

## 21<sup>st</sup> Century Cavite Literature: Writers and Writings

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**Abstract:** This study featured the 21st Century Caviteño writers and their significant contributions in the literary development of Cavite province; determined the dominant literary genres, characteristics and conventions; and examined its distinction from other established regional/provincial Literatures.

This qualitative research used interview and literary content analysis methods. This study is limited to the analysis of the writings of the identified Caviteño authors. Particularly, *The Magic Bahag*, *The Missing Blanket*, *Ang Maglandi ay 'Di Biro*, *Torn Between Two Beki*, *Agaw Trip Komiks*, and *Buhay Guro*, respectively.

Results showed that the emerging Cavite literary writers are Cheeno Marlo Sayuno, Ma. Ana Theresa Cruzate, Jaime Zeus Agustin and Eliza Dionco-Rodolfo. Some of their works were acclaimed by Carlos Palanca Awards for Literature and accepted in various national and international book fairs. Results showed that prose is the dominant genre such as children stories, pop culture, romance novel, and comics. They are substantially contextualized and are characterized by freshness, crispiness and blatant use of vernacular language. Themes on the plight and hilarity in schools, gender development and sensitivity, historical-cultural allusions, indigenous people, current political conditions and relevant societal issues were evident. Apparently, Cavite Literature is peculiar with its huge leap from historical background to post-modern milieu. This study recommends (1) compilation of folk oral narratives, oral traditions; (2) exploration of other intangible heritage in Cavite; and (3) identification of female writers in Cavite (18<sup>th</sup>-20<sup>th</sup> Century).

**Keywords:** 21st Century Literature, Cavite Literature, Cavite writers, Regional Literature, Philippine Literature

### INTRODUCTION

The 21<sup>st</sup> Century Literature from the Philippines and the World is one of the core subjects in senior high school taken by grade 11 students. Its primary objective as indicated on its curriculum guide (CG) is to “engage students in appreciation and critical study of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century Literature from the Philippines and the World encompassing the various dimensions, genres, elements, structures, contexts and traditions” (Department of Education, 2013). The course is basically a study and appreciation of the regions where the school is located in relation to the literature of the other regions of the country (learning competency code EN12Lit-Ic-23).

In the enactment of Republic Act No. 10533 also known as Enhanced Basic Education Act of 2013 approved on May 15, 2013 was eventually implemented in June 2013. The dearth of the literary materials for 21<sup>st</sup> Century Literature in Cavite may be a relapse in achieving the full competency in studying the local or regional literature. Seemingly, in other regions such as Ivatan, Iloko, Bicolnon, Cebuano, Hiligaynon and Pampanga, they have established, recorded and retrieved their own literary identity and traditions. They have integrated these in their language teaching and fundamental macro skills development among their students.

Apparently, it can be observed that there seems to be a scarcity of materials pertaining to Cavite Literature. Particularly, on its CG's fourth content pertaining to the names of the authors and their works and backgrounds of the literature from the regions where the high school is located. From this content standard, the learners are expected to acquire competency in valuing the “contributions of local writers to the development of the regional literary traditions (Department of Education, 2013).”

Remarkably, Cavite province as the historical capital of the Philippines is popularly known for its significant historical events and landmarks recorded in various history books. Conversely, its literary facets seemed to have been gradually emerging and evolving. What are available for academic readings and utilizations are those that were written in the Spanish era during the period of revolution in 1896 to 1898 prior to the proclamation of the Philippine independence. Additionally, the province's oral traditions similar for instance to that of *Osipon sa Tolong Tataramon: The Oral Folk Narratives of Partido in Three Languages* (Nieva, 2012) or children's literature like *Yudi Man: Mga Osipon para Ki Numuy Asin Ki Nini* (Arejola and Billanes, 2009) are unexplored.

Consequently, there were few attempts in compiling literary works from Cavite. One of those who took great initiatives was Efrén R. Abueg (ERA). His *Agos sa Disyerto* (1964) was a compendium of the life and

literary contributions of Caviteño writers during the Revolution period. In 2005, his *Sa Bagwis ng Sining: Mga Nangaunang Manunulat ng Cavite*, he anthologized those whom he described as “neglected writers” of yesteryears. Abueg noted some of the poets, essayists, novelists and dramatists from Cavite namely: Diego Moxica (General Trias), Carlos V. Ronquillo (Kawit), Tomas P. Tirona (Imus), Lorenzo B. Paredes (Imus), Alejandro G. Abadilla (Rosario), Timoteo “Teo” Seneca Baylen (Noveleta) and David T. Mamaril (Noveleta).

Further, Verzo (2013) traced the literary features written in the 20<sup>th</sup> century Cavite and the writings of the Cavite Young Writers Association (CYWA) for a decade. In his paper, *Sa Pasong-Tagiliran sa Pasayhe ng Panitikan*, he reiterated the challenge of Abueg to the young Caviteño writers to respond and address the changing times and landscape in Cavite brought by urbanization, migration (*pandarayuhan*) and natural catastrophes. Verzo stated, “*Ang kabataang manunulat daw ang sagot sa mga pangangailangan ng probinsiya, ngunit paano ka tutugon sa mga pangangailangang hindi pa natutukoy?*”

Florentino (2014) observed that most of the young learners at present are much familiar with literatures from foreign countries. This can be attributed to the teachers' use of foreign literature because of availability and accessibility. Studies also showed that local instructional materials are the toughest and rarest to find and produce, especially for Literature under the branch of Humanities. Miller (2019) believed the future will rely on humanities majors such as credibility of information will become more difficult to decipher. It will be the partner of Science, Technology, Engineering and Management in interpreting scientific facts. Humanists will also ensure progress and ethical futures. Finally, they will catalyze valuable innovations in the society, government, business, culture, entertainment as well as science and technology. Thus, the proponent of this study describes Literature are the “mistress of all other branches of knowledge.”

Cavite seems to have gradually initiating and popularizing its own Literature. Teachers for this subject, fill in the topic by discussing the canonical Filipino writers prior to the 21<sup>st</sup> century. However, there were Literature textbooks that were printed solely for academic purposes such as *21<sup>st</sup> Century Literature from the Philippines and the World* (Uychoco, 2016), *Muhon: Sining at Kasaysayan ng Panitikan ng Pilipinas* (Abueg, Adaya, Balagot, Carpio, Castillo, Peña and Mendoza, 2012) and *Panitikang Filipino* (Austero and Suguran, 2012).

These were published by Cavite Studies Center, Jimczyville Publications, Rajah Publishing House, Inc., and Rex Bookstore, respectively. Nonetheless, none was printed or explored for 21<sup>st</sup> century Cavite Literature. Thus, these current circumstances of inaccessible and unavailable references may disengage the students (Schall, 2010).

This study answered the following questions: (1) Who are the 21<sup>st</sup> century writers in Literature from Cavite and their significant contributions in the literary development of this province?; (2) What are the literary genres, characteristics and conventions in the works of the identified Cavite authors?; and (3) How is Cavite Literature distinct from other established regional Literatures as perceived by the authors?

#### METHODOLOGY

This qualitative descriptive study delved on the content analysis of the writings of the 5 identified 21<sup>st</sup> century Caviteño writers who confirmed to the informed consent for this undertaking. Prior to the analysis and interview, an informal interview with the teachers handling the *21<sup>st</sup> Century Literature from the Philippines and the World* was conducted. Several grades 11 and 12 students were also randomly asked about the lessons they have taken in the said lesson for verification. Additionally, those canonical Filipino writers and traditional literatures from the World were studied in their class. Therefore, none was about the Cavite Literature where the high school students are located as required on its curriculum guide.

Afterwards, the selected literary works for this study were thoroughly read and analyzed relevant to the literary genre, characteristics and conventions. Then, an interview with the writers was conducted to highlight significant contributions and their advocacies reflected in their stories, books and other literary achievements. Based from the proponent's analyses and writers' responses, the perceived distinct characteristic of Cavite Literature was determined.

#### RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

This study featured 5 emerging 21<sup>st</sup> century Cavite literary writers from 2014 to 2018. They are Cheeno Marlo Sayuno, Dani Hernandez, Ma. Ana Theresa Cruzate, Zeus Agustin, and Eliza Dionco Rodolfo. They are from Amadeo, Dasmariñas City, Indang, Naic and Dasmariñas City, respectively.

The selected writings of these authors included in this study are: (1) *The Magic Bahag* and *The Missing Blanket*, (2) *Maglandi ay 'Di Biro*, (3) *Torn between*

*Two Beki*, (4) *Agaw Trip Komiks* and (5) *Buhay Guro*, respectively. Sayuno's *The Magic Bahag* was awarded second prize, short story for children by Don Carlos Palanca Memorial Awards for Literature in 2014. His *The Missing Blanket* was recognized as Honorable Mention in Philippine Board on Books for Young People (PBBY-Salanga Prize) in 2018. Also, the works of Hernandez, Cruzate and Agustin were accepted in various national and international book fairs.

Through these literary endeavors, these Caviteño writers in one way or another have significantly contributed in pioneering effort of recognizing literary outputs from this historic Cavite. Sayuno for instance, in his *The Magic Bahag*, combined his passion for the Philippine cultural dances with his indigenous writings from outside culture. This story depicted industrialization and commercialization. The indigenous people's migration (including Abeong's family in the story) from their rural roots to the urban dwelling was due to mining activities in their hometown. In *The Missing Blanket*, Sayuno highlighted the finding of the missing blanket. It was a special blanket as it was a reminder of the warmth and affection of their mother whom they lovingly call, *Ina*. In the story, *Ina*, recently passed away which could also symbolize the waning weaving line of work. However, hope was invigorated when the children in the story (Raniag and Dayaw) manifested interest in weaving by requesting the grandmother to teach them to weave a blanket. The ending scene shows a beginning of the transmission and preservation of heritage and culture; thus, saving the weaving industry.

Sayuno believes that writing for children needs interaction with child readers. This story was influenced by the insights he gained from Ramon Obusan, National Artist for Dance, as well as the Sanghaya Dance Ensemble, a Cavite-based cultural dance troupe where he has been a member since 2009. Though, a pure blooded Caviteño, most of his storybooks are mainly influenced by the Kalinga culture. It was written primarily to show children readers the beauty of the Kalinga culture bringing awareness that other culture exists outside of their own. Sayuno would like to create impact among the child readers to have love of culture, sense of Filipino pride and child empowerment.

Dani Hernandez' *Ang Maglandi ay 'Di Biro* (translated as flirting is not a joke) is an genuine ride of hilarity, conversational, experiential book. It intends to connect especially with teens and young adults who are the most susceptible to feelings of infatuation,

puppy love and depression. The book also reverberates to ages 30 and above that brings back youthful memories and feel-good feelings. Beyond, hilarity, the writer would like to shed light to his readers how to deal and manage these emotions when faced with circumstances.

Ma. Ana Theresa Cruzate's *Torn between Two Beki* is indeed a label of her individuality, particularly, a non-believer of happy endings in a love story. In this romance novel, Cruzate highlighted the twisted ending between the bekis (gays) whom the protagonist had romantic relationships with: the one whom she knew already since childhood and the recent beki stranger that complicated the situation. The book discusses a very timely social issue particularly on the LGBTQ community and how a woman and a beki (gay) romantic relationship progresses. Observable in this story is use of social media accounts as channels of courtship and medium of expression of love and affection. Cruzate, who's an advocate of out of the box ideology, steps out of the comfort zone in writing by working on various stories creating her own style.

Zeus Agustin is a recipient of awards in two categories of Human Rights Online Pinduteros' Choice Awards in 2012. He is one of the creators of *Agaw Trip Komiks*. This graphic literature conveys relevant advocacies on socialism, protection and defense of human rights, especially workers' rights. Generally, the objective is to expose and discuss social injustices by the government and the capitalist. Since they are mainly on Facebook, they cannot actually control the target audience. Also, the presented ideals and humor are actually crafted for everyone to contribute in the transformation of the society. According to him, the ideals espoused in their comics are somewhat challenging to sell especially in this era of post-truth politics or fake news and government crackdown on critics. In the coming years, they are planning to anthologize the characters that have appeared on their [Facebook] online comics. Agustin is not in tune with regionalism in presenting his work. The uniqueness of their literary endeavors through the comic strip genre, is the fact that they are undaunted to get political.

Eliza Dionco Rodolfo's *Buhay Guro* offers a respite and relief for the teachers. Rodolfo, in this book, sensibly preserved the good vibes and positivity of students and teachers' daily experiences, dynamic conversations and lively encounters. Regardless of age, strife and plight, they retained the harmonious relationships most of the time. The book refueled the teaching's energy level and rekindled the passion for the profession as creators of other professions in

nation-building. The book also intrinsically integrated Department of Education's core values-*Maka-Diyos, Makatao, Makakalikasan and Makabansa*.

Results also showed that prose is the dominant genre such as children stories, romance novel, comics, and pop culture. They are substantially localized and contextualized with relevance to images, themes, plot, dialect or language, objective situation and literary style. Themes on the plight and hilarity in schools, teenage depression, gender and development sensitivity, LGBTQ community, historical-cultural allusions, indigenous people, current political conditions and relevant societal issues were evident.

The conventions gleaned from this group of Caviteño writings are: (1) visually presented through arts, comics and illustrations; (2) vividness, freshness, crispiness and blatant use of vernacular language which could establish solid connection and emotion communicated by the literary pieces; (3) shift from a more reserved to an explicit cultural inclination presentation of issues and conflicts; (4) appropriate for millennial readers; (5) digital intervention resulting to accessibility trend for patronage, promotion and interaction between and among readers and authors.

In the context of this study, Cavite Literature may be defined as a literature written by Caviteños in English, Filipino or Tagalog about the province, its people, language and culture regardless if the characters are Caviteños or other ethnicity and irrespective if the settings are in Cavite or elsewhere. In the future, the writings may not necessarily written by a Caviteño. Based on the proponent's analyses and authors' responses, the contemporary characteristic of Cavite Literature is that it is peculiarly developing with its huge leap from historical background to post-modern milieu.

### CONCLUSIONS

Based from the results, it can be inferred that there are emerging 21<sup>st</sup> century Caviteño literary writers that continuously explore what are appealing to the interests and needs of the millennial readers. There is also a shift from textual to visual presentation and digital interface seizing the millennial culture that is flourishing in the advancement of technology. Results of the analysis are considerably localized and indigenized literary instruction or enrichment among the 21<sup>st</sup> Century Literature learners. There seems to be a presentation of valuable glimpse and sense of ownership in their Literature written by [local] Caviteño authors. This study recommends exploration of Cavite's (1) folk oral narratives; (2) oral tradition

and intangible heritage; and (3) its female writers (18<sup>th</sup>-20<sup>th</sup> Century).

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