

Poetic Justice, Love, and Womanhood

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Abstract

This paper is an attempt to fuse poetry and philosophy as a means to interpret social issues. In the country's history, poems have had a great impact in inspiring the people in their struggle for freedom and to express their love for country. The first poem, "Kunwari," explicates the character and impact of President Duterte on social issues in terms of the way he challenged the Catholic Church, a certain form of poetic justice, one might say. The second poem "Pag-big," will explore the intricacies of love as an experience and an ideal that unites two human beings amidst all the complexities of human reality. The third and final poem, "Babae" is about womanhood. It presents the essence of being a woman and the power of women to nurture and make all life bearable despite the conflicts and emptiness of living in a world that is complex and tumultuous.

Keywords: Radicalism; Rodrigo Duterte; Poetry, Ideal Love; Women

Introduction

In the study of politics as well as philosophy, most works have given priority to theory more than other forms of literary expression. However, philosophy has given voice to theory and allowed various narratives to be expressed. In this exposition, poetry will be used to analyze the idea of “poetic justice” in the politics of President Rodrigo Duterte, the intersubjective aspect of human relationships, and the essence of being a woman. This work risks being thrown away in the dustbin, by its very nature, as suggested by the essay of Lee Trapanier, because while “Dilthey and Nietzsche praise the wisdom of poets and duly see poetry as mutually beneficial pursuits, most philosophers and theorists resent, diminish or eliminate the importance of poetry in philosophy and theory.”¹ In the area of politics, one is reminded of the poems of Jose Rizal and Andres Bonifacio,² two of our greatest men who expressed their true love for this country, by sacrificing their lives for the sake of our freedom and the protection of the dignity of their fellowmen against foreign rulers who demeaned and dehumanized the identity of the Filipino people.

For Kant, wisdom is required to move from the realm of nature to poetry.³ Nevertheless, it’s a noble pursuit that must not be abandoned. In fact, some literary works are not only “aesthetically and emotionally powerful but ethically illuminating.”⁴ To accomplish such a task, the authors will analyze three “self-written” poems, in Tagalog, to express the critical meaning of the life and experiences of the Filipinos in three important aspects of their socio-political existence – politics, love, and womanhood. The use of the national language is an attempt to fight cultural chauvinism inasmuch as it is also intentional in the desire to present the importance of language in giving meaning to the human experience.

¹ Lee Trapanier, “Poetry and Philosophy,” *Expositions* 11, no. 1 (2017): 72.

² Jose Rizal’s “Sa Aking mga Kababata” and Bonifacio’s “Pag-Ibig sa Inang Bansa” are instances of the above.

³ Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Judgment* (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1987), 262-308.

⁴ Trapanier, “Poetry and Philosophy,” 73.

1. “Kunwari” (Pretension)

There have been too many interpretations of President Rodrigo Duterte’s character, leadership style, and political personality. People are too quick to condemn the mistakes of others while they quite often overlook their own hypocrisy. There are many instances in which such an observation is applicable when it comes to the critics of the former President. This poem is an attempt to combine poetry and a critical analysis to situate the President Duterte’s true place in the country’s history. The earliest theoretical attempt to explain his public persona can be traced from the papers written by Nicole Curato⁵, Christopher Ryan Maboloc, and Wataru Kusaka.⁶ However, it can be said that there appears to be very little from the perspective of poetry, although there is an apparent fervor in terms of the need to give poetic justice to the President’s place in Philippine history.

The moral strategy of President Duterte as a leader is something that is unique, but if one were to deal with the underlying cause of his behavior in public, one understands that his is a radical time-tested framework of challenging conventions, with the motive of clarifying fundamental questions. This is the poetic justice in his radicalism. It is a result of the contested nature of our society. President Duterte is a man who fears no one. He is true to his character. He does not hide anything. This authenticity may have catapulted him into his place in the country’s history. A man or woman can become a billionaire, but there can only be one President at any given time.

The relationship between religion and politics, the conflict that is present in the tumultuous history of church and state, indicates that the former President has to confront a world that is never easy nor comfortable. The poem “Kunwari” appears instructive in terms of the effect of the President in the public sphere and the radical change that he represents. While those in their moral high chair often criticize the former leader, the fundamentals when it comes to his politics remain intact. President Duterte is an authentic human being who reveals his

⁵ Nicole Curato, “Politics of Anxiety, Politics of Hope: Penal Populism and Duterte’s Rise to Power,” *Journal of Current Southeast Asian Affairs* 35 no. 3 (2016): 102-105

⁶ Wataru Kusaka, “Bandit Grabbed the State: Duterte’s Moral Politic,” *Philippine Sociological Review* 65 (2017): 55-61.

true self, unlike his critics who hides under the guise of the titles they carry. In fact, Benjamin Labastin captures it quite clear. He said that it does not follow that those who espouse moral politics are truly moral themselves.⁷ Poetic justice is deserved in this sense because the elites in the country, who are the ones who demand civility in public office, are the ones who have desecrated the idea of good governance. The critics of the President cannot hide from behind their altar of secrets.

Kunwari

*Sino pa kaya ang Pangulo na matapang isiwalat ang katotohanan?
Sino ang kagaya niyang umaamin at agad ding humihingi ng
kapatawaran?*

*'Di ba mas madali nga naman ang magtago, magkunwari at magbait-
baitan?*

*'Di ba mas ginugustong panatilihing malinis ang imahe kahit
mapanlinlang?*

Ano ba sa ngayon ang klase ng taong karapat-dapat na pamarisan?

*'Yun bang nagmumura pero nagpapakatao at sa gawa napapatunayan?
O di kaya'y yung ubod ng tamis ang salita pero kalooba'y inggit at
bintang?*

*Ang mga inabuso nga ba'y may tunay na hustisya kayang aasahan?
Ang paghahamon ba ng mga kinaukulan ay dapat agad
pagkatiwalaan?*

Kapanipaniwala ba ang mga pamunuan na wala silang nalalaman?

*Paano kung ang mga haligi ng kanilang samahan ang may kinalaman?
Paano nila hahatulan ang kanilang mga kakampi at itinuring na
huwaran?*

*Paano na kaya kung kumalat na ang epekto ng gawain sa sanlibutan?
Handa kaya nila itong panagutan, pagbayaran at tuluyang talikuran?*

President Duterte has shown his strong leadership in addressing a range of socio-political concerns, the reality of historical injustices in Mindanao, and the difficulties involved in instilling discipline in the

⁷ Benjiemen Labastin, "Two Visions of Democracy in the Philippines," in *Radical Politics in the Philippines* (USA: KDP Publishing, 2021), 13.

country, or indeed the pursuit of truth.⁸ Such serves as the inspiration for the poem “Kunwari.” This poem, written during the early years of the administration when President Duterte was challenged openly by detractors and skeptics, is a reflective work that sarcastically points to the difficulties in dealing with the hypocrisy of certain people's deeds and attitudes, especially in the light of abuse and injustice.

*Silang mga biktima pa nga ang madalas 'di inaaksyonan
 Silang inabuso pa nga ang parang wala nang karapatan
 Sila'y basta na lang iniwang mag-isa at pinandidirihan
 Kung hindi'y sila ay mapanira o kampon ng kadiliman
 Sila pa daw ay mapapalad dahil sa pinili ng diyos-diyosan
 Samantalang silang umaabuso ay pinagtatakpan o inililipat lang
 Dahil sila'y mga matatalino, maimpluwensya at mayayaman*

*Ano nga ba ang maipantatapat ng dukha at mang-mang?
 Sino nga ba ang tunay na simbahan na dapat protektahan?
 Sino nga ba ang magtatanggol sa mga pinagmalabisan?
 Sino kaya ngayon ang matapang na handang harapin ang kasalanan?
 Sino kaya ngayon ang handang umako sa nagawang kahayupan?
 May mga nagkukusa bang lumantad para pagdusahan ang kasalanan?*

“Split-level Christianity,” a formal concept introduced by Fr. Jaime Bulatao, tells us about the fact that the Filipino is often projected as someone who holds a religious idol on his left hand while he also has a rooster in his right. People have seen their leaders attending religious rituals while being accused of corruption and abuse. People are easy to pass bad judgment on others while being reluctant to hold influential people accountable. There is no true rage felt and people are afraid to question people who hold.

Amidst all the discomfort in the world in which we live, the poem reveals the need to question the moral position of some people,

⁸ President Duterte has a complex relationship with the public, given his persona, family history, background, and leadership style. See Menelito Mansueto, “Duterte and Mass Media.” *Radical Politics in the Philippines*. (USA: KDP Publishing, 2021), 33. See also Christopher Ryan Maboloc, *Radical Democracy in the Time of Duterte* (Cotabato City: Elzstyle Publishing, 2022). These two books are representative of the earliest studies on the Duterte presidency.

their demand for authenticity, the need to preserve the interest of the good, and the protest against the hypocrisy of those who think that they are sacred. Kusaka, for instance, explicates in his book *Moral Politics in the Philippines*, all the impact of the moral divide in Philippine society that may have perhaps created the legend of President Duterte, which is a reaction of a people who are fed up with the hypocritical approach to politics by the country's elite. Marx has seen it for even the church has been at the behest of the most powerful, serving the latter's interest.

*Saan natin ito lahat sisimulan at ano kaya ang kahahantungan?
Sino ang karapatdapat nating sandalan, gawa ba o salita lang?
Kanino tayo dapat pumanig, sa hustisya ba o kapangyarihan?
Bakit ang mga kakilala ko ay nagtatago pa rin sa kasuluksulukan?
Bakit hanggang ngayon wala pa rin silang hustisyang nakakamtan?
Sa sobra-sobra nilang dinanas na kahihyan sa sarili pa lamang.*

*Ano pa bang halaga ang mga pangakong napapako at paasa lang?
'Di kaya'y gusto lang nating pagpiyestahan ang pagmumura ng iilan?
'Di na ba iimik sa harap ng mga sagad sa butong pagmamayabang?
Ipagkikibit-balikat lang ba ang mga walang humpay na
kasinungalingan?
Sa bandang huli, tayo kaya'y sama-sama sa hirap na pagdadaanan?
Sinu-sino ang makakasangga natin sa pagtahak ng liku-likong daan?
Kung ang simbahan na ay pinagdududahan, sino pa kaya ang lalapitan?*

2. Pag-ibig (Love)

The author draws inspiration for the poem, "Pag-ibig" (Love) from his personal experiences. The poem discusses the enigmatic nature of love. It explores the lover's secret face and imagines the toughness of one's soul in terms of how it might unite everything to bring inner peace. For Gabriel Garcia Marquez, "true love" creates an imaginary but magical world that transforms two people. A man feels "sick when he is in love," but the same cannot let go of the feeling and chance to be able "to love someone unconditionally". In three powerful words, the philosopher Gabriel Marcel says that, "love defies death". Death only destroys the human person's body, but not the human soul. True love is eternal because it has nothing to do with anything

material. Love is deep and is never afraid of the forces of nature. The nature of love is all divine!

Pag-ibig

*Ang kabuoan ng kahulugan
Ay di kailanman malalaman
Hangga't di pa nararanasan,
Hangga't di pa natututunan.
Pag-ibig ang nagpapaikot ng mundo,
Nagpapaiyak, nagpapasaya sa puso
Nagpapalipad sa mga paru-paro
Ito'y nagpapaapaw ng bawat baso.
Ang pag-ibig...bilang misteryo
Dahilan ng mga namamagang mata,
Ang kulang, pwedeng madagdagan.
Ang nasobrahan, pwede nang bawasan.*

The poem tells us how love transcends differences between two people. Love is based on trust. The author sees love as a force that brings two distinct souls together, seeing a vision that allows them to live in a world that is both real and ideal. Love is the fire that fuels the universe, one that evokes true happiness, and justifies the grief in the face of loss and death. In times of peace and war, only love can elevate our spirits, fill us, and lift us from the emptiness of life. The poem is also a satirical way that draws attention to the paradoxes and follies so frequently connected with love. The poet presents a wide range of feelings and experiences that are connected to love, mentioning the difficulties faced by lovers and lost souls.

*Kapag magmahal, tayong nagmamahal,
'Di rin alam mga pinagsasabi,
Basta't bukam-bibig ay pangalan ng minimithi.
Ngunit pag-ibig ay 'di kayang hadlangan
Uusbong s'ya sa puso ninuman
Dudurugin ang matagal na alitan
Babawiin sa mga hangal ang kapangyarihan*

The poem explores the implications of personal interactions and interpersonal dynamics in society. It addresses the contradictions and difficulties that exist in relationships, revealing the complexity present in social institutions that may show the reality of conflict. Indeed, love has the true power to overcome differences, fostering harmony and understanding. The poem recognizes the truism about the inability of most people to fathom what love means. This also reflects the complex interplay between the social bonds and the personal motives of human individuals. People are entangled in a web of relationships where he is constantly challenged. For Sartre, man is abandoned. He must face his own problems alone. For this reason, he carries the world on his back. Indeed, to be a man is “to carry this burden”. Anxiety characterizes the human in us.

The author thus explores the intricacies and difficulties of love in a vibrant and erratic and perhaps contradictory qualities of love. Skye Nettleton, for instance, tells us that Nietzsche’s advice is for people not to get married because of love.⁹ Marriage is about the strength of two people and their friendship. So, for Nietzsche, it is not about love. It is about our courage. The poem urges the reader to embrace love despite its difficulties by highlighting the dangers, sacrifices, and occasionally ridiculous aspects of love which is not far from the issues of justice. As a point of contention, the poem addresses the universal experiences and problems associated with love. Romantic relationships are often associated with betrayal, sadness, and sacrifice. Nevertheless, people will want to continue to figure out a way of being in love amidst the presence of complex and complicated relationships.

3. “Babae” (Woman)

The poem “Babae” is a tribute to every woman, which affirms their unique role in our lives. The poem is the poet’s salutation to all women and an expression of his greatest admiration for the role of women in human life. It honors the various facets of women’s empowerment and their real capacity to nurture in selfless ways. The resilience, beauty, and strength that come with being a true woman are presented in the following lines. The poet reveals the bias and

⁹ Skye Nettleton, “Ten Tips for a Great Marriage according to Friedrich Nietzsche,” *Indo-Pacific Journal of Phenomenology* 9, no. 2 (2009): 2.

conventions that often result in the lack of appreciation for the value of womanhood. It is the woman who gives and cares for life, serving as a source of inspiration and moral strength.

Babae

*Ang mga matatamis mong ngiti'y sobrang nakagagaan.
Pinupuno mo ang aking mga pagkukulang.
Nabibigyan mo ng kahulugan ang aking kakulangan.
Babae, ikaw ang kanlungan sa oras ng aking kawalan.*

*Karamay at katulong kita sa bawat kahirapan.
Ikaw ang lagi kong sandigan at kalakasan.
Handa mong hilumin ang aking kapansanan.
Katawan mo'y simbolo ng lakas at tapang.*

By valuing the “essence of women”, the poem subtly responds to gender stereotypes. This can be understood when juxtaposed with the essay of I.M. Young, “Throwing like a Girl” in which she distinguishes the differences between genders.¹⁰ The poem is a way of questioning established societal norms. It also honors the priceless contributions made by women. All women make the world strong and resilient. The poem serves as a reminder to value women for who they truly are as individuals and the special contributions they make to society. More deeply, being a woman is a “contemplation of an inner serenity”. The nature of our worldly goals is fleeting. Wealth and physical beauty are temporary. But being a woman is about the profound and meaningful understanding of happiness and of being oneself.

*Hugis at hubog mo'y patunay ng iyong kagandahan.
Likas kang mabulaklak sa kuweba ng kalungkutan.
Napalalambot mo ang mga matitigas na bakal at bato.
Mga pirapiraso'y nabubuo at sugat naglalaho.*

*Babae, salamat sa pag-aaruga at pagpapasuso.
Karugtong ng buhay mo ang buhay ko.*

¹⁰ Iris Marion Young, “Throwing Like a Girl,” in *On the Female Body Experience* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005).

*Sa kabila ng hirap at sakit ng panganganak
Pinili mo akong ipagbuntis ng may buong galak.*

The poet raises issues regarding the definition of true beauty and the underlying traits that transcend physically, thereby suggesting a critique of a culture that rewards people based on appearance. The philosophical investigation of identity, intersubjectivity, and the way individuals relate to one another is cultivated in modern society. The poet explores the need to look behind outward manifestations to have a better understanding of oneself and other people, from regarding other people as mere objects to considering them as subjects. Martha Nussbaum protests that women happen to have a double day, for they are expected to function at home and in their regular jobs, something that does not happen to most men.¹¹ This is a systemic injustice that imposes unfair standards on women. The poem below, however, pays tribute to the role of women in realizing the good for the family and the community. In this way, women should also be truly recognized for their important contributions to society. For the author, women are a beacon of hope that reminds us of our humanity.

*Ikaw ang ilaw ng bawat tahanan at pamayanan.
Pagsasakripisyo mo'y walang pag-aalinlangan.
Kainlanma'y 'di mapapantayan ang iyong katapatan.
Salamat sa haplos mong dulot sa ami'y kabutihan.*

*Sa bawat pagsubok ako'y laging nananalo.
Sa bawat tagumpay ko'y meron kang pangako.
Dalisay at mahusay ang iyong pamumuno.
Lagi kang nakaantabay para ako'y magpakatao.*

Conclusion

Philosophy explicates the meaning of poetry. Poetry, however, also enriches philosophy. The same should be true when it comes to politics, as may be expressed in the works of Jose Rizal and Andres Bonifacio. The presidency of Duterte is one of the most contested in recent memory. It will be up to history to make the final judgment.

¹¹ Martha Nussbaum, *Women and Human Development* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2000).

History can help illuminate the meaning of poetic justice, which in the end would reveal the hypocrisy of some who are too quick to condemn certain mistakes. For the most part, the hate of others is simply due to their insecurities, now fully revealed. Poetic justice is about the things, good or bad, that we truly deserve.

Love is the very soul of every human experience. Poems enable a person to express not only his or her emotion but the meaning of his being in the world as well. In this way, being human is enriched by the literary masterpieces of artists, which, as Kant says, allows man to go beyond nature. Such is the wisdom that love gives. Furthermore, this is thoroughly substantiated by the honor and recognition that society must give to women. By allowing them to express their unique selves and enabling women to show forth their identity, the world becomes a much better place and human existence more bearable amid all the chaos and violence.

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