

**FANTASY, ROMANCE AND REALISM:
MODES OF POPULAR CULTURE
IN *BISAYA KOMIKS***

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ABSTRACT

This study intends to discover the modes of fantasy, romance and realism as part of popular culture in *Bisaya komiks*. In particular, it analyzes the elements of content and style in the modes of fantasy, romance and realism in selected Cebuano *komiks* serialized in *Bisaya* from the 1970s to 90s, and apply the consensus theory within the sociological perspective in the analysis of Cebuano *komiks*.

Three serialized novels in *komiks* form are the basis of the study: *Multo Ang Akong Higala* by Rico Bello Omagad (September 10, 1975 to June 16, 1976), *Unggoy Guwapo* by Porferio S. dela Torre (August 12, 1981 to September 1, 1982), and *Ipanumpa Ko* by Oliver P. Flores (November 21, 1990 to April 8, 1992).

For the mode of fantasy, elements of magic and horror are used, blended with folklore and religious values. For the mode of romance, setting and the conflict of good and evil are given importance, with poetic justice an important theme. For realism, the heroism of one against many is exaggerated and knowledge of practices, especially illegal ones, is reinforced.

Generally, the three modes reinforce religious values, specific beliefs and social norms.

Although there are Western influences in the presentation of the story, *komiks* is blended well with folktales for entertainment.

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CHAPTER 1
THE PROBLEM AND ITS SCOPE

Rationale

Among all forms of print media, *komiks* are the most widely displayed in many of our newstands whether in Manila or Cebu, attesting to the popularity of the form. Its appeal to a wide audience may be partly due to the immense diversity of topics and subject matter explored, which a cursory survey of some fifty *komiks* magazines will show.¹

Since *komiks* are mostly published in Tagalog and studies on the form have been limited to Tagalog, it becomes a pioneering task to go over and study the Cebuano *komiks* published in the only weekly magazine *Bisaya* which was circulated throughout the Visayas and Mindanao that has survived after the war, the *Bisaya*. Aside from *komiks*, which may be considered a form of popular literature, *Bisaya* has published Cebuano poems, articles and short stories.

Two local scholars, Resil B. Mojares and Erlinda K. Alburo, have expressed the need to look at our own literature in the vernacular with greater interest. Both write of the need to conduct critical studies that would contribute to the interest in vernacular, regional, and popular literature using new approaches.² Although local poems, essays, plays and works of fiction have already been studied, not one study has focused on *komiks*.

¹ Soledad S. Reyes, "Romance and Realism in the *Komiks*," *The History of Komiks in the Philippines and Other Countries*, ed. Cynthia Roxas and Joaquin Arevalo Jr. (Manila: Islas Filipinas Publishing Co. Inc., 1985), pp. 47-52

² Resil B. Mojares, "The Aesthetics of Popular Fiction: The Case of Flaviano P. Boquecosa," *Philippine Quarterly of Culture and Society* VII: 2 (March - June 1979), pp. 83-90; and Erlinda K. Alburo "On the Study of Philippine Literature" *University Journal*, IX: I (October 1992), pp. 83-85.

Out of curiosity, the reader may ask: Can the *komiks* be considered literature, and if so, what functions do they serve? Are they to be taken as purely entertaining? Why has the form survived? It is to answer such questions that the present study is being conducted.

Theoretical Background

Comic strips were already developed during the 19th century within European and American periodicals. Beginning in 1894, with a series drawn by R.F. Outcault (1863-1928) of New York depicting the antics of a clown and dog at a picnic, newspaper comic strips grew in popularity and variety, enjoying tremendous vogue between 1900 to 1910.³

In the Philippines, the comics was introduced by the GIs.⁴ For Tagalog komiks, the pioneer is Antonio S. Velasquez who started writing *komiks* in 1926 when he was yet sixteen. He popularized the cartoon characters *Kenkoy* and *Ponyang Halobaybay*, the former becoming a hit with Liwayway readers.⁵ In 1935, these were translated for vernacular magazines like *Banawag* for Ilocano, *Bisaya* for Cebuano, *Hiligaynon* for Hiligaynon and *Bikolnon* for Bicolano.

When World War II broke out, those publications were shut down but came out again after the Americans liberated the Philippines in 1945. In 1947,

³ "Comics," *The Encyclopedia Americana* (New York: Stratford Press Incorporated, 1956), VII, pp. 361-362.

⁴ Jose P. Abletes, "Comics ----- a Force for Good or Evil," *Philippines Free Press* (August 16, 1961), pp. 22-24.

⁵ Cynthia Roxas and Joaquin Arevalo, Jr. (eds.), "I am Kenkoy and this is TONY VELASQUEZ," *A History of Komiks of the Philippines and Other Countries* (Manila: Islas Filipinas Publishing Co. Inc., 1985), p. 18.

the influential family of Don Ramon Roces decided to put out *Filipino Komiks*, and after its initial success, it was followed by *Tagalog Klasiks* in 1949, and *Hiwaga Komiks* in the 1950's. Other *komiks* titles were *Extra*, *Romansa*, *Lagin* and *Kampeon*, most of which failed to survive the competition offered by the Roces-owned *komiks* magazines.⁶

For the Cebuano-speaking readers, *komiks* were included in several periodicals like *Alimyon* (1957-1964), *Bag-ong Suga* (from the later part of 1960 up to the earlier part of 1970's), *Hiyas* (later part of 1989), and *Bisaya* (1930 up to the present). It is only the *Bisaya* that survives and continues to include serialized *komiks* in every issue. During the time the study is conducted, *Bisaya* comes out on Wednesdays with eight pesos per copy. It contains *balak* (poem), articles of current interest, features on showbiz, PBA Shot, a column about good manners and right conduct, *pulongbay* (crossword puzzle), short stories and novels in prose and *komiks*. The printing is done in Manila under the supervision of Liwayway Publishing Company Incorporated. Before *Bisaya komiks* were translations of Tagalog works and it was not until the 1980's that original Cebuano serialized *komiks* appeared like *Unggoy Gurwapo* (Handsome Monkey).⁷

Like television shows, soap operas and other forms of entertainment, *komiks* are also classified as popular culture. But defining popular culture will bring into play a complex combination of the different meanings of the term "culture" with the different meanings of the term "popular". Since the two terms have been connected, the history of cultural theory develops it in different ways.

⁶ "Comics," *CCP Encyclopedia of Philippine Arts* (Manila: Cultural Center of the Philippines, 1994), XI, p. 196.

⁷ By Porfirio S. dela Torre, serialized in *Bisaya*, Agosto 12, 1981 - Setyembre 1, 1982.