

Visual Artists as Literary Artists: Fantasy and Folklore in 1950s Komiks-to-Film Adaptations

Joyce L. Arriola

Abstract

This paper explores how the *komiks* creator and the filmmaker became the “other” literary artists in the 1950s through the *komiks* penned during the era and the film adaptations that were drawn from said materials. This paper trains its focus on the deployment of the fantasy genre and the folkloric elements in both the source text and the target text. A great number of the elements from the fantasy genre have been appropriated from foreign models while the folkloric elements were scooped from earlier folk narratives in the Philippines. From *komiks*, the stories underwent another process of generic mediation through the cinematic adaptation of the pre-existing texts. This process of sourcing fantasy and folklore from *komiks* to film will be exemplified through sample extant texts such as *Tulisang Pugot* (1953) and *Tucydides* (1954), both the *Liwayway komiks* series and the films by Sampaguita Pictures, Inc. and LVN Pictures, Inc. respectively. The central aim of the paper is to project the role of *komiks* creator and the filmmaker in representing the “national-popular” life in the 1950s, namely: (1) as “appropriator” of foreign impulses; (2) as “localizer” of borrowed/imported materials; and (3) as “indigenizer” of stories by melding the foreign and the folkloric. The paper will then examine the participation of the visual artists—once obscured and traditionally dismissed as marginal—in reconstituting popular literary consciousness in their time and unofficially doubling as public “intellectuals” of their generation.

This paper is part of a longer work on *komiks*-to-film adaptation in the 1950s, during which the *komiks* industry and the film industry in the Philippines engaged in a dynamic and fruitful collaboration. The *Cultural Center of the Philippines Encyclopedia Volume on Film* (Tiongson, 1994) refers to the 1950s as the decade when film adaptation of *komiks* began and flourished. In future decades, when *komiks*-based films would resurrect after a hiatus of sorts, the efflorescence of the '50s would continue to be regarded with nostalgia and remembered glory.

Film History as Film Theory: The 1950s as Locus of Discourse

The 1950s was colorful on all fronts. It saw the rise of three political leaders who rose to the presidency: Elpidio Quirino, Ramon Magsaysay and Carlos P. Garcia. Four years after President Manuel Roxas declared the country finally free from colonial rule at the conclusion of the Second World War, the country was rebuilding and beginning to determine its destiny as a sovereign nation. A number of challenges stormed the political landscape, such as the continuous resistance of the Hukbalahap (Huk) or *Hukbo ng Bayan Laban sa Hapon* [People's Movement Against the Japanese]. The members of the movement refused to surrender after the Japanese enemies had left the Philippine soil, because in their view the Philippine government had failed to curb the problems inherited from the colonial and war years. Aware of problems deeply connected to the land, the administration of the various presidents had foreseen that solving the agrarian problem would help quell the Huk uprising in the countryside.

After Magsaysay's tragic death in 1957, the Garcia administration adopted the "Filipino First" policy; this was perhaps the first collective expression of economic nationalism after the war. Meanwhile, rebuilding after the damages wrought by the war seemed to be most difficult on the moral psyche front. What used to be justified during the war—stealing from the Japanese, treachery, graft—refused to go away during peacetime. The toll inflicted by the war on moral culture became grave. The collective post-traumatic stress that reared its head throughout the 1950s became a foreshadowing of things to come in the moral life of the nation.

The 1950s was generally referred to as a decade of nationalism (Agoncillo, 1974). One of the initiatives to pursue a programmatic nationalist vision for the young republic was the passing and promulgation of the Rizal Bill, which mandated the reading and study of Jose Rizal's life and works in colleges and universities. There was the impulse to retrieve the identity that was shattered by painful colonial experiences and the Second World War. This renewed spirit made its impact on the films of the 1950s as evidenced by the subjects, motifs, genres and the general attitude of filmmakers and audiences—these

engendered the cultural climate of the decade. As illustrated below, Rizal's *Noli Me Tangere* was given a *komiks* treatment, and this rather abbreviated rendering of the expansive novel has influenced latter-day transmediations in terms of choosing particular highlights and iconic images.



Figure 1: Komiks treatment of *Noli Me Tangere* written by Clodualdo del Mundo in the 1950s.

Inglis (1990) contends that “the best kind of media theory to begin with is a historical one” (p.4). There seems to be a truism to Inglis’ opinion. Any attempt to adapt prior material in the various film eras may be assumed as part of a continuum that began in the 1950s. This is the story of *komiks*-to-film adaptations that catered to the fantastic and the folkloric in the 1950s.

Komiks as source text, film as target text

Since 1929, the *komiks* has become a new literature of the Filipinos. In addition to its new social significance, *komiks* have also become a new source of lore and a new language to take delight and curiosity in. Reyes (in Roxas and Arevalo, Jr., 1985) adds:

The *komiks* steadily supplanted the other forms of literature as it forced the plots and characters of earlier literary types—the myths, epics, *awit* and *corrido* [metrical romances], novels and short stories—to conform to a new set of codes and conventions. It was not only language that helped constitute the *komiks* stories; as important was the visual aid of illustration that cooperated with language to evoke reality. What the reader could only imagine in reading prose works and *komiks* actually visualized through vivid illustrations. (pp.48-49)

The closer correspondence between film and *komiks* in terms of visual language provided a challenge to the once dynamic interaction between film

and word-based literatures. In a matter of time, the relationship between film and *komiks* would weaken the link between the film and the novel. With film and *komiks*, Filipino culture entered a new stage of literacy built upon this word-image combination.

Since the object of this paper is to present the *komiks* artist as literary artists, the focus of investigation in terms of the adaptive process, or more accurately, the appropriative process, is the evolution of the storymaking appropriation—from the *komiks* medium to the film medium. This can be more evident in borrowing the fantasy genre from foreign materials. While *komiks* have their own properties as a visual medium, it is also a literary medium in so far as it combines images and words. This could not find a better complement in film which operates the way *komiks* does, except with the addition of movement.

The intellectual and the popular artist; the philosopher and the fantast; and the writer and the folklorist meet in this arena of the national-popular. As David Forgacs opines: “National-popular designates not a cultural content, but, as we have seen, the possibility of an alliance of interests and feelings between different social agents which varies according to the structure of each national society” (p. 187).

The visual properties of both media shaped the iconography of the era. Arguably, the *komiks* creator and the filmmaker have become unofficial public intellectuals in the eyes of their fans who responded well to emerging popular media. The artists became visualists and litterateur by foregrounding the notion of the national-popular. Forgacs adds that “National-popular’ became a sort of slogan for forms of art that were rooted in the national tradition and in popular life, and as such it became identified with an artistic style or styles” (p. 179) In the 1950s, promoters of high culture viewed popular forms with condescension. *Komiks* and film somehow levelled such existing hierarchies.

Komiks is a sequential art that possesses both visual and literary properties. *Komiks* creators and filmmakers traversed the literary as they (1) appropriated foreign plots and generic impulses pertaining to fantasy, (2) localized borrowed plots or painted local color, and (3) indigenized or hybridized elements of fantasy and folklore.

Two examples of extant *komiks* with extant film adaptations from the 1950s that invoked the fantasy genre and combined foreign and local sources were *Tulisan Pugot* (Pineda, 1950-1951), published in *Lidaywayway* Magazine and *Tucydides* (Ad Castillo, 1953-1954), published by *Bulaklak* Magazine.

The stories were adapted into movies by Sampaguita Pictures and LVN Pictures respectively.



Figure 2: Magazines where the extant komiks series were serialized. Images used with permission from the Lopez Memorial Library Collection.



Figure 3: Promotional posters for *Tulisan Pugot* and *Tucydides*. Images used with permission from the Lopez Memorial Library Collection.

The visual artist as spinner of fantasy: Appropriating foreign into local

Fantasy has been a point of intersection between *komiks* and film. Both story renderings open with a probable world—all normal and rational—until they have been interrupted by a supernatural occurrence. This scenario echoes Roger Caillous’s (1978) definition of fantasy: “The fantastic is always a break in the acknowledged order, an irruption of the inadmissible within the changeless everyday legality” (p. 9).

To illustrate this passage from normalcy to sudden interruption by the fantastical, one may cite the opening panels/scenes from the *komiks* and the film version. The initial panel in *Tulisan Pugot* is actually a foreshadowing of events in the story when the fearsome headless *tulisan* [bandit] is already on the loose. A woman shrieks in terror, as she utters the words “*Tulisan Pugot! Tulisan Pugot!*”

Futhermore, *Tulisan Pugot* invokes the fantasy, and what better time for the headless bandit to visit a Filipino town but the late 19th, at the height of Spanish colonial era and on the eve of the outbreak of the *Katipunan*?



Figure 4: Splash page of *Tulisang Pugot* showing opening panels. Images used with permission from the Lopez Memorial Library Collection.

In *Tucydides*, normal life in a barrio called Lagamba maintains a quiet existence, which is interrupted by the birth of a girl with a twin bladder in the household of Feliz. It was a birth that has implications in the heavily-superstitious neighborhood. While the visitation of the supernatural is a public occurrence in *Tulisang Pugot*, the birth of a supernatural girl is kept in secrecy by her parents. *Tucydides*' parents are aware of the disastrous impact of such an occurrence on the normative sense of communal life prevailing in 1950s rural Philippines.

In the cases cited above, the visual artists have become a spinner of the fantasy, in both its literary and extra-literary senses. They invoke the fantastical which Edward Quinn (2006) defines as a "literary type that mixes realistic and supernatural events without offering an explanation to the reader" (p. 129). *Tulisang Pugot* pivots

between the supernatural and the realistic drama. It shows a cosmopolitan pueblo in 19th century Philippines. A picture of a colony on the verge of change is shown in contrast to the fabulous tales spun around the headless bandit. In *Tucydides*, the birth of a freak of nature is a counterpoint to the pastoral simplicity of Lagamba.



Figure 5: The visual artist as spinner of fantasy. *Tucydides* features the birth of a freak of nature in a pastoral setting. Images used with permission from the Lopez Memorial Library Collection.

The visual artists-cum-literary artists of the 1950s were the inheritors of a long tradition of borrowing and appropriation dating back to the Spanish colonial period. Alongside the religious and dramatic literature, the natives

were oriented to fantastic literature. For instance, colonial miracle plays bordered on fantasy. The native audiences of the era were also predisposed to fantasy, having been exposed to pre-Hispanic myths, epics and short verses that reveal a belief in the supernatural, a fetish for charms or amulets, and a curious fatalism that one may link to a belief in a higher power.

The entertainment materials that the colonial natives have been exposed to were fantastic. In general, these fantastical literatures may be lumped together with the romantic literature of the era. By the 19th century, these literatures had been circulated in urban places where a new mercantile class was rising, although Medina, Jr. (1976) reports that “the *corridos* and *awits* would have to contend with the still-dominant religious hymnals and exhortations” (p. 63). The said romances fanned the natives’ love for fantasy.

Fantasy then played a dual role. Its popularizers in the Philippines, the friars and the local translators alike, were interested in instilling religious piety on the one hand and implanting escapist entertainment on the other. Ito (1999) offers:

Having filtered into the Philippines via Mexico, such stories drew no objections from friars as subject matter for indigenous literature. After all, loyalty to a European king and Christendom’s triumph over the Moors were constant themes in these stories; they were useful in strengthening the indio’s loyalty and utang na loob to Spain and Catholicism. (p. 2)

From the American period up to the 1950s, variations of the genre continued to interest the natives. Foreign fantasy *komiks* and film materials would usually elicit local counterparts as soon as they reached Philippine shores (Tiongson, 1994). One such material is actually the gothic, a variant of the fantasy genre. The gothic, which normally appears in novelistic form, “is a type of fiction that employs mystery, terror or horror, suspense, and the supernatural for the simple purpose of scaring the wits out of its reader” (Quinn, 2006, p. 184). Usually set in the medieval manor or a mysterious castle, the plot of the gothic thrives on the suspenseful and the gory.

Astonishment and fantasy: The Filipino gothic

The gothic form became a regular feature in 1950s *komiks* but it was better known by a more familiar term—the fantasy-adventure. *Tulisanang Pugot*, for instance, approximates the fantasy mode by making references to a remote setting—the 19th century Spanish *pueblo* and its interlinked families. In the initial panel of the *komiks* series, the real and probable colonial world

is interrupted by the arrival of a unique creature: a headless bandit. From there on, an eerie atmosphere haunts the mise-en-scène. The *komiks* and the film align themselves with similar stories such as Washington Irving's *The Legend of Sleepy Hollow* and other gothic tales where a headless rider or ghost becomes the focal character of the story.

What is unique about the *komiks* depiction and the film rendition of the headless bandit character is that they signal the fantastic and calculate audience response. Rabkin (1976) attests that “the fantastic is a quality of astonishment that we feel when the ground rules of a narrative world are suddenly made to turn about 180 degrees” (p.41). The *komiks*'s prologue recreates that “astonishment” in the initial pages while the movie has to wait until the middle part to turn the narrative into an astonishing scenario.



Figure 6: The headless bandit motif as borrowed character and as located in gothic tradition of colonial literature. The film image used with permission from Sampaguita Pictures.

In *Tucydides*, the gothic may be located in the main character herself. Filipino fantasy is replete with unusual characters, freaks, grotesques, and the almost monstrous. *Tucydides* represents an underside of country life that has been dominated by superstition and folk belief. It smacks of a pastoral sort of gothic.



Figure 7: The *mise-en-scene* in *Tucydides* reveals a sort of pastoral gothic that may be unique to the nation's folkloric life. Images used with permission from the Lopez Memorial Library Collection.

Oddity and freakishness are an almost unbearable happenstance in conservative barrio life. In fact, almost all the characters in *Tucydides* live at the edges of Philippine life in the 1950s. At the beginning of the story, two lovers elope and have been disowned by the girl's mother. They have been forced to live in poverty throughout their married life. Their lot worsens when Tucydides, an infant born with a twin bladder, comes into their lives.

It was Tucidides' father, Felix, who has been given the spotlight in the early part of the story. During a stormy night, while crossing the lake in a banca, Felix loses his wife and child. Before his reunion with his daughter, who miraculously survives, he suffers the ridicule of his neighbors who think that he has gone crazy for claiming that he has a child. They have not seen any child born in his hut because Felix has been able to hide his abnormal baby from his neighbors' curious eyes.

Yet, Tucidides has been a true gift from nature even if she represents the marginal and the grotesque of her generation. As a child, her precocity is endearing. As a young woman, her stubborn nature is an irritant to her father. When she falls in love with Tony Sacramento, she comes to an understanding of what it feels to be different in a world that does not embrace "unique." She is capable of pride, of ferocity, and of fearlessness, even in her humble station.

The heroine's unique gifts become a sort of compensation for what she lacks or for the normality that she craves for. The writers of fantasy, Soledad Reyes (1986) opines, "try to rectify nature's neglect and contemporary society's lack of concern by endowing the crippled, the ugly, the sickly and the poverty-stricken with marvellous gifts" (p.175).



Figure 8: "Monstrous" feminine in Filipino komiks-to-film fantasy. Tucidides lives in her twin-bladder. Images used with permission from the Lopez Memorial Library Collection.

Society dictates that the freaks, the grotesque and the unusual are different and should be feared. This attitude of other people towards them is the root cause of their marginalization. This idea forms the basis of the essential plot and story of *Tucidides*. Marginality and its ramifications form the basic theme of the story: two young lovers have been refused the blessings of the girl's mother. Believed to be the consequence of a cursed union, the girl gave birth to a child with a twin bladder. The worst of any situation perhaps is to be a creature who roams the forest, sometimes inside a bladder and sometimes as a normal girl walking on her two feet.

On the other hand, *Tulisanng Pugot* invokes the adventure tale or the cloak-and-dagger romance. Eco (1985) considers this kind of historical

material a swashbuckling story which “chooses a real’ and recognisable past” (p. 18). Peopled by fictional characters, the film aims at simply propelling the fantasy-adventure genre as entertainment. In a way, the cloak-and-dagger romance, also known by the label cape-and-sword tale, descended from the Spanish period drama, the *comedia de la capa y espada* or the *moro-moro*. The influence of the *moro-moro* is noticeable in the swordfight sequence between Don Fernando (Tulisang Pugot/Tulume) and his arch nemesis, Leonardo. In fact, Tiongson (1983) links the action genre to the komedya: “Today the komedya survives in the so-called ‘action films’ in which the clear-cut forces of good and evil engage each other in combat” (p.85).

The enlistment of a fantastical character reveals the affinity between the fantasy-adventure genre and the gothic tale. Similar to fictional works that include a headless bandit character—such as the one depicted in *The Legend of the Sleepy Hollow* (recently adapted in a Hollywood film starring Johnny Depp) or even the cloak-and-dagger romances such as Alexander Dumas’ *The Count of Monte Cristo* and *Man in the Iron Mask* and their knightly heroes—*Tulisang Pugot* evokes a sense of mystery.

By enlisting the presence of a ghastly headless bandit in the midst of a cosmopolite pueblo and a busy walled city where the imperial gaze sees all indio-related activities as suspect, the story smacks of deliberate anachronism. *Tulisang Pugot* does not aim at achieving historical realism but rather at recreating the adventure genre. The Filipino adventure genre has been popular not only during the 1950s but throughout all periods of the narrative tradition. This is a primeval Filipino predisposition. For the pre-colonial native, the real merges with the fantastical. This is a quality of the Filipino which is predisposed to the uncanny, which means “seemingly supernatural in origin or character” (“*Edges of Reality*,” 1999, p. i). Being



Figure 9: Filipino adventure genre invoked in *Tulisang Pugot*, with obvious borrowings from foreign sources. Film images used with permission from Sampaguita Pictures.

deeply connected with nature—as evidenced by their earliest myth of Malakas and Maganda—the native Filipino has no difficulty merging reality and fantasy.

Tulisang Pugot is therefore a specimen of how the popular writer and filmmaker make use of the materials at their disposal. At the turn of the 20th century, the romance novels were favourite reading materials of Filipinos. The works of Dumas, Sir Walter Scott and their contemporaries were read by the *komiks* novelists and filmmakers alike. “Foreign films with fantasy characters have spawned a number of Filipino counterparts,” adds the CCP Encyclopedia (Tiongson, 1994, p. 88). The interest in these types of materials persists to this day, prompting Soledad Reyes’s (1986) observation that the romance mode is a dominant tendency in recent literary and popular history.



Figure 10: Clockwise. *Tulisang Pugot* is able to interweave colonial city and folk scenes while Tucidides projects the rural landscape as site where man communes with nature. Images used with permission from Sampaguita Pictures and the Lopez Memorial Library Collection.

Fantasy as locus of folklore

The CCP Encyclopedia says that “the fantasy film transports the viewer to an imaginary world” (Tiongson, 1994 p. 88) and draws a number of images from folklore. Some studies, however, aver that “these dark monstrous forces” that visit the world of fantasy “could have been representations of the hidden fears and terrors of the collective psyche” (Reyes, 2009, p. 17). The presence of the *tulisang pugot* may reflect this repressed feeling of persecution and bitterness that the indios feel towards the bigoted colonial officials and the abusive *principaliaso* that this creature of the night has been endowed some deadly powers for the purpose of exacting revenge. The *komiks* and the film are saturated by this feeling, perhaps riding high on the nationalistic fervour of the fifties generation that could give voice to the uncanny and the outlawed as a means of subtle historical analysis.

Katherine Fowkes (2010) aptly puts it: “The roots of fantasy fiction tap ancient myths, legends, and folktales” (p. 15). This assertion cannot be truer in *Tucydides*, the story of a girl baptized with foreign name but was born in a typical old barrio nestled between a forest on one side and bounded by a lake on the other. Her surroundings become a proper setting for a story of the supernatural.

The *komiks* story that inspired a film adaptation opens with scenes that are dominated by superstitions and folk beliefs. The people of Lagamba exude fatalism. They ascribe to the unknown the calamities that have befallen their town. This scenario could not be so far-fetched from how scholars have painted a picture of early Filipinos such as the Tagalogs whose worldviews have been shaped by nature. Nature has its reasons and it mediates between the reality of the folk and what they could not see. As Medina (1976) puts it playfully: “Stories were to be told in all seasons if the strand between the known and the unknown in the life of one’s country must be spun” (p. 2).

These people adhere to old town values. Marital engagements are supposed to be approved by their parents. In the opening scenes, Tindeng and Felix seek the blessing of the former’s mother. But the mother refuses to bless their union, utters a curse and sends the couple to their desolation.

The birth of Tucydides’ as the child of this unfortunate couple is interpreted as the full impact of the mother’s curse that was brought forth by their alleged disobedience. Filial piety is an important value among the barrio folks and this is held in high regard even if the right of children to find their happiness is equally valid.

The interplay of folk superstitions and folk religiosity emerges to the fore as the couple realizes that the mother’s forgiveness is not yet forthcoming. Tindeng encourages her husband to seek God’s help: “*Hindi tayo dapat mawalan ng pag-asa. Humingi tayo ng awa sa Diyos.*” [We should not



Figure 11: Superstition as folkloric/common sense knowledge. Images used with permission from the Lopez Memorial Library Collection.

lose hope. Let us turn to God for help.]. This reveals how the folk ascribe happenings that are beyond their control to a higher power. In fantasy *komiks* and film, one of the pervading conflicts is moral in nature. The fulfilment of a wish is anchored on time, which has its own reasons. A higher power, not man, has control over time.

A number of calamities test the couple's faith. A huge storm descends in Lagamba and destroys the crops. In utter desperation, Tindeng cries out: "*Diyos ko!...Ito na nga kaya ang talab ng sumpa ng aking ina sa aming mag-asawa.*" [O God! Is this the effect of my mother's curse?"]. Furthermore, as Tindeng gives birth to an unusual child, a cholera epidemic hits the barrio and her parents. In this happenstance, the personal struggles of the family intersect with that of the village but the people turn to superstition and folk beliefs, instead of science and reason, for an explanation. Afraid that the village folk will associate the birth of an unusual child with the "curse"/ epidemic, Felix manages to keep his child from his neighbors' prying eyes, and is forced to migrate to another town and eventually to the forest.

The visual/literary fantast as the subcreator of a secondary world

Fantasy has been so beloved by the Filipinos throughout the ages. In the 1950s—when the *komiks* and film creators were riding high on a growing nationalistic spirit—creativity and imagination were at its zenith. Whether fantasy served to delight or to instruct in the 1950s is beside the point. A fantastical topography of this kind of narrative would resonate with any kind of audience because as Mass and Levine (2002) would offer in their book *Fantasy*, it is "the exploration of a world that is distinct from the world of the reader" (p. 19) that matters.

The creator of a *komiks* story such as *Tucydides* and a filmmaker who could re-imagine it for the screen may qualify in what J.R.R. Tolkien calls "Fantast" or the "subcreator of a Secondary World" in comparison with our world, the "Primary Existence" (Little, 2002, p. 53). There are variations of such as topography. Edmund Little informs us that one of the types of locations in fantasy is when the Secondary World does not really appear but some aspects of it visit the Primary World. Little adds: "The author constructs a replica of the Primary World into which he introduces impossible creatures or objects or allows impossible things to happen." (p. 60) Thus, when Dracula visits London in that classic Bram Stoker novel, a primary world is visited by a supernatural or a dark force.

In *Tucydides*, the barrio Lagamba, in the province of Laguna, is rooted in the primary world. Its lakes and forests have a basis in real 1950s Laguna.

The birth of a freak of nature, a girl with a twin bladder, is the product of folklore. The real and the fictional are both the object of fantasy. The creation of a Secondary World or the migration of some of its elements to the primary world is common in Filipino fantasy, especially when folklore and nature are concerned. For the Filipino fantasy character, nature is both ally and antagonist. Medina (1976), for instance, speaks of the pre-Hispanic Tagalogs as a people deeply attuned to their “immediate reality,” which consists “man and nature” (p. 3). The primordial Filipino, whose sensibility is deeply entrenched in folklore, is at home with what is near, with what is immediate.

It is for this reason that in both the *komiks* and the film version, the rural landscape served three functions: as background to actions, as ally, and as antagonist. The forest has been Tocydides’ sanctuary until she reaches adulthood, to protect her secret from the villagers. On occasions when she needs to shrink her size in order to fit inside her twin bladder, Tocydides is exposed to the danger posed by pythons, eagles and other wild animals that roam in the forest. Sometimes, she faces the danger of being caught by bird hunters.



Figure 12: Dual face of the rural setting in *Tocydides*. Images used with permission from the Lopez Memorial Library Collection.

In contrast to the hospitality of nature to marginal creatures, the city serves as their nemesis. Although *Tocydides* marvels at the busy and progressive environment of Quezon City and the opulent mansions of the rich, she learns of the bourgeoisie pretensions of urban dwellers. The city is the jungle; a place for disguise, for hatching vendettas, and for carrying out clandestine activities.

Ironically though, it is the city that provides an opportunity for *Tocydides* to redeem herself. Her metamorphosis into a bladder girl has allowed her to observe a criminal act without being noticed. In fantastic literatures, the metamorphosis of an unusual protagonist has a role towards entropy or an openness of sorts of the text at hand. As Jackson (2003) avers: “Metamorphosis, with its stress upon instability of natural forms,

obviously plays a large part in fantastic literature for this reason” (p. 81). In the cases of Tulumé, the tulisan, and Tucidides, metamorphoses turned imperfections into occasions for redemption.

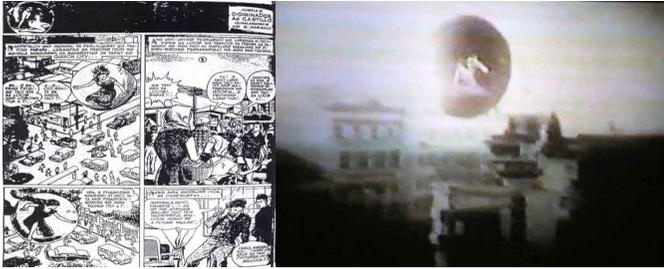


Figure 13: The city as antagonist in *Tucidides*. Images used with permission from the Lopez Memorial Library Collection and LVN Pictures.

Corollary to the acceptance of the freak and the grotesque into the mainstream of normative domestic life is the value placed on the notion of legitimacy. *Tucidides* works for acceptance and towards love. To accommodate these themes, the tropes of drama have to be heightened. In engaging the tropes of realistic drama, freakish characters cease to appear as mere accidents of nature. Like ordinary, normal people, their existential choices could, in the long run, redeem them in the eyes of the people who ridicule and hate their uniqueness.

The *komiks* original has been able to localize the fantastical elements in *Tucidides* by utilizing details such as actual places from the primary world to serve as disruption, transgression or aspects of otherness. Insofar as the story is localized, the characters drawn from the folk, and the lore paints familiar color of the mythical Filipino. The *komiks* story then creates an alternate—albeit imaginative—world. Soledad Reyes (1986) cannot be more apt:



Figure 14: Metamorphosis of the hero/heroine as turning point in fantasy. Images used with permission from Sampaguita Pictures, LVN Pictures, and the Lopez Memorial Library Collection.

The dark and fearful world of myth and legend, where power is always supra-human and where reality cannot limit the breadth or depth of fantasy, has been transplanted into the *komiks*. (p. 174).

Meanwhile, it is the topography of the primary world (Lagamba), visited by a supernatural element from a secondary world (freakish birth), that has supplied the “wondrous setting,” as Senior (2002, pp. 83-84) puts it, that should play co-protagonist to a semi-supernatural heroine. This has also become the basis for the painting of local color that *komiks* can present in sequence and the film can capture in actual location: a bladder girl (*babaeng pantog*) in flight amidst the lush forest of a Laguna town. The same picture of a supernatural creature flies like an unidentified flying object (UFO) over the Quezon City skyline and rolls down unnoticed, penetrating mansions and busy streets.

Little (2002) refers to the third component of the topography as a “Tertiary World” (p. 61) because it is the region where the primary world and secondary world rest. Happily, the new tertiary world created is a familiar Filipino locale. Inadvertently, the painting of local color takes place as the impossible merges with the possible — in familiar Filipino territory, and in actual, historical time of the 1950s. This echoes what Zanger (2002) has articulated of the relationship of fantasy to the real: “Fantasy is a response to a particular combination of historical conditions” (in Mass and Levine, eds., 2002).

The *komiks* story does not specify the actual milieu or time of *Tulisang Pugot*. In fact, while the story may be said to have been set in the late 19th century, there is also a noticeable impulse of the narrative to obscure its setting. This may be observed in the early part of the *komiks* story. The prologue in the *komiks* does not categorically state the exact year of the opening event and the locale where it has taken place. Thus, the narrated prologue goes: “*Panahon ng mga Kastila....Sa bayan ng Santo Tomas. Lalawigan ng X.*” [Spanish period....The town of Santo Tomas in the province of X].

The more setting-conscious *komiks* reader can make an educated guess through the details scattered here and there. Fortunately, as the reader pursues the sequence of the events, the detail depicting the displacement of families from the lands that they cultivate allows an opening for a sort of an unravelling of a fictional setting. The picture of the protagonist Tulumé and his poor family being displaced from the land of a member of the *principalia* (landed and gentrified native *indios*) suggests the period of the Spanish *encomienda* and the banditry that is happening in the countryside. Rizal depicted the bandits of the 19th century in his second novel *El Filibusterismo* as people who have been driven to the hinterlands because of the repressive



Figure 15: 19th Century Philippine popular iconography in *Tulisang Pugot*. Images used with permission from Sampaguita Pictures.

system of paying tax tributes. They live in the margins of social existence, constantly leading precarious lives. This has been immortalized in the character of Kabesang Tales.

The film removes this prologue altogether, instead thrusting the viewer right into the fictional embrace of the Hispanic setting and mood. By removing the expository background in the *komiks*, the film explores the temporal—time-wise and spatial-wise—and propels the narrative without the prologue and the foreshadowing. For Bliss Cua Lim (2012), this vagueness of fictional time is an ingredient of fantasy art, citing Henri Bergson's ideas about time and temporality. Bergson's view may be used to explore the supernatural mode of fantasy as happening not in calendrical, "homogenous" and quantified time but in a temporal mode or in the here and now. Fantasy therefore risks anachronism and historical irrealism.

It is within this perspective that most Filipino fantasy-adventure films, from the *korido* to the historical fiction genre, may be considered. The idea of temporality is also crucial in explicating the social function of the form. To approximate this temporal mode of fantasy, the setting becomes a point of entry in evoking the here and now. The panels from the *komiks* illustrate this

suspension of calendrical time (19th century) in favour of the “homogenous empty time” (the persistent present). In implicating the temporal, calendrical time may be contrasted from the homogenous empty time. The 19th century setting in *Tulisanang Pugot* and 1950s pastoral Philippine setting in *Tucydides* are seen to be any period within the temporal realm.

Colonial mimicry and local color

In propelling local color, the *komiks* artists and the filmmaker also negotiate and imitate foreign modes, genres and motifs. In postcolonial literatures, this practice may be made analogous to colonial mimicry, which Bhabha (1994) describes as “the desire for a reformed, recognizable Other, as a subject of a difference that is almost the same, but not quite” (p. 86). That “other” is the colonial other. *Tulisanang Pugot* brings together ingredients of borrowed stories but it also reflects a variant of fantasy and the gothic that draw from folklore and adventure stories that bring remembrances of the daring stunts of pre-colonial epic heroes. This brings to mind Fanon’s (1963) observation of the native intellectual’s project of building national culture after the colonial period: “There is a tendency to bring conflicts up to date and to modernize the kinds of struggle which the stories evoke, together with the names of heroes and the types of weapons” (p. 240).

Colonial mimicry persists until after the colony has attained independence. In fact, it helps direct the indigenization process because it endows a quality of ambivalence and texture on the postcolonial texts. Bhabha (1994) calls it the “double vision,” (p. 88), wherein colonial discourse persists but within the destabilizing, disruptive and subversive bent of localized texts. *Tulisanang Pugot*, following the mode of predictable material, is bold enough in some way to retrieve the image of the *tulisan* who has long been misunderstood in the story of Filipino resistance movement. The *komiks*/film, while an example of romance “in a displaced form” and “is rooted in this notion of escape” that Reyes (1991, p. 28) talks about in “The romance mode in Philippine popular literature,” may be a step back to the past and its re-examination at the same time.

The reason for the persistence of colonial mimicry and the native assertion of local and indigenous impulses may be rooted in the social meaning of the stories. In view of this, the colonial themes that have been tackled and those that have been alluded to are at the same not directly problematized by the story. Here, the concept of merging foreign borrowings or colonial mimicry with native appropriation may find their explanation in the meaning generated by the story.

Don Fernando, a prosperous gentleman from Intramuros, decides to settle down in Santo Tomas. The gentleman’s new hometown’s name—Sto

Meanwhile, there is the nouveau rich whose origin remains undisclosed: Don Fernando. There is the refined lady of the gentry: Lolita. There is the other woman that completes the love triangle: Teresa. There are the keepers of the law: the *Komandante* Humberto and the *Guardia Civil*, the imperial police. There are the loyal friends and servants: Baste, Isko and Pampilo. And most of all, there is the avenging hero in disguise: the *tulisan* *pugot*. During daytime, he is the handsome and wealthy Don Fernando. At night time, he is the mysterious headless *tulisan*, the Robinhood of Spanish Philippines, who robs from the abusive and the rich, to avenge his former self, Tulumé, from his tormentors.

The film plot captures this intricate social hierarchy. *Tulisan Pugot* shows character delineations familiar to avid followers of romance: Tulumé's filial devotion; Lolita's helplessness; the conniving tendencies of the landed class; and, the social stigma that physical disfigurement creates. These character delineations are not exclusive and specific to Filipinos but they are familiar qualities that create a template for more typages to come, especially so when the protagonists and villains react to and inhabit a world where the most critical point of contention is rooted in the problem of land ownership and class conflict.

Tulumé's miseries are rooted in his social status. Son to poor tenants of an abusive *encomiendero*, Tulumé's die is cast. He is constantly reminded to observe his proper place. As he pursues Lolita's affections, he comes in conflict with people of influence, beginning with Leonardo who masterminds his fall, disfigurement and exile. Moreover, greed and abuse of power are at the heart of Tulumé's misfortunes. In one wicked stroke, Tulumé is destroyed—a household of farmers will be displaced, a father will be sent to jail, a mother will die of heartbreak, and a husband will follow her to early grave.

The themes of greed and abuse and the underlying subtext of class struggle inside a colonial setting are part of a causal chain that leads to the other themes of the romance genre: revenge and retribution. Tulumé's quest for personal justice becomes more urgent as a succession of persecution becomes pivotal to his transformation into a *tulisan*. Firstly, Leonardo, not content with Tulumé's loss of family and of livelihood, carries out another wicked plan. Leonardo destroys Tulumé's face by splashing acid on it and disfiguring it permanently. Suddenly penniless, alone and ugly, Tulumé takes a walk through a dark forest. The movie has treated Tulumé's sojourn in the forest as a metaphor for his state of mind, depicted through a montage of shots and dissolves that evokes the long period of his soul-journey.

Secondly, the same forest that Tulumé has traversed in his darkest hours will open a ray of light, a window to justice. A bird is trapped in a thick bed

of shrubs and Tulume, the despondent and lost traveller, frees it from its entanglement. The bird turns into a fairy who keeps possession of one white and one black head cloak. The white when worn has the magical power to give its wearer a handsome face, the black, an invisibility cloak that could make the wearer appear headless. The fairy gives both cloaks to Tulume so he may start recouping his losses. The cloaks in his possession become the proverbial invincible *anting-anting* (magical charm) to start the adventures of the mysterious handsome gentlemen/fearsome bandit.

Herein, the tropes of fantasy-adventure and romance are utilized to propel the image of the persecuted hero, whom Tiongson (1983) considers as an embodiment of the colonial value of "*mabuti ang inaapi*" (Hurrah to the underdog!). While traditional connotations are linked to the colonial religious Christian value of suffering, the *komiks* and film recreate a sort of a secular embodiment of a native who has been victimized by the complex conspiracy of colonial oppression and class conflict.

Connected to the themes of greed and abuse and revenge and retribution are the themes of love and heroism. Both the *komiks* and the film succeed in placing love at the center of the narrative, with heroism as its important adjunct. Tulume and Lolita are divided by class. But as in all romance stories, the class that divides the lovers is bridged at a turning point in the plot. The underdog is able to change his stars and makes a comeback as a member of the gentry. Eventually, as he sets the revenge in spiralling motion, the disguise becomes the refuge of the hero.

Part of the operations of the *komiks* and the film that usually succeed among their audiences is the excitement brought by this resolve of the underdog to avenge himself and to hope for a reversal of fortune. In realizing this, the plot must enlist other sub-themes such as mistaken identities and creating a climactic moment for the eventual revelation of the identity of the avenger to the villain when the right time commences.

The effectiveness of the film in recreating a new idiom for fantasy and escape is achieved through the employment of local color in evoking the same larger-than-life aura of characters in foreign cloak-and-dagger romances (Edmund Dantes in *The Count of Monte Cristo*, The Musketeers in *Man in the Iron Mask*, Ichabod Crane in *The Legend of Sleepy Hollow*), and even of a gossamer of memory of local ones (Simoun, Kabesang Tales) through sheer fantasy. The setting/locale surreptitiously serves as the alternate arbiter of thematic significance.

Romance in displaced form

The *komiks* story, as mentioned previously, has been more radical than the film in addressing the subject of banditry as far as the inclusion of the

Katipunan episode is concerned. The film markedly departs from the *komiks* by easing it of its political content. In the *komiks* story, Don Fernando secretly provides funds to the Katipunan. The film totally removes the Katipunan sequences altogether, clearing it of any political overtones that may come with a bandit character for a main protagonist and with the subtext of the agrarian problem creating the conditions for the rise of banditry and of the revolutionary movement. In the same breath, the deletion of the Katipunan sequence deprives the film viewers a chance to see history from the lens of fiction. This makes *Tulisang Pugot* a work of romance instead of the more allegorical historical fiction.

The removal of the Katipunan scenes is deemed to clear the material of any political content and to invoke the fantasy-adventure genre in all its escapist nonchalance. It is noticeable that Tulume's return to Sto. Tomas as Don Fernando almost smacks of the aura of Crisostomo Ibarra returning as the avenging Simoun in *El Filibusterismo*. It reeks of remembrances of histories and historical fictions past, but then the film has opted to drop the revolutionary life of Tulume, in effect robbing him of his possible role in the shaping of pre-nationhood heroes.

The film highlights the revenge and the banditry themes, obviously intersecting with a number of the social contexts of the fifties that have been most eminently represented by the Hukbalahap-government standoff. The banditry theme has been treated as a means of personal vendetta rather than a widespread social issue that was rooted in the corrupt colonial policy of Spain. Iletto (1986) considers the *tulisan* as "one of the suppressed figures of Philippine history" (p. 9) because he is portrayed and filtered through the interpretive lens of the bourgeoisie class, which represents or misrepresents him according to the class interests it seeks to protect.

The *tulisan* remains a figure cloaked in mystery, "a hidden and slippery figure" because they are "without a proper Christian name and lineage" (Iletto, 1986, p. 9) and they come from an obscure place. In spite of their marginal position in subservient societies, their charisma and the mystery and inspiration that they evoke among the masses who agonize over the abuses of the Spaniards and their local consort of wealthy "insular Spaniards or *criollos* who were born in Spain," or the mestizo class or those "whose fathers were Spaniards but whose mothers were either Filipinos or Filipino-Chinese" (Agoncillo, 2003, p. 317) and the *principalia* or the landed class among the natives. Out of such obscurity, Tulume comes forth and manages to disguise himself as Don Fernando. Like his real-life models in history, Tulume as *tulisang pugot* is regarded as a romantic rebel by the masses but feared and hated by the landed class. As *taong labas* [outsider], the bandit escapes the logic of the everyday life of the colony and lives on borrowed time.

True to the didactic tendency of the *komiks*, the *tulisan* is one de-cloaked, who submits himself to the *Katipuneros* grateful for his secret support for the movement, but does not agree to brigandage. The film exploits the adventure idiom by emphasizing the spectacle rather than the politics that the character represents. In the end, the film version of the *komiks* becomes more of a problematic moral tale than a social piece. A very promising *komiks*-novel and genre film descends into an escapist vehicle without the pathos and the social significance of what might have been a story of colonial resistance. *Tulisan Pugot* as a piece of *komiks*-to-film adaptation may be instructive not in what it represents by way of charming *mise-en-scène* but by what it cares to evince and treats as peripheral.

Furthermore, the fact that a potentially subversive story has been sanitized does not mean that its politics has been totally muted. The local color evokes what the theme suppresses. The *komiks* and film adaptation tread dangerous grounds, but refuse to move forward as a mouthpiece for anything. In the rose-colored world of the fifties, that was simply enough.

Conclusion

With the film adaptation of *Tulisan Pugot* and *Tucydides*, *komiks* have become transitional texts. The sequential, classic and realistic brushstrokes of the images that lend an iconography for Filipino fantasyscape become more real or life-like in the film. The films recreate an idiom for visual fantasy by drawing inspiration from literary and folkloric sources to create what is Filipino, homely and local.



Figure 17: Colonial images as negotiated images of the local. Images used with permission from Sampaguita Pictures.

In conclusion, the visual artists as literary artists of the 1950s: (1) appropriated foreign fantasy elements in *komiks* and film; (2) localized fantasy by creating a native topography for both the anterior text (*komiks*) and the film adaptation; and, (3) indigenized fantasy by infusing folkloric elements to create a vernacularized genre of adaptation. The visual artists-cum-literary artists of the 1950s became some sort of unofficial intellectuals



Figure 18: The homely and local in Filipino fantasy-cum-romance. Images used with permission from the Lopez Memorial Library Collection.

who articulated the notion of “national-popular.” In spite of the compromised contour of *komiks* and films as popular forms, folklore and fantasy added texture to a national imaginary – both on the level of the common-sense and on the level of the marvelous.

References

- Ad Castillo, D. (1953, February 25– 1954, February 3). Tocydides [Serialized comics]. In *Bulaklak Magazine*. Philippines.
- Agoncillo, T. (1974). *Introduction to Filipino history*. Quezon City: Garotech Publishing.
- Agoncillo, T. (2003). Manila in the 1890s. In B. Churchill (Ed.), *History and culture, language and literature: Selected essays of Teodoro A. Agoncillo* (pp. 317-337). Manila: UST Publishing House.
- Bhabha, H. (1994). *The location of culture*. London/New York: Routledge.
- Cua Lim, B. (2011). *Translating time: Cinema, the fantastic and temporal critique*. Quezon City, Philippines: Ateneo de Manila University Press.
- Eco, U. (1985). Reflections on "The Name of the Rose." *Encounter*, LVIV(4), 7-19.
- Edges of reality: Confronting the uncanny*. (1999). Lincolnwood, IL: National Textbook Company.
- Fanon, F. (1963). *The wretched of the earth*. New York, NY: Grove Press, Inc.
- Forgacs, D. (1993). National-popular: Genealogy of a concept. In S. During (Ed.), *The cultural studies reader*. London and New York: Routledge.
- Fowkes, K. (2010). *The fantasy film*. West Sussex, United Kingdom: Wiley-Blackwell.
- Ileto R. (1986). *Critical questions on nationalism: A historian's view* [Lorenzo Tañada. Professorial Chair Lecture]. Manila, Philippines: Diamond Jubilee Publication of De La Salle University.
- Ileto, R. (1999). *Filipinos and their revolution: Event, discourse, and historiography* (Chapter: History and criticism: The invention of heroes). Quezon City, Philippines: Ateneo de Manila University Press.
- Inglis, F. (1990). *Media theory: An introduction*. Oxford, United Kingdom: Basil Blackwell.
- Jackson, R. (2003). *Fantasy: The literature of subversion*. London and New York: Routledge/Taylor and Francis Group.
- Little, E. (2002). Re-evaluating some definitions of fantasy. In W. Mass & S. Levine (Eds.), *Fantasy*. San Diego, CA: Greenhaven Press, Inc.
- Marquez, A. (Director). (1954). *Tocydides* [Motion picture]. Quezon City, Philippines: LVN Pictures.
- Mass, W. & Levine, S. (Eds.). (2002). *Fantasy*. San Diego, CA: Greenhaven Press, Inc.
- Medina, B.S., Jr. (1976). *The primal passion: Tagalog literature in the nineteenth century*. Manila, Philippines: Centro Escolar University Research and Development Center.
- Pineda, G. (1950, October 2 –1951, September 17). Tulisang pugot [Serialized comics]. In *Liwayway Magazine*. Philippines.
- Quinn, E. (2006). *A dictionary of literary and thematic terms*. New York, NY: Checkmark Books/Infobase Publishing.
- Rabkin, E. (1976). *The fantastic in literature*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
- Reyes, S. (1985). Romance and realism in the *komiks*. In C. Roxas & J. Arevalo, Jr. (Eds.), *A history of komiks of the Philippines and other countries*. Quezon City, Philippines: Islas Filipinas Publishing Co., Inc.
- Reyes, S. (1986). The Philippine *komiks*. In C. Del Mundo, Jr. (Ed.). *Philippine mass media: A book of readings* (pp.169-178). Metro Manila, Philippines: CFA Publications.
- Reyes, S. (1991). *The romance mode in Philippine popular literature and other essays*. Manila, Philippines: De La Salle University Press.
- Reyes, S. (2009). From Darna to Zsa Zsa Zaturrnah: Desire and fantasy. In S. Reyes (Ed.), *From Darna to Zsa Zsa Zaturrnah: Desire and fantasy/Essays on literature and popular culture* (pp.2-34). Pasig City, Philippines: Anvil Publishing, Inc.

- Rottensteiner, F. (1978). *The fantasy book: The ghostly, the gothic, the magical, the unreal*. London, United Kingdom: Thames and Hudson, Ltd.
- Senior, W. (2002). An integral sense of wonder. In W. Mass & S. Levine (Eds.), *Fantasy*. San Diego, CA: Greenhaven Press, Inc.
- Silos, O. (Director). (1952). *Tulisang Pugot* [Motion picture]. Quezon City, Philippines: Sampaguita Pictures.
- Tiongson, N. (1983). Four values in Filipino drama and film. In C. Lumbera & T. Maceda (Eds.), *Rediscovery* (pp.317-339). Manila, Philippines: National Book Store, Inc.
- Tiongson, N. (Ed). (1994). *CCP encyclopedia of art: Philippine film* (Vol. VIII). Manila, Philippines: Cultural Center of the Philippines.
- Zanger, J. (2002). Fantasy literature both reflects and denies reality. In W. Mass & S. Levine (Eds.), *Fantasy*. San Diego, CA: Greenhaven Press, Inc.

JOYCE ARRIOLA is a professor of literature, communication, journalism and film studies at the University of Santo Tomas Manila. Her book *Postmodern Filming of Literature: Sources, Contexts and Adaptations*, published by the UST Publishing House, was conferred a National Book Award for Film/Film Criticism by the Manila Critics Circle in 2007. Her research interests include postmodern and postcolonial discourse in literature, media, cinema and cultural studies (corresponding author: joycearriola@yahoo.com).