) is based upon a proximity. He states that a written text, once distant from the writer, opens up for multiple interpretation resulting in plurivocity. This implies the difference between the objective meaning of the text to the subjective intention of the author. The gap created in the interpretation is filled in by stylistics which creates connections between these two discourses — the discourse of the text and the discourse of the interpretation —in order to achieve the 'fusion of horizons', which occurs when the world of the reader and the world of the text merge into (Rocoeur, 2017).

In analyzing literary works, one should consider how language is used (Simpson, 2004). Stylistics is identified as the application of concepts from linguistics (Mahlberg, 2007). It is interpreted of ways in which the semantic meaning is created through language in literature which highlights deviations. It studies how a writer installs the phenomenon of language to communicate to its readers. As an application in relating how language works in literary texts, stylistics has two main objectives: to explain the relationship between language and artistry and to determine the author's works of doubtful attribution.

In the context of foregrounding, literature and art share several similarities; thus, it is justifiable to study the spoof verse's language against the artistic and aesthetic backdrop of foregrounding (van Peer, 2007). This concept sees that a text's artistic and aesthetic uniqueness lies not in the exact reproduction of a certain piece but in its deviations from the regulations or norms. For instance, the creativity of a composer of a certain piece of music lies not in the repetition of regular rhythm and melody but in its divergence from the musical norm, which is accepted and anticipated by the general public. Similarly, the eyes, hearts, and minds of the reader will be captured by the foregrounding part of the spoof verse against the common background of language accepted by conventions.

### 2.2. The Spoof verse

This study provides an integrative, bottom-up stylistic analysis of the poem. The spoof verse was made by Villalon (2020) based on a press conference interview regarding the COVID-19 outbreak in the Philippines where PRRD was asked about the sufficiency of testing kits in the country should the COVID-19 cases increases.

## 3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### 3.1.     **THE KIT**

The title is in boldface and in UPPERCASE to separate it from the rest of the text. Technically, the

interview does not have a title but since the text is patched from an interview, the title should stand out.

### 3.2.    by **Rodrigo Roa Duterte**

The declared author becomes an alluded figure although he is not the poet in this spoof verse. He becomes the speaker in which he is relevant to its interpretation. Rodrigo Roa Duterte is the 16th and incumbent President of the Republic of the Philippines. Relevant to the theme of the spoof verse, PRRD has been criticized for targeting human rights (Heydarian, 2018), freedom of the press (Ong & Cabanes, 2018), and the Catholic Church (Chalk, 2018) The president appears to be obliterating his opposition in his infamous speeches (Bautista, 2017; Baviera, 2019).  PRRD's brand of politics is perceived as nothing short of being disruptive (Kreuzer, 2018). The Philippine president disdains protocols and veers away from the established traditions of the office (Ithrana, 2017). Mustafa Dikec (2017) says that disruptive politics is not only for the sake of disruption. Disruption is necessary in the attempt to question the status quo (Maboloc, 2016).

### 3.3.    Can be distributed
To different health centers,
But at this time, kung kulang
They can be brought
To a testing station, to RITM

There is a cut between the title and the first stanza in which the first line connects to the title because of the dependent clause, *Can be distributed*. This completes the idea that the speaker talks about *The Kit Can be distributed To different health centers.* This is followed by another dependent clause starting with the conjunction: But at this time, *kung kulang*. This is followed by the independent clause, *They can be brought To a testing station, to RITM*. The first stanza talks about the *kit*(s) that are useful to the health crisis, as indicated by the *different health centers*, should it will be not enough can be brought to a testing station specifically RITM (Research Institute of Tropical Medicine) instead of the *different health*

*centers.* This due to the lack of the kits to be distributed as well as the various health centers. The RITM is a research facility to implement a basic and applied research program for tropical medicine in the Philippines, pushing both for health advancement and for medical research (http://ritm.gov.ph/, n.d.).

### 3.4.    *Kokonti lang kasi, e.*

This one-line stanza indicates the insufficiency of the kits. Structurally, this is separated and just one line to show *Kit's* sufficiency. The code-switching in this line indicates the assertion of the speaker that the kits will not be enough for nationwide testing as alluded from the press conference.

### 3.5.    The kit
Is the kit.

This two-line stanza is an independent clause which follows a S-TV-DO. The subject *kit* in this clause is the same as the direct object. However, this *kit*(s) may be a reference to the *Kit* mentioned in the title and the first stanza. The lack of other textual evidence suggests that the latter *kit* is the same as the former *kit,* which is the same *Kit* from the title. As such, there are no other signified for this signifier.

### 3.6.    *Meron namang lumalabas pa.*

This code-switched, one-line stanza is an independent clause which incoherently addresses the *kit*(s) from the previous stanzas. The cut made the reference incoherent as the previous stanza talks about the *kit* while the next stanzas introduces a new idea in the spoof verse.

### 3.7.    I think that,
Sabi ko nga-

This two-line enjambed interlanguaged stanza shows a "buffer" on thoughts of the speaker. The first line, *I think that,* expresses uncertainty, since to *think* signifies unsaid thoughts. Whereas, the

second line *Sabi ko nga-* shows assertion which contradicts to *think*. However, this paradox coherently introduces a new idea in this spoof verse.

3.8.    In every epoch
        Maybe meron nang una:

This stanza completely shifts the first object, which is the *Kit* to a new object in the spoof verse. This line introduces *In every epoch* which suggest historical perspective in the spoof verse. The speaker suddenly changes code (language) saying *meron nang una:*. Graphologically, the colon ( : ) introduces and new idea in which the speaker is about to enumerate concepts.

3.9.    Bubonic plague.

The speaker mentions *Bubonic plague* which is a historical reference to one of the most devastating pandemics in human history, resulting in the deaths of an estimated 75 to 200 million people in Eurasia, peaking in Europe from 1347 to 1351 (History.com, 2019). This is a historical allusion.

3.10.   Mga gago ang tao no'n—
        *Tamang tama lang.*

This code-switched stanza indicates how the speaker depicts how he sees the people during the era. He describes them as *gago* which is a curse word in *tagalog* which means "idiot." He continued by saying *Tamang tama lang* indicating that these "idiot people" deserve the plague. This stanza reveals the arrogant character of the speaker. His use of the vernacular language manifests the rude tone of the language.

3.11.   Tapos, 'yung Spanish flu,
        Right before the wars,

In this stanza, the speaker mentions the *Spanish flu*, a strain of influenza caused a global pandemic, spreading rapidly and killing indiscriminately at least 50 million people on 1918 (livescience.com, 2020). The historical reference is

supported by the second line, *Right before the wars* indicating the speaker's knowledge towards the reference.

3.12.   *Kawawa 'yung mga tao—*

This one-line stanza describes the state of the people during the *Spanish flu* which is *Kawawa*. *Kawawa* in the *tagalog* language means pitiful. The speaker asserts his arrogant tone as he continues in the succeeding stanzas.

3.13.   Pero mas kawawa
        'Yung sa Middle East,
        The so-called Roman Empire.
        You have read the inquisition.

The speaker then cites another pair of allusion. He describes the people of the *Middle East,* a racial allusion, to another allusion which is the *so-called Roman Empire,* a historical allusion. The presence of the word, *inquisition* signifies Christianity. This would give reference to persecution of Christians in the *Middle East* as well as during the *Roman Empire* when the disciples of Christ were persecuted.

3.14.   *Kung may birthmark ka—*

In this one-line enjambed stanza, the speaker mentioned *birthmark* which signifier relevant to the next stanza. This is due to the presence of the hyphen (--) which is used to establish a connection between cuts. This line connects to the next line.

3.15.   You are a witch
        And you are burned
        At stake.

In the last stanza, the speaker mentioned *You are a witch / And you are burned / At stake* an allusion to "burning by death" which is an execution method involving combustion or exposure to extreme heat. It has a long history as a form of capital punishment, and many societies have employed it for

criminal activities such as treason, heresy, and witchcraft (Steel, 2013). The speaker simply implies that those misfortunately identified as a witch are burned much more dreadful compared to what the COVID-19 threat is about to bring.

## 4. CONCLUSIONS

The stylistic analysis of Villalon's spoof verse revealed three features: a) the kit as the object of the spoof verse, use of b) historical allusions to foreground the speaker's intentions, and c) code-switching to show the speaker's tone. First, the kit associates the movements of the speaker's thoughts in the spoof verse. He describes the usability of the kit but acknowledges that there might not be enough suggesting an alternative such as bringing it to a testing center.

Secondly, he opens a new discussion by utilizing historical allusions. These historical allusions further advanced the importance of the kit, as these historical allusions does not only point out the unfortunate pandemics from history killing numerous people but more likely ill-fated predicaments of the people from the past. By citing these allusions, it may be interpreted that the speaker accepts the fate of this instances as it has happened before and casualties becomes but normal. This has opened room for these statements to manifest absurdity.

Ultimately, code-switching in between lines shows how the speaker strategically uses his vernacular language to show a tone. The lines where the speaker used his vernacular language shows arrogance. He cursed, asserted his ideas, and stressed dreadful points in these lines.

The foregrounded spoof verse may be nonsensical in its semantic meanings, specifically because it was filled with historical allusions; but when the reader moves to the lexicon, these allusions manifest an excellent metaphorical sense, which is the main feature of the spoof verse. This reveals how the speaker intends to express his meaning indirectly with the historical allusions that doomed humanity before. These allusions, in addition, apparently exhibited absurdity in which there is no eventual way of fighting off this pandemic since history has shown us that this is inevitable. In between these features, his blatant use of code-switching asserts his arrogance as most of the lines used in it manifest ill-fated statements. Furthermore, the stylistic analysis of the spoof verse reveal that the lack of kits but ordinary. As he mentions the plagues, he establishes an insight that casualties are inevitable as shown in the past.

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