

HISTORY AND AESTHETICS OF THE *LUWAS* OF  
PUROK SANTA CECILIA IN SANTO NINO  
SOUTH COTABATO

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In Partial Fulfillment  
of the Requirements for the Degree  
Master of Arts in Literature

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by

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March 1998

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## ABSTRACT

A study on literary tradition transplant this research traced the history of the *luwas* outlined the aesthetics of good *luwa* and good *luwa* performance, gave an analysis of the form and function of the *luwas* of the place and pointed out modifications in the form and function of the *luwas* after having been transported from Panay in the Visayas to South Cotabato in Mindanao. *Luwas* are folk verses in Hiligaynon which are recited during the *bilasyun* a rural practice of saying prayers and holding entertainment during wakes.

Interviews were conducted to trace the history and to outline the aesthetics of the verses. For the modifications in form and function, results of three previous studies on the *luwas* of Capiz, Iloilo and Antique were collated and compared vis a vis the results of the analysis of the collected *luwas* of Purok Santa Cecilia in Santo Niño, South Cotabato, the area of study.

Analysis of the *luwas* of the Purok suggested that gender and discourse competence are inherent in the *luwas* which point to the *comedia* in Panay as the source. As to aesthetics, interviewees prefer euphony and cadence, originality and rhyming end words in the *luwa* and the *luwa* performance. The collection of verses from Santo Niño also yielded a number of quaint *luwas* which survived the migration.

The study showed that form survived the migration while function did not. The migrant community Purok Santa Cecilia held on to the same language and subject matter as form of the *luwas*, function changed with the needs of the new community.

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CHAPTER I  
THE PROBLEM AND ITS SCOPE

Rationale of the Study

During the prewar period, studies on Philippine folk literature were scarce. It was only after Independence that there was a remarkable increase in the volume of such studies. When the first thorough review on Philippine folk literature in the sixties was undertaken by eminent Filipino folklorist E. Arsenio Manuel the list was not complete. It was found out that there was not a single library in the country that kept copies of all folklore contributions (Manuel, 1967 1)

Such was the scenario on Philippine folklore studies during the midcentury. There were certainly a few interested folklorists who tried tapping the wealth of the Philippine oral tradition at the start of the century. Fansler and Beyer collected through their students at the U.P. from 1908 to 1914<sup>1</sup>. In 1921,

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<sup>1</sup> H.O. Beyer and Dean S. Fansler were among the early professional anthropologists and ethnologists sent by the United States of America to the Philippines to study its oral literature.

Fansler's *Filipino Popular Tales*<sup>2</sup> was published by the American Folklore Society. But no one followed in his footsteps.

In the years to follow, literary studies on the subject were still sparse. But the surge of nationalism during the sixties occurred and along with the different sectors of the society, the academe performed its role toward a definition of a national literature. In the initial review, there were over 70 theses and dissertations listed (Manuel, 1967:1). Then, too, regional studies centers were established with an objective, among others, to document the current output of social scientists as well as that of literary scholars.<sup>3</sup>

However, possibly due to geographical constraints, there are still far flung places which every interested researcher cannot reach. In South Cotabato in the island of Mindanao, for instance, abound various groups whose rich folk traditions have yet to be collected and

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<sup>2</sup> This book is Fansler's collection of the folktales of the Christians in Luzon. He also made comparative analyses of the texts he gathered from his students. Some 4,000 more stories were gathered but not published by him.

<sup>3</sup> In Cebu, there is the Cebuano Studies Center and in Iloilo, the West Visayas Studies Center.



critically studied. The early settlers from all over the Philippines in the so-called land of promise brought along with them their local folk literature. Indeed, Mindanao possesses a literature worthy of attention. Among the different literary genres in the place that need critical analysis, the folk verses or folk poetry called *luwa*<sup>4</sup>, which are recited during a cultural practice called *bilasyun*<sup>5</sup> in Purok Santa Cecilia in the municipality of Santo Niño, deserve attention.

The researcher spent a good number of her growing up years in the place. She had attended the *bilasyun* several times as a high school student but little did she know that those Hiligaynon verses she had tried hard to memorize with some help from *bilasyunero*<sup>6</sup> friends were literary gems that form part of the Hiligaynon Literature. Lest these verses vanish with

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<sup>4</sup> Also written as *loa*, it is a poem recited during a *bilasyun*.

<sup>5</sup> A *bilasyun*, also written as *velacion*, is a social activity observed for one, or as is usually the case, nine consecutive nights, following a burial. During this occasion, neighbors, friends, and the relatives of the deceased gather in the house of the bereaved family to console it. They may sing songs for the dead, gamble at the mahjong or bingo tables and play parlor games.

<sup>6</sup> One who participates in a *bilasyun*.

the dead, they must be documented

On the national level, studies on the *bilasyun* and the *luwa* as part of an area's oral literature abound as evidenced by the various papers, theses and books on Hiligaynon Literature. They, however, dwell on the West Visayas region particularly on the islands of Panay and Negros. Readers of literature have yet to find one about the *luwas* in the province of South Cotabato.

This study, then, is a trek to the past an attempt as much to make the *luwa* and the *bilasyun* of Santo Niño a more meaningful part of the writer's youth as it is an attempt to give them their rightful place in the Philippine literary heritage.

### Theoretical Background

In Western art criticism, M H Abrams laid down four elements to be considered the work, the artist, the audience, and the universe. These four elements are variables in the different orientations of the aesthetic theories (Abrams, 1953.6-7). That these theories are grounded on one or the other variable would call attention to the separateness with which work, artist, audience and universe are viewed in the