

## **Satire in Merlinda Bobis’ *Banana Heart Summer***

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### **ABSTRACT**

Hornedo, a literature icon asserts that “A piece of literature documents the world and the worldview of its author.” Accordingly, some literary pieces can provide information on the socio-political and cultural background of a certain society. Anchored on this premise, this paper aimed to identify the aesthetics of satire in Merlinda Bobis’ *Banana Heart Summer*. It also sought to unveil the novel’s message and the author’s manner of criticizing the novel’s social setup. Specifically, it sought to describe the novel’s theme, tone, structure and style, as well as the socio-political and cultural aspects using food as primary trope. The paper also aimed to present the reality frame of the depicted societal problems of the Filipinos in general and those of Bicolanos in particular. The formalist theory was applied in the treatment of material, which is a satire, and being so, the researcher also applied defamiliarization theory, through devices such as tropes and social realism, as it forms part of the aesthetics of satire that can help identify the ideology behind the author’s work. The researcher grouped the identified satirical techniques into five: exaggeration, incongruity, parody, reversal, and defamiliarization. In conclusion, this paper asserts that Bobis wrote the material for the readers to see the flaws of the society; alongside, she also implicitly offers a solution or presents the possibility of curing the social ills highlighted in the novel.

**Keywords** - Literature, aesthetics of satire, defamiliarization, Banana heart summer, Bicolanos, Filipinos, formalist-contextual analysis, Philippines

## INTRODUCTION

In her *Hagkus Twentieth-century Bikol Women Writers* (2003:149), Paz Verdades M. Santos describes Merlinda Carullo Bobis as “the most prolific, most awarded, and most skilled of all the Bikol women writers and the youngest of the region’s new *balyanas* or female writers”. In some of her works, Bobis, who was born in what is now the City of Tabaco, in the first district of Albay, on November 25, 1959, she expresses and exhibits her double otherness as Bikol and as Woman. She also highlights the deconstruction of both the urban/rural and male/female binaries and presents further such contrasts. Santos further describes Bobis as:

*As a novelist, she brings the Bikol woman writer to the postmodern, post-theory era of the ‘90’s while keeping aware of her roots and of her gender.*  
(p.148)

Besides writing, Bobis also paints, reads, sings, and performs. She sings and dances her prose and drama; in fact, she has performed in Australia, Philippines, US, Spain, France and China. As a Filipino-Australian writer, she publishes in three languages across multiple genres, with her works receiving recognition from award-giving organizations in the Philippines and abroad. Some of the various awards she has received are Prix Italia, the Steel Rudd Award for the Best Published Collection of Australian Short Stories, the Philippine National Book Award, and the Australian Writers’ Guild Award.

In this paper, the researcher mapped out the Bikol writers both male and female and considered that among them, Bobis is a standout because of her multinational and international awards and her works cover all genres from poetry to prose. Although the list of Bikol writers was trimmed down to those writing in English, Bobis remains significant as she writes in three languages—Bicol, Filipino, and English. Aside from such an impeccable accomplishment, Bobis is also included in the list of Bikol writers writing both poetry and prose including play or drama. All the above-mentioned feats justify that Bobis is undoubtedly a multiawarded, multilingual writer across genres, hence, encouraging the researcher to choose Bobis and her work (the novel, in particular) as the subject of her study.

To date, Bobis has received four major awards in the Philippines for her collection of poetry. In Australia, her collection of poetry was published as *Summer Was a Fast Train without Terminals*, which was shortlisted in the Poetry Book of the Year award.

Alongside her poetry, Bobis is also into drama and play, where she has also proven her prowess. For example, her one-act play, *Ms. Serena Serenata* was recognized by the Carlos Palanca Awards Committee. In addition, *Rita's Lullaby*, a radio drama, received three awards in Australia such as Ian Reed Foundation Prize, Australian Writer's Guild Award and Prix Italia or international award. Bobis' epic poem, (*Daragang Magayon, Cantata*) was also named finalist in The Australian Classical Music award.

Equally outstanding are Bobis' fictional works which have also garnered various awards since 1997, having received 12 awards for her short stories and novels, each with six awards. These short stories and novels were published when she was already working in Australia as a creative writing professor in Wollongong University where she also had a scholarship to pursue her doctorate degree in Creative Writing. It was after her eleven years of teaching in the different institutions in the Philippines. On the third year of her doctorate program, she applied for a teaching job at Wollongong University, where she is still working as a creative writing professor.

Two of her novels, *Banana Heart Summer* and *Fish-Hair Woman* are explicitly and implicitly set in the rural areas of the Bikol region, Remedios Street and Iraya. Bicol or Bicolandia, is one of the 17 regions of the Philippines; it consists six provinces, namely Albay, Camarines Norte, Camarines Sur, Catanduanes, Masbate, and Sorsogon. The other novel, *The Solemn Lantern Maker* is set in the heart of Metro Manila, an urban area. The settings of these novels provide not only cultural information but also actual social and political circumstances, which prove relevant to the plot structure.

The first of the three novels, *Banana Heart Summer*, suggests a bright scene and light tone yet filled with latent meanings. The whole novel is packed with signs and metaphors that stir the reader's senses. For example, the novel explicitly mentions food, but one reading it critically could explore on the suggestive meaning of these details. Bobis skillfully and purposefully weaves cookery with such sequence of events in the neighborhood among the townfolk.

*The Solemn Lantern Maker* and *Fish-Hair Woman*, manifest the same level of Bobis' craftsmanship; however, both works are of darker color and serious tones, revealing serious societal issues such as child prostitution, militarization,

total war, urban poverty, and political connivance of the Philippines with other countries.

Bobis' themes in her novels and this paper's material reflect the major problem of poverty. It is also the main concern of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN). This regional grouping aims to alleviate the problem of poverty in particular. The Extreme Poverty Conference held in Bangkok in April 2015, assembled global and regional intellectuals to confer about the latest issues on poverty in Asia. The keynote speaker Stephen O'Connell, USAID's Chief Economist discusses the conference' objective which is "to improve the well-being of the extreme poor and protect the less poor from shocks that might pull them into extreme poverty and to produce a policy briefer identifying the most efficient and sustainable approaches to improving the well-being of the extreme poor" (The Asia Foundation, 2015).

This analysis aimed to reveal Bobis' criticism particularly of the ugliness of the Filipinos' hospitality, particularly that of the Bicolanos. According to Lumbera (1997:58), reading a literary work requires one to "engage with its language as the social practice of individuals, groups and institutions." He refers to Philippine literature as that which "may be produced in the capital city of Manila and in the different urban centers and rural outposts, even in foreign land where descendants of Filipino migrants use English or any of the languages of the Philippines to create works that tell about their lives and aspirations". This goes to show that the novels—though written in another country and a foreign language—may still serve as a good source of material on Philippine studies. Furthermore, Lumbera says:

*The forms used by Filipino authors may be indigenous or borrowed from other cultures, and these may range from popular pieces addressed to mass audiences to highly sophisticated works intended for the intellectual elite. (p. 2)*

Indeed, novels are intended to arouse emotions by allowing readers to make intellectual discoveries of ideals creatively embedded in the writer's artistry through thematic presentation, form, style, and general structure of the work. These discoveries also lead them to decipher ideas which can enlighten, inspire or simply inform them accordingly.

Xi Tian (2014) concludes in his study, *Uncertain Satire in Modern Chinese Fiction and Drama: 1930-1949* that the people in China may find difficulty in expressing their complaints in politics through traditional media like books and

newspapers. His ideas are expressed in the following excerpts:

*But the internet and satire provide them a platform to vent their grievances and receive immediate responses from others. The instability of satirical triangle becomes even more obvious in today's satire, which is mixed with laughter, anger, carelessness and other emotions, simultaneously blurring the boundaries between satirists and the reader and even inviting unexpected satirized objects. (183)*

The above idea conforms to the objectives of this paper, which is to identify the satirical tropes used in the novel under study. *Banana Heart Summer* is a Philippine novel written to expose the follies of the society through the technique of defamiliarization.

In his book *Essays on The Philippine Novel in English*, Galdon (1985) enumerates women writers who have played significant roles in the development of Philippine writing in English. In the same work, he identifies nostalgia as one of the more frequent themes of contemporary Philippine writers in English. In addition, he has observed that Philippine writing often highlights the idyllic nostalgia or longing for home in the provinces which he considers either gentle or bitterly satiric. Specifically, Lumbera defines nostalgia this way:

*Nostalgia is the melancholy longing for home, or the wistful and often sentimental yearning for a real or romanticized past that cannot be regained. It is often characterized by innocence, even by naivete in ironic conjunction with manipulative cleverness, authentic simplicity and a quality of frustrated aspiration which characterizes dreamland (pp. 96-97)*

It is safe to say that most of the expatriate writers from Rizal to Carlos Bulosan, Gilda Cordero Fernando, Ninotchka Rosca and the contemporary novelists such as Jessica Hagedorn and Miguel Syjuco use satire through nostalgic approach in their writings. Abrams (1999:275) defines satire as “the literary art of diminishing or derogating a subject by making it ridiculous and evoking toward its attitudes of amusement, contempt, scorn, or indignation”. Satire differs from comic since the latter evokes laughter mainly as an end in itself; a satire ridicules and uses laughter as a weapon, and against a butt that exists outside the work itself. The aesthetics of satire can be identified through the theme and tone. Furthermore, Abrams explains the aesthetics of satire in the following statements:

*Satire occurs as an incidental element within many works whose overall mode is not satiric-in a certain character or situation, or in an interpolated passage of ironic commentary on some aspect of the human condition or of contemporary society. The most common indirect form is that of a fictional narrative, in which the objects of the satire are characters who make themselves and their opinions ridiculous or obnoxious by what they think, say, and do, and are sometimes made even more ridiculous by the author's comments and narrative style. (p.277)*

Theme and tone are considered valuable factors of aesthetics. Abrams (1999:170) defines theme as the “general concept or doctrine, whether implicit or asserted, which an imaginative work is designed to incorporate and make persuasive to the reader”. On the other hand, tone, according to Abrams (1999:218) by quoting I.A. Richards, is “the expression of a literary speaker's attitude to his listener”. The tone of an utterance reflects the speaker's sense of how he or she stands towards his or her audience or listener and in the case of written piece, the reader.

In an article published in *Ad Veritatem* (2011), Sy-Ng concludes that by studying the novel in a Lacanian framework, the literary work is elevated from Philippine to universal culture. Specifically, Sy-Ng writes:

*Unveiling the unconscious discourse in Banana Heart Summer allows the text's meaning to come to fullness. Through a Lacanian analysis, the reader is able to see that underneath the diversity of the characters' experiences is a shared experience of self-fortification. The Lacanian analysis of the intrinsic complexities of the psyche as it engages the realm of the interpersonal and the social brings unity and cohesion among seemingly dispersed elements present in the plot. (2001: 257)*

The pattern of the food tropes in the novel gives the different characters and subplots interconnection. As Fernandez discusses in her article published in *Philippine Studies* (1988), Filipino food is shaped by history and society; it consists of a Malay matrix, with the melded and blended influences from China and India, Spain and America. Fernandez also cites the anthropologist Naomichi Ishige, who said “eating is the act of ingesting the environment.” In her article, “What is Dietary Culture” she explains that eating is similar to ingesting culture because the most permanent traces left by foreign cultures on Philippine life is food.

Sy-Ng's, Fernandez' and Ishige's articles are relevant to this paper given that they underscore food as a trope; critically, this trope can be used to analyze the material at hand. The present study also employed Freudian and Lacanian psychoanalysis in the interpretation of the material in order to decipher the signification of food and other tropes as well as the representation of the characters in the novel.

In her article, *Humor in Alejandro Roces' Fiction*, (2013) Sy points out that humor is used as a form of ridiculing Filipino vice particularly cockfight. She stresses that Filipinos are fond of gambling as a form of entertainment. Sy bases these claims on Roces' work *We Filipinos Are Mild Drinkers, Of Cocks and Hens, Of Cocks and Kings, Of cocks and Battle Cocks*, which, according to her, employs an apparently light tone that allows readers to understand the folly of the characters, making them appear amusing rather than annoying. The same thing holds true in the use of jokes, which, could be "half-meant", considering the truth that jokes are meant to convey.

In his article in *Ideals and Ideals: Essays in Filipino Cognitive History* (2001), Hornedo discusses that political jokes imply and reflect the society's aspiration. He also stresses that humor is dependent on one's culture and that jokes are embedded in culture and even history. For instance, during Marcos regime, the subjects of ridicule were those who had power, such as The President and his First Lady. The political undertones in jokes such as these manifest the Filipinos' dissatisfaction and disappointment with the Marcoses as the country's leaders during that period.

Undeniably, Filipinos are inclined to using humor as a form of defense mechanism, so they may reasonably cope with their frustrations and hardships. However, this "art" of ridiculing their follies through humor is exclusive to Filipinos themselves. *The Asian Travellers' Handbook* published by Asia Week cautions foreigners about it, saying:

*Do laugh when Filipinos tell jokes about themselves and their country, as they often do, but don't reciprocate by doing the same thing for that may cause nationalistic hackles.*

In a nutshell, the statement asserts that we are offended when others make fun of us or a family member. On a similar note, we are offended when a foreigner makes fun of our country.

Aside from jokes, Filipinos are also fond of playing with words and acronyms that can only be understood by those familiar with the Philippine culture. An

article published in Sunstar Daily on September 26, 1997 mentions some “special acronyms” such as PAL for Plane Always Late rather than Philippine Airlines and MBA for Manager by Accident instead of Masters of Business Administration. Some terms referring to Filipino street foods have peculiar reasoning for their names like “adidas” for the barbequed chicken feet which was taken from a brand of shoes; and “isol”, the chicken butt, is named as “Shakespeare” for the locally pronounced word, “pu-wet” (poet).

The above-cited literature and studies strengthen the idea that a novel, at a certain point, has a particular message to tell. In the various researches and studies made on Philippine novel, nothing provides readings on the side of satirical tropes particularly defamiliarization. In this paper, the point of contention is to identify the message of Bobis in the *Banana Heart Summer* through the techniques and devices of satire. In so doing, the structure, theme, tone and tropes were the subjects of analysis to reveal the presupposition that Bobis is a satirist. This is the gap that this study hopes to bridge.

## FRAMEWORK

This paper employed Hornedo’s (2002:42) idea that “to an extent, the artist is an artifact of culture, and what art discloses is not an individual consciousness but a narrative larger than the individual’s personal narrative of himself.” Hornedo’s statement asserts that a piece of literature reflects the worldview of its writer, which is the result of his/her personal experiences, basically rooted from culture. As stated by Geertz (1973:448), “culture consists of the ensemble of stories we tell ourselves about ourselves”. He concludes that cultural studies involve the investigative description and construction of the relational signifieds which lie hidden behind the signifiers that constitute our daily interactions within our societies. Thus, it is possible to affirm that culture is a rational manifestation distinctive of humans and human communities.

In addition to Hornedo’s idea, Abrams (1953) literary theories on the relationships between the text and the writer (expressive) and the text and the reader/critique (pragmatic) strengthened the researcher’s claim that Bobis is a satirist. The expressive theory views literature as something to be appreciated, contemplated on, and observed, in which the critic’s task is to examine it according to its own terms as established by the work itself. The true meaning and significance of a novel, according to Colayco (1957) “is derived from the suggestions and cumulative views evolved from symbolism and adjustment, and

enrichment of meaning at all points through style, pattern, plot, tone and every element that enters the makeup of a novel.”

The researcher, therefore, anchored this paper’s argument on the idea that Bobis is a satirist, a Filipino expatriate writer, who also considers herself as a transnational of Australia. Her novels are reflective of how she views Philippine society in general and the Bicolanos in particular. Through the aesthetics of satire, this paper sought to disclose that Bobis writes about her society for its people to recognize the need to change and the problems that arise from the negative patterns of behavior. Through her works, Bobis induces calls for change that may emanate from the people who may see themselves being implicitly represented by the characters in the novels.

In this paper, the researcher utilized the formalist-contextualist approach to analyze the novel’s characters, theme, tone, structure, language, and local color. Abrams (1999:102) explains that Formalism is a type of literary theory and analysis which originated in Moscow and St. Petersburg in the second decade of this century. It views literature primarily as a specialized mode of language, and proposes a fundamental opposition between the literary use of language and the ordinary, “practical” use of language. The literariness of the text is thereby attained through the distinctive features of the form. Form and structure as employed in this paper refers to the principle that determines how the work is ordered and organized.

Food in the novel is the primary trope in the defamiliarization techniques the researcher employed to identify and trace the cultural and socio-political journey of the setting of the novel. Likewise, the reality frame yielded through the deciphered societal problems was discussed to reveal the identity of the community in the novel. This study therefore was based on this premise.

## **OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY**

This paper aimed to identify the aesthetics of satire in Merlinda Bobis’ novel, *Banana Heart Summer*. The researcher intended to unravel the literary devices used to reveal the themes of the stories focused on the Filipinos in general and Bicolanos in particular. Specifically, this paper sought to answer how the novel can be described in terms of characters, structure and style, theme, tone, and the use of food’s representation and signification. It was also undertaken to reveal the Philippine societal problems that can be identified in the novels using the aesthetics of satire thereby revealing its socio-cultural aspects. Finally, the

researcher sought to propose the Filipino and Bicolano types of satire based from the discerned reality frames of the said novel.

## METHODOLOGY

This study, a descriptive-qualitative research, used the formalist-contextual analysis as method. Specifically, the method involved content analysis with the use of satire in the novel as the main contention of this paper. This content analysis focused on the thematic interpretation through the aesthetics of satire, humor, sarcasm, ridicule, hyperbole, and similar literary conceits to point out the societal issues and problems in the novel. The researcher also considered reader-response criticism to discern the main trope, food, in Bobis' work. Some technical devices in defamiliarization such as magic realism and social realism were also used to decipher the objects of satire. Moreover, Freudian and Lacanian psychoanalyses were employed as interpretative tools in unveiling the characters' representation and name symbols.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Published simultaneously in Australia and Manila in 2005, and in the United States in 2009, Bobis' *Banana Heart Summer* is a novel about food and love. Divided into three parts-- "The Heart of the Matter"; "The Spleen of the Matter"; and "Becoming a Heart", the novel traces Nenita's coming of age in 50 chapters, each a discourse on local cuisine. Nenita's (or Nining's) experiences with food (both the cooking and the eating) are woven together with the love stories of the folk on Remedios Street. The novel offers awareness of the different types of poverty and issues brought along by the socio-historical and political problems where acceptance and forgiveness still prevail.

### Overview of the Novel

Set in the summer of 1960s, the novel has Nenita as its main character. Based on the story, Nenita's eyes widen at the sight of Nana Dora's deep-fried caramelized bananas; her behavior seems like that of just another 12-year-old girl. Nenita believes in the myth of banana heart which she believed could to appease the hunger of her family as told by Nana Dora herself. Being the eldest, she tries to compensate for her father's being jobless but she gets her mother's rage in return. Maring beats Nenita even for a simple mistake which Nining considers as

a sign of her *libi* as she is conceiving her seventh child.

As the story progresses, Nenita witnesses the latest wares of the Calcium Man, the latest duet between the local Patsy Cline (Miss VV) and Roy Orbison (Mang Gusting), Manolito Ching's perfect hair, her father's stolen tongue and finally, her mother's latest lecture on dignity and the whims of her other five younger siblings.

As the summer days heat up, Nenita's simple pleasures of her childhood peel away, revealing the complex hearts of adults. She moves out of the tiny attic filled with seven other sleeping bodies to begin working as a maid for the Valenzuela family. Though living only next door, Nenita's new role as the breadwinner changes the family dynamic. Though immersed in her work, Nenita continues to witness such events in the neighborhood, including Miss VV's pregnancy with a married man, Mang Gusting's infidelity, the suicide of Tio Anding after Mr. Ching terminates him from his job, Manolito's guavas peeking from his shorts, the mayor's corruption during the eruption of the volcano, Gable Junior's first taste of imported corned beef where he got his welts, and the burial of their stillborn baby sister, Marinella.

Ralph Mckenna, the American friend of Ms. VV's father, Dr. Valenzuela, offers to marry Miss VV. They take Nining to America where she grows up and learns that there is no secret ingredient to obtaining acceptance, affection or answers—she can only try to forgive.

### **The tropes in the novel**

As part of her aesthetics, Bobis uses trope in this novel. Trope or figurative thought is defined in *The Columbia Dictionary of Modern Literary and Cultural Criticism* as the usage that diverges from the norm. As one of the tropes used in the novel, food takes the role of expressing norms of the characters and the community as a whole. According to Mojares (2002), a complex story can be told from the meals in Philippine history. Citing Fernandez (1993) saying that cooking does not happen in midair or by whim, Mojares asserts that this story exists in real time and place, since it is shaped by real persons and occasions. Hence, Bobis' novel about food carries signification of cultural tradition represented by every meal.

Food is ever-present throughout *Banana Heart Summer* as it plays an important cultural and psychological role in the story. Hunger is central to Nenita's world and being. Food is used as a subject-matter set against the background of love as a human emotion. Love and food—associated with “hunger”—are two sides of the

same coin. The novel explores what hunger is in the social context. Accordingly, Hefner describes hunger as that which we all experience. In addition, he describes it as “the greatest leveler of humankind, if it wishes to be leveled. But how and whether we appease it always restores the social order”.

Each of the stories begins sweetly only to be edged with bitterness towards the end of the novel. The transitions in these stories should not be viewed entirely without sorrow; instead, they must be seen as an inevitable growth as characters begin to approach understanding of their lives. For Nenita, everything has a flavor and every flavor has its purpose. Bitterness holds as much importance as its counterpart. However, it is in the mixing of the two that our deepest longings are confronted. To quote the narrator:

*-because hunger is always unsightly. It's our gut hanging out, unkempt like unassuaged love. We see it in someone else and instinctively we grab at our stomachs, then quickly withdraw our hands, knowing we have betrayed ourselves (p.187).*

One of the characters, Nana Dora, is described similar to the jackfruit, which is “too prickly outside but sweet inside, but only if she was ripe enough to entertain your intrusions” (p.9) The preparation of the shredded heart in coconut milk is also aptly described:

*It must be the right heart, it must be the soft core of the right heart, it must be the yellowish part of the soft core of the right heart (p.10).*

Nenita also has assumptions that the devil ate her father's tongue by cooking it in mushroom sauce, a similar method Spaniards follow in cooking ox tongue. The idea comes into her thoughts after her mother beats her, and her father keeps his silence as he always does, more likely after he lost his job. The “devil” refers to Gable's employer who terminates his job after finding cheaper labor for the extension of his house.

The *palitaw*, or the floated one, carries a similar impression with those who eat it, such as the floating faith of Tiya Coring, the mother of Basilio Profundo. In the text, *palitaw* is likened to faith, as seen in the following excerpt:

*faith always floats, keeps us afloat. As it is in swimming, so it is in cooking, so it is in falling in love. We always believe we'll rise to the surface. Faith is too*

*light to stay down, and it smells. We can't hide it (p. 20).*

Further, this part of the novel describes that floating faith makes us brave and endure consequences. Dignity is also explained as may be lean but more filling than faith.

In the seventh and eighth chapters, "Seaweed Salad" and the "Calcium Man with Pili nut husk on the Side" and the chapter titled, "Halo-halo: Mix-mixed Intentions" foretell the ideas on dignity and pride. The narrator recounts, "Mother said pride is a sin, but dignity is a savior".

The smoky coconut chicken in green papayas is used to present the strangeness behind an attempt to make the smell, taste, texture, or look of nature 'better'. In addition, the narrator states that the heart of the matter offends the palate, and when it does not offend, it scares. Thus, the text concludes, "*So we arm ourselves with herbs and spices, and we consider ourselves improved as a species*" (p. 49). This is similar to how each person lives and pretends as somebody else or has made-up identity.

The art of preserving is likened to the preparation and preservation of the taste of *acharra*, or preserved shredded and soaked green papayas in vinegar. For example, Maria Corazon Alano is described based on the speculations of the narrator as having an experiment of her new version of preserving domestic harmony. The text reads:

*When in her heart, a wife decides that she's no longer one, not by her husband's decree or imputation, then she becomes playful. Without leaving, she can be single again, a maiden, a girl. The sense of old self can be recovered and preserved, where it had been adulterated or diminished (p. 218).*

The strange synthesis of cookery, tales, and of human interaction is the dominant metaphorical theme of the novel, which, categorically speaking, appeals more to the intellect rather than to the senses. This appeal can be discerned amid the strewn metaphors that frequently appear in the novel.

The novel also attempts to establish a literary continuity between food preparation, consumption, and human relations and to present the facets of human relationships that can be explained creatively and understood in terms of food.

## Analysis of the Banana Heart Summer

### 1. Characters

The characters in the first novel are semi-pathetic individuals seeking and aiming for hope, love, and acceptance. The narrator, both the 12-year-old Nining and the forty-year-old Nenita, longs for maternal love and acceptance, and after 29 years of working abroad, she longs for her country and hometown. Her mother, Marina and father Gable are also trying hard to find their proper places and responsibility for their children. Her mother's dignity is shattered by her inability to feed her family that may have caused her violent rage towards Nenita. Gable, is said to have his tongue eaten by the devil, hence his silence on whatever occurs in the house.

Another character, Nana Dora, the cook, relies on some myths to sustain her hope of having her husband Tasyo back. Her husband left her because she failed to give him a child. After many years he follows Nana Dora, he sells seafoods which he peddles as "calcium, vitamins", possibly to seek for another chance that he has never had.

Violeta Valenzuela or Miss VV, Nining's mistress is the most beautiful among the ladies on Remedios Street. She falls in love and gets pregnant by a married man. She eventually marries the man (Ralph Mckenna) who offers to save the grace of "Concepcion Immaculada".

Ralph Mckenna is an American who is old enough to be Ms. VV's father. Another character, Basilio Profundo, the bachelor who offers his love, through his mother's "floating faith" or *palitaw*, to Miss VV but never wins her heart. Basilio is outsmarted by Mang Gusting, a married man, who is helplessly trapped in a marriage with Tiya Asun, who finds liberty in the delicacies that she prepares, making twists in the recipes and ingredients but with a deeper purpose of wanting to keep her marriage alive.

Moreover, through the narrator's encounter with Manolito Ching described as the Spanish-Chinese mestizo and the heir to the fortunes of the richest businessman in town, Nenita confirms the bitter reality of being poor. She narrates, "The poorest are whipped by the poor, and the poor are whipped by the rich, even without them lifting a finger" (p.31). Though the richest in the town, Manolito seems unhappy having busy parents, Mr. Ching and Se ora Ching, who are respectively busy with getting richer and with personal effects like jewelry and dresses. The family of Mang Anding is considered the poorest in their street. After losing his job during a volcanic eruption, his wife being ill while his twins

have nothing to eat, he commits suicide. Through his act, the reader views Mang Anding's helplessness as being very evident in his character; his family eventually receives help and full generosity of the neighbors during his wake and funeral.

Juanito Guapito, the 18-year-old son of Tiya Miling, elopes with Tiya Viring.. The two women are both storeowners who find rivalry not only in their stores but also in Juanito's heart. Tiya Viring is a "frozen delight" or spinster old enough to be her lover's mother and would be ready to be with someone just "not to miss the last trip". When they elope, they go to the fringe garden of Boy Hapon, who is rarely seen in the neighborhood thus the speculations of coming from nowhere and the one who invoked the volcanos' eruption. Later in the novel, Nining learns that Boy Hapon is an ordinary person just like her, the twins Chichi and Bebet and the other folks in the neighborhood and inside his hut is collection of romance pocketbooks. Boy Hapon also tells her that his mother worked for the Japanese which explains his looks; that is also the reason why others don't like him there.

Critically speaking, one can say that every character, in general, aims for his or her particular desires. The novel presents each of them as being unsatisfied with what he or she has. The characters expect for something. Borrowing Freud's concepts, Lacan declares that the unconscious is structured like a language; therefore linguistics and semiotics may be used to study it.

## ***2. Structure and Style***

In this paper, structure refers to the presentation of the story. It is the manner by which the author presents the chronology of events. Style, according to Abrams (1999: 303) "is the manner of linguistic expression in prose or verse- as how speakers or writers say whatever it is that they say."

The story is told in the first-person point of view by a 40-year-old migrant worker named Nenita. Her tale traces her life's events when she was only 12 years old, in her hometown, longing for the love of her mother. The 12-year-old Nenita, based on the 40-year-old narrator's tales, aims to be of worth to her family particularly to her mother by being a good cook and literally a food provider. It was when she heard of the myth of the banana heart and decided to get hold of it.

Nenita enumerates her townfolk and describes each character while revealing how these characters are interrelated. In so doing, she vividly describes every dish representing each character and the manner of preparing it.

Nenita's description of each character is full of innocence of a child (e.g. how she narrates that babies come out from armpits after hearing her parents gasping for air from the vent). Such can be discerned from the following excerpts:

*-to hold her tightly at night, whispering over and over again, I love you Maring, I love you. Then a baby always arrived from the armpit (p.71)*

*-which clung to the waist of our father who clung to our mother and whispered, I love you, I love you, while she kept her face turned away, breathing precious air from the vent (p.73-74)*

After narrating an event, the narrator fast-forwards to present events such as when she recounts the evening when her brother suddenly got hungry after listening to the “predictable breathing” that came from the other side of the mat. Specifically, Nenita shifts to this:

*This was a story that he would tell me years later in his weary letters, which always asked whether I could send the family's a little bit of help (p. 202.)*

The narrator also talks about falling in love at a very young age. She describes her ability and inability to understand things as a child. When Manolito volunteers to climb the guava tree, Nining and Chichi see his “two guavas” peeking out from his shorts.

*Two guavas, two guavas, she said swallowing a fresh burst of giggles. I looked up. My cheeks were on fire. Was it a fruit of a vegetable? Up there, Manolito Chong's shorts were too shorts indeed. (p. 122)*

*But how can I save that twelve-year-old from these arguments? Of course I love my own? Even today, it takes great effort to believe myself (p.131).*

*I could climb any tree at my time (p. 132).*

The narrative also reveals the child's lack of ability to understand the difference between ‘stolen and the bought taste’.

*That summer I was twelve, lihi made sense. Mother vented her spleen on me because she was pregnant, and she couldn't help it. Today, twenty years later,*

*and so far away from home, I understand and I forgive (p. 103).*

### **3. Theme**

In the book, material poverty coexists alongside spiritual poverty. The former functions as a dual role that fuels Nenita's endless pursuit of maternal love. The novel depicts an aching need for acceptance and love in the lives of those who live on Remedios Street during that summer. The dramas of other characters' relationship and love help the narrator as she struggles to satisfy her need to establish a relationship with her abusive mother. Undeniably, most characters are individuals who are eternally searching for inner peace.

The nourishment of body and soul is the most sought-after idea in the novel as the narrator and other characters long for satisfaction and fulfilment of their desires. For example, Nenita's longing for her mother Maring's maternal love is Nenita's motivation to seek for a local and eventually foreign employment at a young age. Maring's yearning for the acceptance of her parents and society for marrying a mason is seen through her personal idea of dignity and pride. Miss VV's decision to marry a man old enough to be her father could represent a refuge for the love that she can never have. Nana Dora's beliefs in myths could be attributed to her desires such as her husband's coming home.

### **4. Tone**

Tone or intonation refers to the expression of a literary speaker towards his reader or listener. Abrams discusses tone further in the following statements:

*The tone of a speech can be described as critical or approving, formal or intimate, outspoken or reticent, solemn or playful, arrogant or prayerful, angry or loving, serious or ironic, condescending or obsequious, and so on through numberless possible nuances of relationship and attitude both to object and auditor. (Abrams:1999: 218)*

The entire novel is literarily written even with its obvious attempt to break conventions in writing given Bobis' inclination to touches of satire. The satires are evident in the use of various metaphors throughout the narrative; these metaphors sounds loving but have serious meaning that requires readers to understand the undertones more deeply. The author also resorts to writing on serious subjects in lighter tone making the readers feel light rather than bored or scared. The nostalgic pattern of the narrator's recounting her experiences reflects her actual

childhood involvements in the neighborhood that have led to her coming of age and full understanding of her life and those of others. Note in these lines, where the narrator talks about how Nining's siblings quarrel over pork knuckles, Nining's innocence reveals a certain reality with her mistress:

*Claro began to cry. Nilo chanted, "greedy, greedy!" The two youngest joined in, banging their hands on the table.*

*"Stop acting like pigs! Mother screamed.*

*Junior giggled. 'No, we're not- this is pig, he said under his breath, then bit the flesh hanging from the knuckle. (229-230)*

*You see, right after her loss, Tiya Miling began speaking in tongues, inventing fresh terminology for 'that evil woman who stole my son'. I must admit I was confused when I overheard something about teeth, as they shuffled cards.*

*"Please, what's "a woman with loose molars"? I asked my mistress.*

*Violeta Valenzuela could not answer. Her face was torn between laughter and guilt, neither of which I understood. Loose morals. She could not enlighten me about my confused consonants. She searched my face for any sign of accusation. (p.145)*

The excerpts above simply disclose social problems like poverty, gambling, gossiping and morality issues. Hunger may cause people to be greedy and at the same disrespectful. The issue of talking about others behind their back while playing cards is inherent in the barrio folks. Thus, when Nining innocently asks for the meaning of "woman with loose molars", her mistress feels guilty of being one.

## **The aesthetics of satire in the novel**

### **What is satire?**

Satire is a form of literature, which, according to Hornedo, is just like ode, lyric, panegyric, elegy, lampoon, caricature, comedy, tragedy, and romance. A satire primarily seeks to ridicule or criticize any subject, idea, institution or mankind in general. However, the satirist also seeks to expose some representative vices that are considered threat or harmful in the society. In addition, a satire aims to point out human behavior that is despicable and hence, needs to be changed. The goal of a satire can be either destruction or reform but mainly for the general benefit or betterment of humanity as a whole.

In general, there are two identified satirical styles—direct and indirect. A direct satire is that which is directly stated; an indirect one is communicated or

implied through characters in a situation. The two well-known types of satire are the Horatian, described as intended for fun which is light-hearted, and the Juvenalian, the bitter, attacking and angry in nature. Beckson and Ganz (1960) explain that the treatment and attitude rather than the subject matter mark the presence of satire.

### **Satirical techniques and devices**

There is a variety of satirical techniques and devices which can be used to comment on or criticize a particular subject or character. Some of them are irony, hyperbole, paradox, palindrome, oxymoron, magic realism and social realism. In addition to these, defamiliarization is also a technical satirical device like tropes and conceits.

As a technique, defamiliarization uses devices like tropes, metaphors, magic realism, and social realism to present ideas in an unfamiliar artistic form purposively to stimulate fresh perception. Viktor Shklovsky (1993), one of the main voices behind a way of thinking about literature which is known today as Russian Formalism, is concerned more with the notion of *literariness*. According to him, literariness is the result of working language so that it “makes strange” or interrupts our habituated or automatic perception of the word. By interrupting our automatic perception of the word in this way, the reader is forced to make extra effort to determine the meaning of the text and in so doing, the reader’s wonder of the world is re-enlivened. Hence, *defamiliarization* can be defined as the technique by which the author seeks to re-enliven the naturally inquisitive and literally awesome gaze of the child in the reader. As applied in literature, defamiliarization works in three levels: language, content, and literary forms. Needless to say, the entire novel applies these three levels.

With regard to the novel’s tone, the narrative is evidently told in a way that the reader will become apathetic towards the characters, except towards the narrator who innocently tells of her experiences as a child. The following are the various satirical tropes readers can identify in the novel. For clarity, they are presented according to type:

#### **1. Exaggeration**

Exaggeration aims to represent something beyond the ordinary and make it appear ridiculous so that the readers can identify the subjected flaws of the individual or society as a whole. Under exaggeration are caricature and burlesque. The former exaggerates physical features or traits while the latter deals with the exaggeration of style through language or action. Hyperbole and farce may also

be classified under this type since both utilize exaggeration through language and situations.

To illustrate exaggeration, here are a few excerpts from the novel, in which the narrator describes Tiyo Anding and Tiya Asun's family as the poorest in the street. The narrator also compares their family's nothingness to theirs:

*I wondered what they ate; their house hardly smelled of cooking. We had been eating more –water-than-rice gruel for a week after my father's and, of course, her husband's sacking. I wondered what non-smelling thing boiled in Tiya Asun's pots. In my heart I knew that her family felt it too- the esophagus lengthening, I mean. And as they were poorer than us, perhaps other parts inevitably followed suit- the tongue, the cheeks, and the eyes, perhaps stretching towards the earth, as if they were already being pulled into their graves. (26)*

The excerpts above suggest that the narrator compares hunger to how poverty reeks in their street. The description of Tiya Asun, having no breasts, no hips, no brows and little hair added to the exaggerated faces of scarcity in all levels—material and physical.

Another form of exaggeration is shown in the character of Se ora Ching. She is a full-blooded Spaniard who wears mantilla, a lace or silk veil or shawl worn over the head and shoulders, often over a high comb called a peineta, popular with women in Spain. The narrator describes Senora Ching in the following lines when she catches the narrator holding a bottle of an *ube* jam in their kitchen.

*She wore an emerald silk robe with red dragons—she had a penchant for fire-breathing things—and the most beautiful tortoiseshell comb with gold studs, angled gracefully on the side of her low chignon. (38)*

A full-blooded Spaniard, married with a Chinese creates a disaster in the line of fashion. This form of satirical caricature is somewhat similar to Rizal's Do a Victorina. Likewise, her act of screaming because she sees a thief in the 12-year-old girl holding a bottle of jam inside her own kitchen is indeed an exaggeration.

## 2. Incongruity

Incongruity is used to present things or ideas that are absurd or out of place. Included in this second group are irony, oxymoron, metaphor, and paradox. The actual intent of irony is to express the opposite meaning of words. There are four

types of irony; verbal, which is simply an inversion of meaning; dramatic, when the words or actions carry another meaning in contrast between the speaker/character and its audience/reader; socratic, or feigning or pretending ignorance to achieve its intended effect over an opponent; and situational, the type which is dependent on the inconsistency between purpose and results. Both oxymoron and paradox use contradiction of something through language and action to present the real idea or situation.

One example of ironic circumstance in the novel is shown during the volcanic eruption, which the residents of Remedios Street found ordinary, and being so, it will not stop the celebration of their fiesta. That foreign aid will abound and will be the subject of politician's corruption is a known fact, and so applied in the novel, local canned goods shall be labelled with their names and the imported ones will go to the black market to allow the industry of the already rich businessmen to flourish. By businessmen, the novel refers to those who are closely related to the mayor. The "one eruption, one mansion" is said to be the likely epitaph on the mayor's tomb when he dies. The time of calamity turns out as a prosperous time for the residents and the greedy politicians. The locals are able to taste foreign products from the black market, so little do they know that those goods were supposed to be given to them for free.

The generosity of the neighborhood when Mang Anding commits suicide is another example of incongruity. The novel implies that his family is the poorest yet nobody offers help. It is during his wake and funeral when everybody becomes 'helpful'. The Chings family give five hundred pesos, for the funeral services. Whatever help the family received during the wake and funeral will never bring back Mang Anding's life; ironically, their help will bury him instead.

### 3. Parody

The third group, parody, is used to ridicule the original through imitation of a usually serious piece of work. Travesty falls under this group; it presents a usually religious subject playfully reducing it to the lowest level of mockery.

Chapter 42 of the novel is entitled *Cosido: soup of immaculada concepcion*. A sour soup, cocido is what one sees in front of Mang Gusting Alano and Miss VV while they discuss about the unwanted pregnancy that results from their illicit affair. In their conversation, the characters use "folk aphorisms" so that Nining will not understand the subject of their conversation. Note how the narrator uses Biblical characters' names to refer to themselves. Note in the following lines:

*But we can't- you can't have that- that Concepcion Immaculada, even if- if Saint Joseph loves Mary. ( 213)*

*Saint Joseph will always love Mary- but I'm sorry, I can't..(214)*

*I wish Saint Joseph were dead. ( 215)*

Indeed, the holy figure of Mama Mary, who conceived without sin, is used to relate to Miss VV's unwanted pregnancy. The statement also suggests a blasphemy as one of the characters wishes for the death of a Saint Joseph, referring to the married man's inability to leave his wife and give his name to the unborn child.

The same is true in the following line:

*I only want to cook good, I only want to eat good, I only want to be good. (14)*

The above line shows the words that Nining tells to herself as her own novena instead of actual Catholic prayer in her intention to help and put food onto the family's table. The novena is mentioned in the novel as a repetitive prayer, which Nining recites while being beaten by her mother.

#### **4. Reversal**

Reversal focuses on the use of order of things or ideas such as a hierarchical order or events. Palindrome, the use of a word, phrase or number that reads the same backward or forward can be identified under this fourth group.

The reversal in the novel is evident in the character of Nining. She is just 12 years old, yet she already wants to help feed the family. Her first earning amounting to four pesos is even higher than the last wage her father brought home after he had lost his job. Nenita can think better and decide more sensibly than his father whose tongue was "eaten by the devil" according to the narrative.

When Nining innocently asks for the meaning of "woman with loose molars", her mistress felt guilty of being one, "a woman with loose morals". The position of the two letters in both words creates confusion between the words themselves, yet the paranoia is obvious to a person who knows better but has failed to act accordingly.

## CONCLUSIONS

The novel boasts of numerous satirical tropes intended to ridicule the follies and foibles of society. The idea of child labor and child abuse is just one of the issues in the reality frame which the novel discloses. At 12 years old, Nining is forced to stop attending school and volunteers to help the family by working as a maid. In return, she receives her mother's rage with slaps and blows that hurt her, and one time even burns her skin. Afterwards, she feeds her. This instance is accepted by Nining as part of her mother's *lihi* which later on she understands as a defense mechanism disguised as dignity. The problems of illicit affair, corruption, and rampant moral degradation made through gossips among the neighborhood are just some of the issues unraveled in the novel using metaphorical representations of food.

Bobis' intentional use of defamiliarization opens the reader to the possibility of understanding the culture of the community represented by the novel's setting. The aesthetics of satire intends to create realization on the reader's point of view to appreciate the work of fiction and at the same time to be mindful of the biting realities of life. The entire novel is full of lines that reveal thoughtful concerns presented in a way that the reader shall find amusing yet needs to be changed. The Bicolanos are Filipinos whose ideas and ideals may emanate from their inherent desires and their promulgation rooted from the type of culture that they have. Just as Rizal's novels satirize the Filipino's characters and attitudes against Spaniards, Bobis' novel also aims to call for a change and positivity amidst the cultural idiocies of the Filipinos particularly Bicolanos.

The researcher, therefore, recommends that creative writing be treated with purpose. Literature is not just for entertainment; more so, it is supposed to suggest, inform, and educate, and must serve their worth if taught well in institutions. Literature should not just instill critical thinking in the readers but also stir their emotions to respond to the call for change as Bobis' work highly encourages.

## TRANSLATIONAL RESEARCH

With the technological advancement in today's society, the current trend demands the function, access and application of literature through the worldwide web or commonly called "Internet". The present generation called "digital natives" can easily manipulate and grasp ideas from the available internet sources.

Most of these digital natives easily get bored with books, and seldom devote time in reading. Through various representation of ideas employing technology, information may instill attraction to the learners. This paper also recommends the use of popular culture specifically satirical comic strips similar to the Japanese manga. Manga in Japanese means “flowing words” or “Undisciplined words”, an ancient art that has been used as a form of entertainment (Simon, 2003). The satirical comic strips may be an example of an innovative media that can be accessible not only in the Philippines but also in the global community.

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