

Distillation of Bantugan: A Maranao Epic

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Abstract. This study entitled “Distillation of Bantugan: A Maranao Epic” is divided into two parts. The first part includes the study and analysis of the epic of Bantugan within the framework of postmodern analysis, using distillation, deconstruction, psychoanalysis, and selected folklore theories. The second part includes the transcreation of these processes to a scenario of a Postmodern production of the epic of Bantugan.

This study aimed to answer the main question: How can the Maranao epic of Bantugan be distilled for the postmodern theater? Specifically, the study: relates the folklore theories to the postmodernist principles of deconstruction and distillation; integrates the theories with these postmodern principles by analysis and production into theater; includes in the scenario portions of the material culture and the cultural symbols in the epic of Bantugan using the procedures of distillation in postmodern theater; identifies the values and emotive representations in the epic of Bantugan; distills and deconstructs portions of the epic of Bantugan for production in postmodern theater identifying their recreation according to: “tangibles” (choreography, props and sets, costumes, lighting, dialogues), and “intangibles” or the values and emotive representations of the text.

Using the theories on Deconstructionism and Postmodernism as guides, the researcher “distilled” the text into a theater script outline. In distillation, the meanings of text are not only extracted but the affective values of the folk literature are drawn out too.

Keywords: Bantugan, deconstruction, distillation, epic, folklore, Maranao, postmodernism, theater, transcreation

1. Introduction

George W. Boswell writes that epics are among the “aristocrats” of folklore. Epics are important because besides their lofty subject matters and seriousness of purpose, they also embody the beliefs, customs, ideals, and life values of the people who recite them. Epics, most of which come from ethno-linguistic groups, are translated into the English language so they can be studied in schools. However, Philippine Literature expert Bienvenido Lumbera (1999) maintains that the translation of the epics into English poses a problem in the correct and appropriate contextualization of a literary work which is elaborately woven into the cultural fabric of these ethno linguistic communities. Truly, the artistic genius of the original, with all its core essences, texture, and sense, is more often than not lost in the process of recording, transcription, and translation of epics into a language (Lumbera, 1999).

How then should epics be studied so that all its vital elements are not lost? Lumbera maintains that videos and live performances are means of restoring oral literature. Hence, theater is seen as a very potent tool to propagate epics. Recent developments and trends in theater have applied a concept of literature and the arts known as *postmodernism* where the process of deconstruction and distillation is usually employed.

The proximity of this epic’s sources to the researchers allows immediate access that facilitates the study. Besides, the study’s importance is in its cultural relevance. This study guided by folklore and theater theories aims to describe deconstructing and distilling the core essence and meanings of this epic into theater.

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1.1. Theoretical Framework

The researchers presented relevant theories of folklore and literature that guide the epic's deconstruction and distillation. The following views interrelate, each supporting and reflecting the other: Sigmund Freud's Psychoanalysis of folklore, Alan Dundes' view on material culture, and George W. Boswell's categorization of folklore as action, science, linguistics and literature.

Freud's view of folklore as dream manifestations use symbols which can be taken from the material culture. The material culture may be interpreted as metaphors and are employed to communicate and explain the world. These meanings often reveal more than what discussion can reveal about true feelings. The study of folklore as action, science, linguistics, and literature also deals with material culture. The playthings in games, the technology used in daily activities, the incantations recited and written in parchments are all part of material culture which may be used to represent abstractions. Psychoanalysis of folklore with Dundes' view on material culture and Boswell's categorization of folklore are used in distilling, deconstructing, and staging the epic. Adding a base to these multi-fold layers are studies on Philippine psychology so that a more closely-local view can be gleaned from the whole process.

Postmodernism, as Edwin Wilson says, is concerned with mixing abstractions and realism. This way, postmodernist theater hews to the mentioned folklore theories in this theater process of the deconstruction of oral literature. The theater bares the skeleton of the original text, in this case the Bantugan world and his person (Wilson, 2003). A term tied closely to Postmodernism is Deconstructionism or Deconstruction that challenges any attempt of establishing any sole or ultimate meaning of a text. In film, fiction, and theater, deconstruction can criticize or parody the original text; it attempts to revitalize the original by eliminating what the author sees as an unnecessary buildup. Using these theories on Deconstructionism and Postmodernism as guides, the researchers may now distil the meanings and the affective values of the literature extracted.

1.2. Statement of the Problem

This study aims to develop a process where in the final stage is the production of the Maranao epic of Bantugan. Through the process of deconstruction and distillation – the main elements of Postmodern Theater, the study will derive the core essence of the epic. How can the epic of Bantugan be distilled for the postmodern theater? Specifically, the study aims to: Relate the folklore theories to the postmodernist principles of deconstruction and distillation; Integrate the theories with these postmodern principles by analysis and production into theater; Perform portions of the material culture and the cultural symbols in the epic of Bantugan using the procedures of distillation in postmodern theater; Identify the values and emotive representations in the epic of Bantugan; Dovetail the folkloristic theories of George W. Boswell into the analysis of the epic juxtaposing these with the process of deconstruction and distillation; and, distil and deconstruct portions of the epic of Bantugan for production in postmodern theater identifying their recreation according to: Tangibles, identified as: Choreography, Props and sets, Costumes, Lighting, Dialogues, and Intangibles, or the values and emotive representations of the text.

2. Methodology

2.1. Deconstruction and Distillation Procedures

The researcher read the text not less than three times from Coronel's compilation and Eugenio's Philippine Folk Literature: The Epics. After the readings, he looked into samples of the epic's action and science elements from where material culture was gleaned. He employed anecdotal listing to record the categories and facts that are important in the distillation, deconstruction, and Postmodern staging of the epic. Then he listed down the material culture present in the text such as images, sounds, gestures, movements, and music. After, he looked into samples of the elements of science and linguistics which included speeches and dialects, morphology and syntax used in verses, epithets, and charms or challenges. He then correspondingly identified what each material culture stood for using symbolism and the Freudian analysis. The next elements the researcher sampled were the linguistics and literary elements from where mood, meaning, intention of the text, and the drawing out of characterization were distilled. The researcher progressed to determine the form, focus, and feel the distilled text shaped in their adaptation to the stage. At

this point, the researcher was ready to write the script outline for staging.

3. Results and Discussions

3.1. Material Culture

Samples of Actions and Science Elements

The following are samples of the epic's action and science elements from where some material culture was gleaned. The material cultures that are present in the text are images (*Mountains and plains, Rainbows, Rivers and oceans, Bamboos, Abode of death (Dadalian Karegen), Skyworld (Daridayan a Langit), Crocodiles or dragons, Sarimanok, Moon (Olan), Okir, Colors*), structures (*Huge solitary rock (Talatalak a Wata), Balete Tree (Nonok), Panolong, Torogan, Boats*), home articles, clothing and accessories (*Betelchew, Katiyopo masaleg, Flags, Malong, Mosala, Patola Kaorayan, Tobaw, The royal umbrella, Bier, Glass bottles*), weapons (*Kampilan, Kelong, Cannons*), gestures and movements (*Changing of clothes before a battle, Giving of names, Sagayan, Turning to the left, Betel nut chewing, Sipa*), and sounds and music (*Agong, Thunder, Kolintang, Pindo, Ponay birds, Tagongko*). From here are drawn the symbolic elements and metaphors contained in the text. These elements are transposed into the distilled work.

Samples of Science and Linguistics Elements

The following are samples of Science and Linguistics elements which include speeches and dialects used in epithets, and charms or challenges, among others. We draw out characterization at this point. The epithets will be the basis of the characterizations in the distilled work. The charms and challenges will be used to define how the characters perceive each other. *Tangkal a Borantakan*-The place where the sun rises, which locates it in the East. *Pasandalan a Morog/Bandira a Modayaw*-Highest flag at highest tide or "highest ranking datu." *Paramata Bantugan*-A jewel praised and famous everywhere. *Maramanay o Simban*-Crown of the Ayonan. *Arkat a Lawanen*-Perfect, peerless. *Tambing Oray Masaleg*-Royal, shining glass.

Samples of Linguistics and Literary Elements

We use the Frietag's pyramid to present the pattern of the plot, if there is rising action, climax, and the dénouement present. The moods distilled are as follows: melancholic (exposition), fantastical (rising action), chaotic (pre-climactic and climactic), and reconciliatory (denouement). The text intends to represent these moods as they are, to showcase how one deals with ones internal and external inconsistencies

Symbols and Freudian Analysis of the Sampled Material Culture

The researcher identified what each material culture stood for using symbolism and the Freudian analysis. *Mountains and plains* (natural wealth of the country, may also symbolize erratic peace and order situation, male and female). *Rainbows* (death of a royal person, male). *Rivers and oceans* (passage to afterlife Female). *Bamboos* (versatility, flexibility, Male). *Abode of death (Dadalian Karegen)* (place of rest and equality, Female). *Skyworld (Daridayan a Langit)* (place of trial and cleansing, Female). *Crocodiles or dragons* (Ferocity, Male). *Sarimanok* (Wealth, Male). *Moon (Olan)* (Beauty, Female) *Okir* (Motif, Male).

Form, Focus, and Feel of the Distilled Elements

The distilled work will maintain the dreamlike quality of the epic, therefore the non-linear distillation on Bantugan's character is employed. It will also center the story in the death and resurrection of the hero. The distilled epic will employ minimal dialogue and more symbolic visuals than text spoken to add to the dreamlike quality. Creative movements and sounds will also be used to enhance the effect of the visuals. The sets will be minimalist. Like the patterns in the epic of Bantugan, the work will shift vice-versa according to the feel of the distillation, moving from sharp to soft, fast to slow patterns.

3.2. The Scenario

A scenario sample of the specific Bantugan segment follows:

Bantugan Dies (working title)

Characters:

Bantugan – the hero

Nakir and Mongkar – two judges of the dead

Setting:

This study illustrates how oral literature can be transcreated into the stage through our suggested creative process. Transcreation opens the bounds of traditional oral and written forms to allow these forms to move to innovative mediums that can be more dynamically appreciated by our contemporary audiences. The study shows that despite being lore in the traditional form as the epic, this study's selected "Death of Bantugan" episode can be synthesized by deconstruction and distillation to produce new flavor. More meanings may be expressed when an epic or lore is distilled to its core values.

In deconstruction and distillation, the issues presented in the text are no longer bound to a single culture but transcends to embrace all other cultures. In this transcreation, the creative work becomes a more universal tool of expression than its original form where in audiences from any culture can relate to. The divisions of age, gender, and social standing, among other cultural qualities, are bridged and all that remains in the creative experience is the art form in contact with its audience.

This "re-shaping" of the epic has practical purposes too: production is cost-efficient and is less time consuming than traditional chanting.

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