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WE FILIPINOS ARE MILD DRINKERS: A POST-COLONIAL TEXT EXEMPLIFYING MULTIPLICITY OF MEANINGS

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ABSTRACT

Typical literature teachers have been rather selective and prescriptive in determining the meanings of literary works. They limit those meanings to their own perceptions, draining the texts of more insights, and not welcoming other meaningful possibilities. Inputs that are not agreeable with their own, particularly from the students, are deemed incorrect. To assert the multiplicity of meanings extant in good literary works, this study was pursued subjecting, as a method of inquiry, Alejandro Roces' post-colonial work *We Filipinos Are Mild Drinkers* to critical analysis based on mimetic, expressionistic, formalistic, affective, and historical theories. Appraisal zeroed in on the above short story. The results of the study exemplify how stories yield various insights from different critical lenses. Teachers, then, should discard that pedagogic treatment which deprives the texts of multiple meanings.

Keywords: Textual meaning, multiple meaning, mimesis, expressionism, formalism, reader-response, historicism

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Introduction

It has been a tendency of literature teachers to be sort of prescriptive when they teach literary pieces to students. Their interpretation of works is one that limits the meanings to their own perceptions, not welcoming other views that may unravel the text. Insights that are contrary to their own, particularly from students, are deemed incorrect.

As a result, schools have been producing readers with narrow perceptions of literary works. They think that a text simply yields a single meaning which, when finally unearthed, drains the text of more ideas. The notion is akin to the plain meaning rule, or literal rule, which is a traditional statutory construction used in English courts wherein statutes are read and interpreted based on ordinary meaning

of a language (Driedger, 1983). Such idea of singularity in meaning is widespread that the possibility of multiple meanings in a text is not only viewed as absurd but is likewise improper, hence its outright rejection.

This pedagogical tendency has prompted this study. Adhering to the idea of indeterminacy where multiple interpretations is encouraged to address authorial lapses and gaps (McHale, 1992), this inquiry had resolved to prove the "limited meaning" wrong, and the best way to do that is to provide a sample of work that is viewed from different angles yet the meanings drawn from it never run out. This would explain the significance of this study as it would show the inexhaustibility of meanings in texts when viewed from various critical standpoints.

This paper then theorizes that Alejandro Roces' *We Filipinos are Mild Drinkers* yields multiple meanings, like other literary works do, as it is viewed from various critical lenses. These theories used to analyze the story are the mimetic, the expressionistic, the formalistic/objective, the affective/reader-response, and the historical theories.

Theories at Work

A critical and philosophical term that carries a wide range of meanings, mimesis includes imitation, representation, mimicry, *imitatio*, receptivity, non-sensuous similarity, the act of resembling, the act of expression, and the presentation of the self (Taussig, 1993).

It was, in ancient Greece, an idea that governed the creation of works of art, in particular with correspondence to the physical world understood as a model for beauty, truth and the good. Plato contrasted it with the narrative. After him, the meaning of mimesis eventually shifted toward a specifically literary function in ancient Greek society, its usage changed and re-interpreted many times thereafter.

Expressionism, on the other hand, attempts to portray the inner workings of a person's mind by turning them 'inside out' and allowing mental states to shape their face, body, and the very world where they live in (Gordon, 1987). This could be a reaction against a comfortable, unthinking, uncaring and increasingly mechanized society. Franz Kafka's main characters, for instance, find themselves trapped inside a vision of the world that's rather distorted, reflecting either their own psychological conflicts, or of the society where the readers live.

The physical consequences of a distorted situation in expressionist literature are followed through as if they were completely real. Writers are quite divided as regards the latter's final consequences. Destruction of the character often results from personal tragedies. But given the focus on society's status, positive ending can surface, the traditional human values ending up victorious. Poetry eschews details of description and narrative, and attempts a lyrical intensity capable of conveying the essence of an inward experience. As with expressionist painting and drama, disgust over

materialistic society combines itself with that sense of foreboding for an inevitable collapse.

Formalism, the next theory, is a school of literary criticism and literary theory having to do mainly with structural purposes of texts. It covers critical approaches that interpret, analyze, and evaluate inherent features of a text such as grammar and syntax, and also literary devices like tropes and meter (Lemon & Reis, 1965). It reduces the importance of a text's historical, biographical, and cultural context.

Having assumed prominence in the early twentieth century, Formalism commenced as a reaction against Romanticism, which centers on artists and individual creativity, and underscores the text itself to manifest its indebtedness to forms and those works which preceded it. Two schools of formalist literary criticism developed: Russian formalism, and soon after, Anglo-American New Criticism.

Formalism predominated academic literary studies in the US from the end of the second World War all the way to the 70's, particularly as embodied in *Wellek and Warren's Theory of Literature* (1948, 1955, 1962). From the late 1970s, it was substantially displaced by various approaches (often with political aims or assumptions) that were suspicious of the idea that a literary work could be separated from its origins or uses. But recent trends in academic literary criticism suggest that formalism may be making a comeback.

Affective theory or Reader-response criticism is a school of literary theory that focuses on the reader (or "audience") and his or her experience of a literary work, in contrast to other schools and theories that focus attention primarily on the author or the content and form of the work (Tompkins, 1980). Literary theory has long paid some attention to the reader's role in creating the meaning and experience of a literary text. Modern reader-response criticism began in the 1960s and '70s, particularly in America and Germany, with the works of Hans-Robert Jauss, Stanley Fish, Roland Barthes, Norman Holland, and others. Predecessors like I. A. Richards had analyzed a group of Cambridge undergraduates' misreadings in 1929; Louise Rosenblatt, in *Literature as*

Exploration (1938), had argued that teachers should avoid imposing preconceived ideas on the proper way in reacting to any work.

Reader-response theory recognizes the reader as an active agent who imparts some kind of real existence to the work and completes its meaning through interpretation. It argues that literature should be viewed as a performing art in which each reader creates his or her own, possibly unique, text-related performance, opposing the theories of formalism and the New Criticism which ignore the reader's role in re-creating literary works. Historicism is another critical analysis focusing on the role of historical context to understand a text. With this, the critic creates a more cultural, or anthropological criticism, conscious of its own status as interpretation, and intent upon discerning literature as forming part of a system of signs constituting a given culture (Wellek and Warren, 1977).

Literary criticism and historical critique then are integrated, with the critic's role being an investigator of both the social presence to the world of the literary text and the social presence of the world in the literary text. Given this, one would have to understand the story as being rooted in its cultural and authorial connections.

The Method Used

Given the critical lenses used, this paper scrutinizes Alejandro Roces' story *We Filipinos are Mild Drinkers*. It critiques the story using those theories to come up with multiple and varied meanings. Although the other works of the author were considered, and so with his biography, the researcher did so only to have those works shed further light on the story.

The theories used to analyze the story are, again, limited to five, which are the mimetic, expressionistic, formalistic, affective, and historical lenses. The paper claims that, by subjecting a work to analysis using the above approaches, one could unearth multiple meanings from a literary text.

Some key terminologies are made operational in this study. First of which is the word *multiplicity*. In here, it is used to mean variation, numerousness, and abundance of meanings that are embedded in a text. Next is the word *meaning*,

which refers to the substance, content, or interpretation of a work. *Exemplified* means sampled, illustrated, enlightened, and something clarified by way of example.

An Expressionist Reading

This part assumes that Roces' award-winning short story, *We Filipinos Are Mild Drinkers*, yields traces of the writer's presence, not just physically, but mentally and emotionally as well. The story obviously reveals a vision that underlies the author's idea, which is doubtless concerned with external or objective incidents, thereby conveying his quality of soul.

If the meaning of a literary work could be had from studying the psychology of the author (Adams, 1971), then it should be easy to arrive at reliable conclusions as to what a literary work conveys, given one's familiarity with its writer, and the literary text as the author's mouthpiece. Beckson and Ganz (1993) make a clear-cut distinction between Expressionism and Mimesis by pointing out the former's departure from certain realistic conventions. They caution, however, that the term itself is problematic in that it can be used to describe any of the deliberate distortions of or departures from reality that pervade modern literature and art.

Thus, the symbolic metamorphoses of the characters in Joyce's *Finnegans Wake* and Kafka's *Metamorphosis* (wherein a nightmarish metaphor becomes a literal fact), and the fragmentary construction of T.S. Eliot's *The Waste Land* could exemplify expressionism, an imprecise designation embracing disparate works that casts doubts on its usefulness as a literary description.

The author, regarded as the cause of meaning (Kessey, 1998), unconsciously makes his/her works autobiographical. And so to understand the latter, a reader simply needs to unearth the author's social, political, intellectual, and social milieu and juxtapose these with the vital elements highlighting the writer's works.

Attempting to express the basic reality of its subjects rather than to reproduce the mere appearance or surface, an expressionistic work relies heavily on distortion of salient features, being exclamatory and dynamic, sometimes so cryptic as

to be baffling (Hornstein, Percy, and Brown, 1984). It revolts not just against current art, but against current civilization, which appears prosperous and attractive, but rotten at the core.

A not-so-old literary invention, the short story is a prose narrative that reveals what the artist feels about human experience that communicates a distinct impression, vision, and meaning that the writer feels relevant. This vision is buried deep in his personal life and depends upon his native sensibility, his acquired knowledge, and his character. Realistic in essence, the short story then, as exemplified by Roces' stories, tend to be anecdotal and autobiographical, hence expressionist to certain extents.

For its point of view, the story uses the first-person, observer-participant narration which, when used, is usually taken by readers for an autobiographical narrative due to the presence of an "I" narrator in the story. Being confessional in tone, this makes the story closer to the author's life and personal experiences. The choice of subjects, symbols, and imagery moreover indicates a writer's preference. If such items as wine and fighting cocks make it to a story, then an author's fondness of them in real life is confirmed.

The main character in the story, though a peasant farmer, could somehow represent the author in some ways. He meets the American soldier, but it was not by accident as the foreign soldiers, being yet assigned in Philippine soil, frequented the barrios for their leisure and strolling sprees. This made the barrio folks, including the narrator, familiar with them such that most often, friendships between the natives and these GIs became inevitable.

Then the protagonist-narrator is portrayed as being hospitable, which is typical of Filipinos especially in earlier times. His manner of entertaining a visitor through drinking lambanog does not just reveal his hospitality, but also his fondness of the native wine. That he is not easily affected by lambanog's "venom" despite gulping down repeated shots suggests that, like the rest of rural folks deprived of urban entertainments, he is used to drinking the liquor.

Like the character-narrator, the author mingled a great deal with American GIs during the World War II years and established friendships with them. He was already a grown up young man then, aware of the historical and cultural milieu of the time. In fact, his frequent association with the American soldiers even led to his involvement in the war—he later became a guerilla warrior. In short, he, like the narrator, was too knowledgeable about the weaknesses, whereabouts, and the vices of the GIs like he knew his palms. That they were addicted to liquor didn't, of course, elude his attention.

The narrator's association with American GIs in their place is not just juxtaposed with the author's similar experience; his wine connoisseurship also resembled Roces' love for lambanog. The author, in real life, had his share of spending time together with friends, passing around a glass that contained the treasured liquid. And went to drinking it, he was not easily downed by just a few shots. It would take gallons of lambanog before he would retire for bed. Indeed, the narrator in him; and Roces in this narrator-character.

Mentally and emotionally, then, Roces' presence in the story via the character-narrator is highly evident, distributed all over the story, obviously visible, heard and felt by readers. But that's if readers are aware of the author's own life story, his past involvements, his vices, hobbies, and all.

It is one's knowledge about him that would allow one to see him in stories he had penned. If wine albeit in the form of lambanog occupied his mind in real life, then we can see his mind in the characters' preoccupation with this liquid commodity. The fact, moreover, that he had associations with American GIs as a young man is mirrored in the narrator's hospitality to his GI visitor and their subsequent drinking session. And the way the narrator treasured the lambanog, the way he played the host, would be exactly the same way Roces would have performed had he experienced the same in reality.

In conclusion, Roces' story clearly suggests that it is an expressionist work that partly reveals the author's mental preoccupation with something and physical association with certain individuals

exemplified in the story. In terms of characterization, the Filipino character-narrator mentally represents the author for attending to something that the latter likewise considered a must-have when with friends—wine. The narrator's one-time association with an American GI over the native lambanog could be autobiographical in that the author, that time when American soldiers were yet in the country, must have had drinking sessions with the latter, transporting his presence there into the story. Even the vivid description of how the American soldier reacted every time he gulped down a lambanog shot was clearly drawn from what he saw from his drinking GI buddies. It is therefore held that this story is an expressionist work revelatory of the author's autobiographical milieu, part of which being drawn from his mind, and another from his life's experience.

A Mimetic Reading

This part theorizes that Alejandro Roces' story under study is a re-creation of reality that was extant during the World War II years in the Philippine archipelago, particularly in the countryside.

Mimesis assumes that art imitates reality, tracing its roots to Aristotle who argued that the universal can be found in the concrete. It was developed and applied through mimetic theories of literature, theater and the visual arts during the Renaissance and the Enlightenment (Abrams and Adams, 1992).

Aristotle, Plato, Moliere, Shakespeare, Racine, Diderot and Rousseau applied the mimetic theory of literary criticism to their work and lives; modern thinkers such as Benjamin, Derrida, and Girard have reworked and reapplied their ideas. Being a recipient of foreign ideas and styles, Philippine literature easily adopted mimetic theory, as manifested in works of many Filipino writers, one of them being Alejandro Roces himself.

Mimetic theory is rightfully the universal foundation of literature, of schools of literary criticism. Text-audience relationship is what this pragmatic school of literary criticism deals with. Often drawn from mimetic theory are moral effects. Apparently, aside from injecting humor, Roces must have also been imparting morals through this story,

foremost of which is the common lesson that one should not judge a book by its cover alone the way the American GI belittled the native jungle juice that boomeranged at him in the end.

How well a work of literature connects with the real world is what mimetic criticism aims to determine, but may also accommodate approaches dealing with the spiritual and symbolic, the images that connect people of all times and cultures, the aspects of moral/philosophical criticism, psychological criticism, and feminist criticism, arguing that art conveys universal instead of just temporal and individual truths.

This reality showed in the American soldiers' obsession with wine while they were here in the country during the war. Perhaps that was their way of cheering themselves up in the midst of homesickness, war shock, uncertainties of their future, and haunting dread for the on-going war. Local observations had it that these foreigners would go as far as the mountains only to look for something to drink every time they ran out of whiskey, not minding the risks and the perils that threatened their lives.

The story exemplifies how well a work of literature accords with the real world, exhibiting its accuracy and morality, and considering whether or not it shows how people really act, and whether or not it is correct. It tries to assess reality through the prism of its own time, and judges the same according to its own value systems.

That's exactly how the text lends itself to this critical investigation. It provides accurate details on the things that transpired during those war years. Filipinos were readily hospitable to American soldiers, giving them what they need based on their capacity to give. In the story then, the Filipino narrator was quick to give his remaining lambanog just to satisfy the hunger of his American visitor. This was the world then, documented in the story by way of vivid local color.

Mimetic criticism praises literary works of authors like Homer, Shakespeare and Goethe for expressing the highest ideas and aspiration of humankind. Representatives of the Mimetic Theory of Literary Criticism include Plato, Samuel Johnson, Matthew Arnold and Leo Tolstoy. Samuel Johnson

argued that Shakespeare portrayed universal character traits and moral values. That's in the universal sense which, if we will apply to Roces' work, would likewise fit as the story is equally laden with deep characterization and said values.

Girard (1976) a modern thinker, stretched the mimetic theory of literary criticism across time and disciplines. In his book, "Deceit, Desire and the Novel," he argued persuasively that great novelists alone in the Western world have understood the mimetic foundations of human interaction. The theory owes it to him for its present widespread application and acceptance.

The manifestation of realistic elements in fiction when viewed mimetically do not just show on the outward but may as well come via a character's thought prowess. One could imagine that, given a chance to express what he had in mind, the Filipino narrator in the story could be talking to the American soldier this way:

"Tell you what, Joe, were it not for your enchanting blue eyes, I would have dismissed you as nothing but a peeled-off banana trunk fallen by the wayside. Thank God for those eyes, though; they are your saving grace."

"How dared you challenge me into a drinking duel? You must have been in your usual, collective self as Westerners—thinking great of yourselves while looking down on us dwarfed, brown natives."

"You must have been banking, too, on your wine connoisseurship, more so if it were true that you have drunk all the known wines in the world with astonishing appetite, even drinking medical alcohol and lotion without feeling a bit of their toxicity."

"How come that, after gulping down a few shots of our lambanog, which you ridicule and mock, you were soon off your wits and consciousness. Don't tell me it crawls down your throat like a centipede, for why do you have to grab your neck, your face distorted, every time you drank it?"

"Now that you have become good-for-nothing in that silly uniform that identifies you with the world's military superpower, how would you ever get up and go back to your barracks? Your colleagues must have been waiting for you right

now. You could not even lift a finger. Your size now is nothing; your height doesn't help; your blonde hair proves unattractive; and, yes, your white complexion is utterly useless. You busted your butts with lambanog you could not even fuck the semen out of you."

"But, here, you open your eyes a little bit against the flickering flame of the kerosene lamp. I just want to stare at your blue eyes that remind me of the baby doll I once gave to my childhood sweetie. Come on, man; look, I've walked my carabao over here. That beast will carry you to your quarters."

The story clearly suggests that it is a mimetic work that copied the reality surrounding the characters' lives and the story's cultural/historical context. In terms of characterization, the character-narrator represents the typical Filipino young man doing the work in the farm but is once in a while engaged in drinking sessions. The American GI's hunt for liquor was exactly what the American soldiers did occasionally in their obsession with liquor that time when they were fielded in Philippine soil for the war. Even the vivid description of how the American soldier reacted every time he gulped down a lambanog shot was clearly drawn from what Roces saw from his drinking GI buddies.

It is therefore held that Alejandro Roces story *We Filipinos are Mild Drinkers* is a mimetic creation imitating remarkable events, characters, settings, and other narrative elements.

A Formalistic Reading

This part theorizes that Roces' story utilizes lambanog as a symbol of Filipino identity. In formalistic studies, the selection is read and viewed intrinsically, or for itself, independent of author, age, or any other extrinsic factor. Close to the "art for art's sake" dictum, this critical approach studies a selection based on literary elements which more or less boil down to the literal feel (subject matter), the affective values (mode, tone, atmosphere, emotion, attitude, empathy), the ideational values (visions, character, universal truths, themes), technical values (imagery, plot structure, language, scene, point of view, figure, metrics, etc.), and the total effect (the

interrelation of foregoing elements), and communication.

The formalist critic embraces an objective theory of art and examines plot, characterization, dialogue, and style to show how these elements contribute to the theme or unity of the literary work. Moral, historical, psychological, and sociological concerns are considered extrinsic to criticism and of secondary importance to the examination of craftsmanship and form. Content and form in a work constitute a unity, and it is the task of the critic to examine and evaluate the integrity of the work. Paradox, irony, dynamic tension, and unity, among other literary elements and devices, are the primary values of formalist criticism.

Because it posits an objective theory of art, there are two axioms central to formalist criticism. One of these is *The Intentional Fallacy* which states that an author's intention (plan or purpose) in creating a work of literature is irrelevant in analyzing or evaluating that work of literature because the meaning and value of a literary work must reside in the text itself, independent of authorial intent. Another axiom of formalist criticism is *The Affective Fallacy* which states that the evaluation of a work of art cannot be based solely on its emotional effects on the audience. Instead, criticism must concentrate upon the qualities of the work itself that produce such effects. The formalistic approach stresses the close reading of the text and insists that all statements about the work be supported by references to the text. Although it has been challenged by other approaches recently, the New Criticism is the most influential form of criticism in this century.

Formalism is intrinsic literary criticism because it does not require mastery of any body of knowledge besides literature. As an example of how formalistic criticism approaches literary works, consider Shakespeare's *Macbeth*. All the elements of the play form an organic whole. The imagery of the gradual growth of plants is contrasted with the imagery of leaping over obstacles: Macbeth is an ambitious character who cannot wait to grow gradually into the full stature of power, but, instead, must grasp everything immediately. A related series

of clothing images reinforces this point: because Macbeth does not grow gradually, his clothing does not fit. At the end of the play, his "Tomorrow and tomorrow and tomorrow" soliloquy drives home the point as we see, and pity, a man trapped in the lock-step pace of gradual time. Formalistic critics would immediately see that the repetition of the word "tomorrow" and the natural iambic stress on "and" enhance the meaninglessness and frustration that the character feels. References to blood and water pervade the play, and blood comes to symbolize the guilt Macbeth feels for murdering Duncan. Even the drunken porter's speech provides more than *comic* relief, for his characterization of alcohol as "an equivocator" is linked to the equivocation of the witches. Shakespeare's craftsmanship has formed an aesthetic unity in which every part is connected and in which the whole is greater than the sum of the parts.

One can readily see that Roces was into getting some message across, especially to the Westerners who are known for their tendency to discriminate and belittle Filipinos in many ways. The message is clear and poignant, unfolding in the arena where the ridiculed race has been traditionally bullied by the above.

Driving home this point is clearly the story's preoccupation from start to end. The author had employed certain devices, objects, and techniques to achieve it. For one, he used the wine around which the characters are to revolve. The story then opens with the narrator saying that, in relation to wine, Filipinos are mild drinkers, drinking only for three reasons, namely: when they are sad; when they are happy; and for any other reason.

This is followed by a description of American soldiers frequently swarming the narrator's barrio while under the influence of liquor. They would rather that they spill their blood if only to spare a bottle of whisky that had become part of their uniform. This is how addicted they were to wine such that one day, an American G.I. risked his life wandering by himself into back countries to buy more wine. But he could not find it because foreign liquors were not available in those remote sari-sari stores.

Finally, this wine-devouring American soldier met with the narrator, a Filipino farmer to whom he offered a half-filled bottle of whisky. The farmer refused, though, saying that Filipinos do not drink it as they are but mild drinkers. They have a mild wine to drink, the lambanog, mocked by American soldiers as jungle juice for its primitive and inferior quality.

Then the author provided a stark contrast between the two nationals: the bragging GI who claimed to have drunk all the known wines in the world with ease and appetite, and the poor Filipino farmer bearing only with the humble, primitive wine juice which was the only one he preferred and could afford. Between the two drinks and drinkers, we could easily tell which one is a mild drink, and who among the two is the heavy drinker—it's the whisky and the GI, respectively.

The farmer is even hesitant to introduce his native wine to the American visitor, due perhaps to its inferiority and mildness in comparison to foreign liquors. The foreigner, however, got so interested with it that despite the farmer's caution that he wouldn't like it, he still insisted they go drink that lambanog in the farmer's house. Drinking that "jungle juice" became a sort of great challenge to him he followed the farmer everywhere if only to gulp down that thing.

As the story progresses, the author carefully arranged everything in climactic succession, adding on items like the coconut tree of the Philippines and the pine tree of the United States as part of the widening contrast between the lowly farmer and the puffed up foreigner. They did not just differ in terms of their preferred wines; they also differed in terms of their national trees. The pine tree, which the American soldier said symbolizes America, is tall and stately, going straight up to the sky like a skyscraper. The coconut tree which according to the farmer symbolizes the Philippines, starts up to the sky; but its leaves sway down the earth to remember the land that gave it birth.

The characters understood that they had diverging roles played—one being superior, and the other being inferior. A competition therefore between the two is established. They themselves

could somewhat sense they were into it. One was to maintain, or even augment, his reputation of being a wine devourer, even claiming to have drunk medical alcohol and lotion without feeling their toxic effects. The other was to stick to being a mild drinker using his mild drink.

Amid their diverging fates as wine drinkers, the acid test as to who had a tougher belly was to be provided, and determined, by the ridiculously mocked lambanog, the mild drink of the little brown farmer. It was to settle the matter and finally decide who among the two deserved the distinction as a heavy drinker.

Local color by way of vivid descriptions abounds in the story, reinforcing the author's intent in underscoring meaning. The images of the carabao splashing itself excitedly in the mud hole, of the lemon fruits and how they are plucked off the tree, of the foot-high table, bare nipa house on whose bamboo floor they sat, polished coconut shells from which they drank, and many more, contribute successfully to the development of the story.

When the drinking session began, it soon turned out that the pompous wine devourer in the American soldier was of no match to the Filipino farmer who would drink his share of lambanog with ease and pleasant smile on the face. The foreigner, after every gulp, grimaced as if in pain, struggled to swallow the liquid, and had to grab his neck like he had swallowed a centipede. Just a few shots and the GI was already out of his wits, could not stand by himself, and had to be brought by the farmer back to their barracks on top of a carabao.

His colleagues were happy to see him back. In gratitude, they offered him a bottle of whisky. But the Filipino farmer declined, claiming that he was but a mild drinker. Mild drinking to him is, to Western foreigners, actually heavy and impossible to match. The lofty characterization that the American soldier enjoyed—wine expert, devourer, and all, suddenly collapsed, downed by the humble lambanog of the "mild" drinker.

The humble lambanog then succeeds in representing the soft-spoken Filipino and his identity in general. Like the native inhabitants in the island, this liquor has extra strength that is hidden inside but, when challenged by an intruder, could unleash

deadly venom that could spell defeat for the latter, and victory for its owner. The two, thus, are inseparable, being complementary to each other, and representing each other in matters of identity.

A Reader-Response Critique

This portion is a critical essay explaining my positions relative to significant issues raised in Alejandro Roces' story. Personally, this story has something to do with me since, being a Filipino, Alejandro Roces' came up with a body of works that concerns me, or with the rest of our countrymen. The story shows a clash of cultures, or a race to take on an identity.

It makes me glad, and quite proud, that in this contest, the Filipino narrator came out the winner, though he appeared a down-to-earth underdog at first. And I like his choice of gauge with which they were to be measured up—the lambanog—which the American soldier merely belittled as against the numerous wines he had already gulped in various parts of the world, particularly in comparison with the medical alcohol and the lotion that he had devoured once.

This lambanog, being almost private to Filipinos, does its job to my utmost satisfaction. It seems as though this native wine has a mind of its own, making clear distinctions between its masters and the latter's adversaries. And alas, how loyal it proved to be, working so mild down the narrator's throat, yet crawling like a centipede on its way to the American GI's belly. How this "jungle juice" had championed the Filipino spirit in this one-one-one competition, and I could only identify myself with it, desirous to spread this outcome far and wide.

The text somehow agrees with me over the necessity to once in a while put people in their proper places. For instance, I've been critical about the bullying people from so-called superpowers do to the ones of inferior origins. History attests to it—countries that make it to the top eventually produce arrogant citizens who think great of themselves, putting down others in utter discriminatory treatment. The Greeks once showed this, so did the Romans, the Germans, the Spaniards, and now the Americans. At the height of their seeming superiority in all things, sometimes there is a need to drop them to where they belong at certain

moments.

In this story, we see an American soldier who was out into the backward villages looking for bars and more whiskey. But in their conversation that followed, his arrogant tone seemed to suggest his mission was to preach into the natives the superiority of their race in matters of wine consumption. Although the narrator warned he could not stand it, he still insisted to drink it so he could perhaps compare, or contrast, how far it is from the best wines he had tasted all over the world. Tasting it was his way of assessing the drinking ability of this "brown brother," who was just up to this inferior wine, and of judging the worth, or intensity, of this native drink.

Amid his discriminatory appraisal of the brown drinker and his humble jungle juice, the American soldier found what he was looking for when he finally gulped it down. Grabbing his neck each time he swallowed it, his face terribly distorted, he was soon off his soberness after just a few shots. His brown drinking buddy, who drank the "mild" lambanog with a smile on the face, was surprised to see him seemingly swallowing coals of fire down his throat.

It gives me a sense of satisfaction to see that a braggart is reduced to his rightful place. Pompous people always piss me off, but I also relish over their downfall. Through the instrumentality of lambanog, the GI Yankee went through it—an embarrassing downfall. Oozing with pride and delight over his wine connoisseurship, he later on succumbed to the blows of embarrassment and humiliation.

Roces' story *We Filipinos Are Mild Drinkers* clearly suggests that it is an affective work calling to mind the reader's past experiences that could help him unravel the story's seemingly inexhaustible meanings. Its characters undergo an experience to which the reader, particularly a Filipino reader, can immediately relate to. The plot is endowed with elements that can activate one's emotions, such as a sense of satisfaction, or sense of humour, at seeing the antagonist suffer from the intense effect of the lambanog. It is therefore held that this story is an affective piece expressing elements to which readers could have plenty of

reactions, thus contributing to the story's meaning and interpretation.

A Historicist Reading

This portion assumes that Roces' story reveals the historical milieu surrounding the author's life and the times during which the story was penned, as suggested by the story's elements particularly its characters, plot, and setting.

This is another critical return to focusing on the importance of historical context to understand the story. According to Stephen Greenblatt, the role of Historicism is to facilitate easier grasp and understanding of literature as part of a sign system constituting a particular culture. In his new historicism, we either understand history through literature, or vice versa (Mikics, 2007).

Literary criticism and historical critique then are integrated, with the critic's role being an investigator of the text's social presence in the world, and the world's social presence in the text. Given this, one would have to understand the story as being rooted in its cultural and authorial connections.

In fact, the study of literary text is only one element of the New Historicist's exploration of the poetics of culture. Like the Marxist critic, the Historicist explores the place of literature in an ongoing contest for power within society but does not define this contest narrowly in terms of an economic class struggle. Rather, within a culture, a chorus of disparate voices vies for attention and influence.

Partly, the nation's history can be learned by way of reading a story. And in a way, too, one can glimpse how the people in this part of the world reacted to the events around them. One can read their dreams, joys, anxieties, and problems encountered in that historical context. All this can be had if a story's historical intricacies are dwelt on, at length if need be.

Fiction itself, as represented by the short story, is a rightful product of reality. It does not exist in isolation nor does it draw its materials from nowhere. For the most part, it reveals and mirrors reality, sourcing its contents from the real world. Since the events that unfold in real life substantiate history, it is then easy to look at realistic fiction, like *We Filipinos are Mild Drinkers*, as being expressive of

historical accounts for drawing its substance from reality.

This story indeed showcases certain elements that are strongly suggestive of an unfolding history. First, it is set at a time that juxtaposes with one of the country's past. Then, it introduces a character that likewise represents certain personages in our history. Moreover, it chronicles events that exactly match with a crucial historical moment in our history, thus erasing any doubt that may question history's predominance in the story.

When the story mentioned the presence of American barracks and quarters of the GIs, the reader is immediately transported back in time into the World War II years as Philippine settings particularly in strategic places abounded with such sights during that period. Wandering American soldiers in search of food, wine, and women were common in those days, braving treacherous terrains, hills, and fields if only to acquire the objects of their desires.

This is history making its way to fiction, or vice versa. In whatever way we view it, the setting of the story documents vivid images of homesick and pleasure-hunting American GIs who, for reasons of war, were deployed into the countryside as living witnesses to those cruel clashes of civilizations the world cannot forget. In short, this is fiction documenting history.

The introduction of a GI for a character supports another historical fact. During World War II, Philippine experience, American GIs indeed roamed around the archipelago mostly for military operations. But although their deployment in countryside was basically for said missions, they sometimes wandered into the villages for socialization, particularly in search of pleasure drawn from drinking sprees and the like.

The American soldier in the story is one good example. He was out for that purpose till he met the Filipino farmer who was working in the field. As expected, the latter proved readily accommodating, known for hospitality as they are. Historically, this was quite consistent as the Filipinos then, being allies with the Americans, considered the white visitors as brothers. In the events when the American soldiers wandered into various places for

non-combatant ends, the Filipinos were quick to keep them company, or meet their needs, like what the Filipino character did to the American soldier in the story.

Besides using a historical setting and personages, the story has included a glaring historical event, which was the infamous World War II, in the mid-forties. This provides the strongest proof that, indeed, history permeates in *We Filipinos are Mild Drinkers*, almost making the story a historical document rather than a work of fiction.

This is more than enough to silence any question regarding the story's historical signification. In fact, when viewed from various critical standpoints, the story is more historical than something else. It seems to have been tailored to a historicist appraisal from whatever angle, including the cultural aspect. And authorial meaning is undoubtedly agreeable with it.

In short, Roces' story clearly reveals that it is a historicist material that dwells at length on a significant historical event of national magnitude. The story's setting is patterned after the typical sights in Philippine countryside during the war. The characters, particularly the American GI, represented historical personages who played vital roles during the war—the American soldiers. The story's plot emanated from a glaring historical landmark, which is the 2nd World War.

It is therefore concluded that Roces' *We Filipinos are Mild Drinkers* is a historicist fictional genre revealing much history as exhibited clearly by the author's choice of setting, characters, and plot.

Conclusions

To sum up the findings, the story *We Filipinos are Mild Drinkers* yields the writer's presence mentally and physically, recreates the reality that was extant during the WW II years, uses lambanog as a symbol of Filipino identity, explains my positions relative to various issues raised in it, and reveals the historical milieu surrounding the author's life and the story's creation. This story is indeed a classic example of how meaningful texts are when subjected to various critical analyses such as mimesis, expressionism, formalism, reader-response, and historicism.

This paper then exemplifies how a text could yield multiple meanings, thus proving that there is not just one, limited meaning of a text but there are actually so many, even inexhaustible, depending on how we view a text. Teachers who have had limited appraisals of literary works, believing that a text could not have more meanings than how they perceive it to be, would come to realize that they, after all, have been espousing error with their bias, and they might as well change their minds or else they would be missing a lot of significant meanings and experiences in their narrow-minded treatment of literature.

Students on the other hand should be more careful on how they should approach literary texts. In case they have been influenced by the tutelage of traditional teachers, they should open their eyes to the meaningful possibilities that a text could afford. Drawing ideas from it, they may try their hands at writing their own critiques based on their chosen texts to see for themselves how varied textual meanings could be.

Literary critics, both budding and established, may take a look at the scholarly significance of this study and thereby consider it in pursuing their own inquiries, either for presentation in conferences, or for publication in noteworthy journals. Even ordinary readers may find it enlightening since they, too, need some kind of guidance, though their readings are mostly for pleasure and entertainment.

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