

The Concepts of God and Power in the Subanon's Myth The Creation of the Earth and the First People

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ABSTRACT

Literature is the bearer of the best treasures in the world. The values system of the Filipinos is embedded in their literature, in the same way that the Hebrew values system is anchored from the Old and New Testaments of the Bible. This literary criticism is descriptive-qualitative, employing the comparative and hermeneutical analyses of the Subanon's myth *The Creation of the Earth and the First People* and Hebrews beliefs on God's creation of the universe. It seeks to unfold the Filipino socio-cultural concepts of God shadowed through the characterization of the myth, analyze the politics of gender and power implicitly displayed by the characters, and draw out theoretical concepts from the analyses made. The findings concluded that the Subanon's myth nuances the peoples' beliefs on the creation of the universe, and entails to revive the familial values system of the Filipino, especially the love for children. The analysis unveils the gender roles of the Filipinos in the aboriginal period of history that have evolved to the development of gender equality in the present. Likewise, a theoretical concept of literary appreciation is developed through the established philosophy and background of the storyteller of an oral literature.

Keywords - Literary Criticism, Subanon myth, oral literature, descriptive-qualitative research, comparative analysis, Capiz, Philippines

INTRODUCTION

Florentino H. Hornedo (1997) lectures that God's utterance of Himself when He speaks of Himself within Himself is the Word – the Bible. When God utters Himself outside of Himself, He utters Himself about the world. Therefore, He says that the Word is His message to the world which needs to be understood not merely by seeing but also by living in its context. Into this light, the Subanon epic has rooted the Filipino values system – that reflects the traditional beliefs on how God created the universe and the first man and woman who govern it.

The Subanon myth, *The Creation of the Earth and the First People* is an example of an aboriginal literature of the Philippines as classified by Florentino H. Hornedo. The aboriginal mind concerns not with control of nature, but with making sense of phenomena and protecting the people's consciousness from the threat of absurdity (Hornedo, 1997). Thus, analyzing an aboriginal literature means to link the ethnic Filipino tradition, culture, and values in today's cultural practices that are preserved in the oral lore such as the myth of the Subanon, which represents not only their land but the whole Filipino identity in general.

FRAMEWORK

One's theoretical preferences or philosophical inclination highly colored the interpretation of the myths and other traditional narratives. However, the researcher views the mythical expressions as a conjoining expression of wonder at existence and the projection of an attempt to make sense of the universe. And precisely, because it is an attempt to make sense of the primordial encounter with the cosmos, it is in the form of the signification of experience, as well as a revelation of at least, partially, the process going on in the consciousness. The mythical significations and the critic's/researcher's experiences are significant in the analysis of the Subanon's myth, employing the hermeneutical approach.

In 1962, Heidegger promoted a hermeneutic paradigm by rejecting that cultural activity is a quest for universally valid foundations for knowledge. Instead, the perspective that he produced a holistic epistemology where meaning is context-dependent and anticipated from a particular horizon or point of view. He shattered the idealization of objectivity. Therefore, the idea of "understanding" something – for example, the myth – has changed.

In 1975, Gadamer built on this and described the cultural activity as an endless process of fusions of horizons. Understanding operates through integration with a strange horizon. Such a fusion means that our horizon is transformed and, on the other hand, that the other horizon, being illuminated by a new perspective, transfigures itself. Through this unpredictable process, our personal horizon expands and eliminates distorting prejudices.

Verification of the truth and of the prejudices through the ability to produce a coherent interpretation of the pieces is offered to our understanding. The inability to produce a harmonious picture would reveal the falsehood of our prejudices (Gadamer, 1975). This coherent picture is what the researcher aims in the analysis of the Subanon's myth.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

It is the aim of this analysis to present a comparative study of the Subanon's myth, *The Creation of the Earth and the First People* and Hebrews beliefs on God's creation of the universe. It seeks to unfold the Filipino socio-cultural concepts of God shadowed through the characterization of the myth, analyze the politics of gender and power as employed by the literary persona, and draw out theoretical concepts from the analysis made.

METHODOLOGY

The study uses mainly the descriptive-qualitative type of research using the comparative analysis between the Subanon's myth, *The Creation of the Earth and The First People* and the Hebrews beliefs on God's creation of the universe taken from the Bible. Likewise, the critical analysis is made by employing the hermeneutical approach, wherein the text speaks itself to the reader, and the latter understands its contexts based on the significations of his/her experiences.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

God and Diwata as the Father

Filipinos are religious in nature even before the coming of the Spaniards. We pray due to the following reasons: firstly, when we experience hunger. God let us suffer the famine and hunger to remind us that He is the only provider of our needs. Secondly, we pray for supplication – that is we wish for something we want

Him to give. Thirdly, we ask Him for assistance every time we have problems. The last is assumed to be the frequent reason we Filipinos always communicate with our God through prayers though there are times that we celebrate and offer Him with thanksgiving.

But what is our concept of God, Diyos, Bathala, or Panginoon?

Jose Villa Panganiban (1969) in his *Diksiyunaryu-Tesaurus* defined the term Dios or Panginoon as synonymous with the words Bathala, Maykapal, and Lumikha – all referring to God in the English dictionary. From these definitions, it can be concluded that God or the Panginoon is a supreme persona who is invisible to us, yet has the capacity or the power to create things. Some of these creations are the land we live, the flora and the fauna, and we humans as the highest forms of all His creations. All these implied that we owe everything to our God, and that needs to be paid off in whatever means we can, including to be obedient in all His commandments.

The characteristics of God as defined by Panganiban reflect the God as we see in the Bible (Genesis) and to Diwata, the god in the myth under study. In the Genesis 1: 1-31 says:

“In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth. And the earth was without form, and void; and darkness was upon the face of the deep. And the Spirit of God moved upon the face of the waters...”

The verses in Genesis show the power and capacity of God to create both the living and the nonliving creatures that the earth possessed. Like God, Diwata in the Subanon myth represents God in the aboriginal mindset of the Filipino. Being the father of Demowata, he gives everything that pleases his son.

He created a place for his son to live, the sun, the moon, and the stars – all that comfort Demowata.

“... Diwata took a piece of heaven and gave it to his son.” (lines 4-5)
“He installed the sun to light the new home of Demowata.” (lines 10-11)
“He [Demowata] asked...his father to put out the light so he could sleep...and Diwata granted the request.” (lines 23-26)
“Diwata gave his son thousands of torches which scattered in heaven and became the stars... and gave him a big

beautiful moon to light the earth at night.” (lines 30-35)

Diwata mirrors not only the characteristics of God but more so, he portrays the ideal father of the Filipino family. It is his duty to love and provide what his son needs or everything that pleases him. In the same way, Demowata represents every Filipino sibling who needs a father who would give him all the comforts of life.

Like God, Diwata does not only function as a father of all his creations, but he also forgives every sinful act his son performed. As the father of Demowata, he gave in to the appeal of his son to forgive Le and Lebon, the first man and woman created who disobeyed his commandment.

“Demowata begged his father to create another companion for him who should look like him in build, size, and appearance. He promised his father that if he failed again, he would go back to live with him in heaven. Diwata, after a moment of thought, decided to give Demowata another chance.” (lines 93-98)

“Demowata begged his father for mercy and to give the first man and woman another chance. He promised to accompany Diwata in heaven. And Diwata’s heart was softened by his son’s pleading. He gave Le and Lebon one more chance.” (lines 211-215)

Diwata portrays a forbearing father, and he imposes discipline among his children. The enforcement of punishment and discipline among his offsprings symbolizes his capability to rule over his family that let them learn the rules of life. Like what God had done to Adam and Eve, Diwata enforced a conditional punishment to Le and Lebon when they disobeyed his commandment:

“From now on, you and your people shall forever live near the river. You will live in sorrows, illness, hunger, and miseries. But above all, you will lose your immortality.” (lines 206-209)

God and Diwata have been good to all creations as their common denominators. Aside from a forgiving and loving father, Demowata, who is a metaphor of God in this epic has possessed human nature because he can be a “mad” god if being provoked, disappointed, and disobeyed.

The “Bad” God Diwata

In spite of the goodness Diwata had shown, he also possesses some characteristics that humans have. At some point, he can be a “bad” god because he represents the Filipino idiom “*natutulog na Diyos*”:

“He [Balag] hurriedly flew to heaven whereupon he saw Diwata sleeping on his golden hammock.” (lines 72-74)

Balag found a way to realize his plan to steal the golden sword, the only weapon that could kill Demowata. While Diwata was sleeping, he assumes that he could safely get the golden sword. These were the results of Balag’s envious to Demowata as the privileged son of god, unlike him who only functions as the messenger of Diwata.

“He took the golden sword and thrust it at Demowata. But at that instant the heavens roared and opened up. A ball of fire fell to the earth and struck Balag, after which Balag lay there writhing in pain. His body was aflame.” (lines 77-81)

Like God, who rested on the seventh day, Diwata also rested, but he is aware of what’s happening around him and among his creatures. He allows Balag to steal the golden sword so the prophecy that lies with Demowata, who represents Christ, to save all men will come into reality. Thus, Diwata does not sleep at all. He sees us in every way we do and even knows all our plans. He allows Balag to steal the golden sword – it was a part of his plan. Because the latter has been envious and planned to kill Demowata, he transformed him into an eel as his punishment and became all the sources of evil deeds.

“They [Le and Lebon] were surprised to see the great eel speaking before them... Balag wriggled, and the water rose like a fountain. Le and Lebon looked with admiration... Balag told her [Lebon] that she would acquire the perfection and beauty of a woman if she would obey his wishes. Balag asked Lebon to drink the water.” (lines 128-138)

“Lebon had gone back to the river. While she was playing in the river, Balag came out from the water and greeted her. Balag promised she would become a beautiful if she drank the water...”

Balag insisted that he could give her contentment and a beautiful life which Demowata could not give. Finally, Lebon raised her hands and formed them into a cup...she caught the dripping water...then drank it little by little.” (lines 153-166)

Diwata made Balag into an eel so the latter would be an instrument for the first act of disobedience of man (read as man and woman). He allowed Balag to play tricks with Le and Lebon and disobey him by drinking the forbidden water because part of his plan is to give them the free will. Man's free will gives him/her an opportunity to use his/her will to choose between good and evil. But man's weakness overruled them and chose to disobey God, thus committed their first sin. As a result, they were punished to experience poverty, hunger, bitterness and pains of life – that is if they continuously choose evil against good. Since then, nganga, composed of gapin and bonga when chewed together become the first meal of the first man and woman in their new abode after leaving the paradise. The nganga in this Subanon epic symbolizes the blood to be shed by man resulted from his labor, pains, and bitterness of life.

“Lebon's cry bitterly.” (line 223)

Lebon's cry echoes the cries of every man who experience the pangs of hunger and twinge of life that occur in the world today as the result of poverty and disobedience from the will of God.

The Politics of Gender and Power

The loneliness of Demowata as the son of Diwata, the Supreme Being is a counterpart of the Hebrew Old Testament loneliness of Adam:

“And the Lord God said, It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him an help meet for him.” (Genesis 2:18)

The verse in the Genesis serves as the motivation for the creation of woman (in Adam's case) and other living beings, including men, in Demowata's case.

The Hebrew biblical story of creation, where man is shown to be created ahead of the woman, and the woman was created from his rib, indicates a cultural bias in favor of the male dominance. The Subanon myth shows man and woman to have come from a single molded clay figure, that they were two halves of one

and the same creation and were identical in the beginning. This strongly suggests a cultural bias in favor for the notion of absolute equality between man and woman:

...the crack split open dividing the moulded figure into two identical creatures. (line 103)

This formal aboriginal equality, however, is shadowed in the myth itself by a belief that the woman is psychologically weaker sex. She succumbs to temptation first (153-167) and then tempts the male who succumbs because of her (176-178).

In this, the Subanon shares the biblical version of the woman. Even in suffering, the woman is depicted as weaker. The full force of catastrophe of disobedience finally catches up with the woman when God left the earth; Lebon cried bitterly (line 223), while the man is busy trying to find something for them to eat (lines 223-230).

It may be said, therefore, that in the culture represented by the Subanon myth, there is recognition of a formal equality of sexes, but also of a practical discrimination against women. The male is still expected to be the breadwinner.

Though a lot can be said and analyze from the Subanon myth under study employing hermeneutics, however, the concepts drawn are only limited to cultural world views on family and gender equality and composition. Through hermeneutics, this researcher and the literary persona in the Subanon myth had fusions of horizons – that is to illumine the mind of the readers for cultural and values preservation and understanding of the beliefs on what, why and how they have existed.

CONCLUSION

The narrative of the Subanon myth is an exact example of myth as Mircea Eliade (1963) defines it:

“a story set in time before the world as we know it began, whose dramatis personae are divine or semi-divine beings, whose actions are exemplary or at least explanatory of the subsequent state of things and affairs in the world today.”

It is sensible to note that the explanatory of the...state of things and affairs in the world today reflects the Subanon's philosophy of nature, as indeed myths in the traditional societies are the expressions of the philosophy of those societies. It can even be said that today's theories of the nature of matter and the energy and forces of these involve are modern man's explanation of how everything in nature began (Hornedo, 1997). And as myths in primitive societies ruled the behavior of those societies, our own myths rule our actions and the way we manage and control our technologies.

The Philippines, a treasury of oral literatures, calls us for opportunities to document and introduce them to wider audiences (Biclar, 2014). The Subanon myth, The Creation of the Earth and the First People as part of the Filipino lore does not only narrate the Filipino's historicity, cultural practices, and values that the people observe, but also it illuminates the "sweetness and light" of life that every human should learn. Part of its context is the ideology that defines our life, our way of life, and our being and existence in the community.

Resil Mojares (2002) states in his essay:

"To explore a people's lore is to understand something of the shifting ideological configuration of changing times. A systematic mapping of folklore, informed by a sense of the contingency as well as the interconnectedness of social phenomena, should afford us with a view of material and mental transformations over the long duration..."

Philippine folklore contains the symbols of Filipino crushed spirit; and its revival is more than philological – it had a strong racial, political, and gender implications, and it illuminates the historic conflicts of man and history (Biclar, 2014). Although our folklore contains the complexity of context between our history and our Filipino ideology, still it mirrors our identity, values system, and way of life. Our literature emulates human values through the metaphors of the characters and situations they represent. They are being told and retold through the memory we collected from our ancestors or old folks. Thus, folk literature is a collection of our memory of time and space.

Teaching the Student How to Understand Literary Text

Literature is not an ordinary language. The teaching of a student how to understand the literary text concerns itself with guiding him/her to discover the difference between ordinary speech and literary speech. He/she is helped to ascertain textual patterns that are significant to him/her and suggests meaning to him/her. Such meanings may be shared to the extent that experiences and significances of the words which express them are common, and may be unique to the student to the degree that he/she has capacities of perception and creative imagination not commonly shared with the rest of humankind. The point is to suggest that the student is capable of being guided to a threshold of understanding text from which threshold he/she can go on if he/she chooses to see worlds for himself.

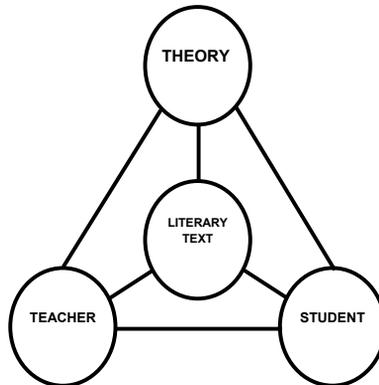


Figure 1. Teaching the student how to understand literary text in a literature class

The minimum that the student should be made aware of, as the diagram indicates, is familiarity with the text and the theoretical and/or historical foundations which have influenced it in any manner. The storyteller or chanter does not employ any theory in the production of the oral forms of literature. However, he/she is conscious of the historicity of his/her times. The theories the teacher have taught, of course, leads the student; however he/she has to be acquainted with the historical roots. And of course, the student is to be made aware of the role of the teacher – who has his own theoretical biases and personal meanings he might attribute to the text (validly, of course, under Hermeneutism).

This role is similar to that of the critic in relation to the reader of both text and critical text. For the student is but an exceptional kind of reader.

Ordinarily, the guidance of the student towards understanding for himself the literary text involves initiation into the recognition of the philosophy and background of the chanter/storyteller and his/her teacher, in terms of oral literature, in provoking the meaning-making activity of readers - called literary appreciation – or simply reading of literature.

TRANSLATIONAL RESEARCH

The literary criticism is the unfolding of the critical worldviews of the Filipinos that the new generation might have forgotten or excultured. The preservation of this oral literature can be done into translational research. The oral literature such as the Subanon myth can be translated into a comic or animated movie. The translational research to be employed is to get the acceptability and impact of the translated text. Likewise, the implication made from this study can be transformed into a conceptual manual in the teaching of literature, to which the acceptability and impact it made can be taken from the stakeholders.

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