

WOMAN IN CEBUANO POETRY

A Thesis

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the Faculty of the Graduate School

University of San Carlos

In Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree

Master of Arts in Literature

by

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APPROVAL SHEET

This thesis entitled "WOMAN IN CEBUANO POETRY" prepared and submitted by NONA A. BACATAN in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of MASTER OF ARTS IN LITERATURE has been examined and is recommended for acceptance and approval for ORAL EXAMINATION.

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Chapter 1

THE PROBLEM AND ITS SCOPE

Rationale

Many critics believe that literature is a social institution which makes use of language, a social creation.¹ This notion establishes the ground in this research undertaking. It suggests how literature can be a means by which society, its changes, and development, can be illustrated. In this research then, poetry as one literary form shall be subjected to an analysis to support or prove the validity of the significance of literature as index of social change.

Change is inherent in every society. A society's existence is manifested in the modifications amidst fixities in its forms or ideals. "Fixity unpunctuated by change is as unlikely in the world of actuality as is change unpunctuated by fixity."² No doubt people consciously or unconsciously witness changes occurring in a society, in its development process both innate, such as those brought by forces of nature like earthquakes, population growth; and radical, such as those caused by external forces like invasion, and inter-

¹Rene Wellek and Austin Warren, Theory of Literature(USA. Harcourt Brace and Co., Inc., 1956), p. 22.

²Robert A. Nisbet, Social Change and History(London: Oxford University Press, 1969), p. 275.

action with outside cultures.

The Philippines is one nation where cultural development has been nourished by both innate and external forces. For instance, the rapid growth in population has gradually changed the Filipinos' perception of and attitude towards the family. From a traditional pride in having a big family with children as assets in sustaining and strengthening the clan, there is now the submission to limiting the number of children as adopted in the Family Planning program. The culture of the country too has been transformed twice. From a Muslim-Islamic culture before 1500 it was brought to accept Hispanic tradition during Spanish colonization, and to a Westernized way of living after American education was pushed into the national system.

Recently however, the development of Philippine society is strongly brought about not by bloody invasions, but by ideologies or movements reaching the country for the cause of liberation or socio-political, intellectual and economic progress. A few of these ideologies are communism, socialism, and capitalism all of which have altered social policy and program; in literature and arts, these movements include post-colonialism, post-Marxism, and feminism.

One force that has gradually gained gravity in contemporary society is the feminist movement or simply, the emancipation of women - a liberation of women from the constraints created in a patriarchal society.

In the Philippines, the women's movement was organized as an offshoot of the anti-imperialist goals articulated during the Marcos regime. Some of the organized groups of the movement are GABRIELA (General Assembly of Women), Katipunan ng Bagong Pilipina, Kilusan ng Manggagawang Kababaihan, and the Rural Women's Program. The women's movement in the Philippines, whose struggle was first ignited by the anti-fascist or anti-imperialist spirit, has now become more gender-specific in fighting for a better government, a more sovereign nation and a "recognition of women's rights and potentials in all spheres of life."³ In Cebu City, a group of women writers organized themselves in 1991 and named their group WILA, or Women in Literary Arts. The group's objective is to enhance and acknowledge Cebuano women's skills in the field of literary creativity.⁴ This is considered

³Amaryllis Tiglao-Torres, "Direction for Third World Feminism in the Philippine Locale," Sarilakas Grassroots Development Journal(photocopy), p. 15.

⁴Eustacia Jocus, "Poetry in September Light" Sunstar Daily, 25 October 1992, p. C-1.

significant because the woman writer had been conspicuously absent from Cebuano literature before and the group aims to project an individual voice in a field dominated by men.

Against this background, it would be interesting to find out the changes of Cebuanos' perceptions on and regard of women in society from the Pre-Spanish to the contemporary period especially with the emergence of the feminist movement. Although groups of women fighting for the feminist cause have a strong hold in the capital and not so much in Cebu, the ideas extended through its literature and through the efforts of the branch offices in the province like GABRIELA-Cebu have not made Cebuanos ignorant or unaffected by the gender issue. There may be other ways to figure out how far feminism has affected the mentality of Cebuanos toward women, yet this paper utilizes poetry written by male and female Cebuano writers, considering that literary works like poems can be a significant source of knowledge in studying people and society.

In the light of the aforementioned, this study then shall deal with the image of woman in Cebuano poetry to point out the changes in the projection or in the image of woman in Cebuano poetry from Pre-Spanish times to contemporary

⁴Eustacia Jocus, "Poetry in a September Light" SunStar Daily, 25 October 1992, p. C-1.

period especially with the emergence of the feminist movement in the second half of the 20th century.

Theoretical Background

What is poetry? It is in the nature of poetry's complexity and distinct quality that people have refrained from defining it, but rather have preferred to enjoy its experience. One literary critic says that "like life poetry exists in so many forms, and so many levels that it triumphantly defies description," and that "poetry may just simply serve as a generic name for a group of poems."⁵ Although there are a number of literary critics who have attempted to define poetry as a genre, their own view seems to support this early thought of poetry as a field of large expanse. "like life", as earlier quoted. Tiempo stresses that "there are no exclusive poetic objects and situations,"⁶ thus, a poet can break away from fettering concepts of earlier schools that have tried to delimit the definition and the essence of poetry by certain poetic standards.

The difficulty in giving a concrete definition of poetry, however, is never a hindrance for one to recognize the presence of the poetic spirit. Taking the analogy cited

⁵Donald A. Stauffer, The Nature of Poetry(New York: W.W. Norton and Company, Inc., 1946), pp. 11-12.

⁶Ma. Elena Baretto Chow, "Edith Tiempo's Definition of Poetry: 1950-1986," Philippine Studies, vol. 37, 3rd q.(1989), p. 258.