

FROM PREHISTORIC TO CONTEMPORARY: EXPLORING FILIPINO LITERATURE

by:

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Filipino literature invites exploration across time—prehistoric roots, classical milestones, and contemporary expressions. As we navigate this literary terrain, the resonance of ancient narratives lays the groundwork for the diverse literary legacy of the Philippines.

The expedition begins by peering into prehistoric literature, where oral traditions, passed through generations, wove tales of the land and its wonders. Before written words, these narratives, encompassing myths and epics, acted as a cultural compass, shaping the collective identity that would later find its voice in written works (Manuel, 1980).

Building on these ancient foundations, the narrative gains momentum with the emergence of the Propaganda Movement—a transformative period in Filipino literary history. Visionaries like Jose Rizal, Marcelo H. del Pilar, and Graciano Lopez Jaena wielded the written word as a tool for change. Rizal's "Noli Me Tangere" and "El Filibusterismo" emerged as enduring critiques of colonial oppression, contributing significantly to the formation of a national identity (Zarco, 2015).

The journey then transitions to Claro M. Recto's generation, symbolizing both a change in generations and a continuity in the struggle for independence. Writing in Spanish, Recto echoed the linguistic heritage of his predecessors, threading the past into his advocacy for Philippine autonomy. Despite the celebration of figures like Recto, the

accessibility challenge to classic Spanish literature remains, celebrated by many but read by few.

Advancing into the 21st century, contemporary authors like Miguel Syjuco and Charlene Arcanghel inject fresh perspectives into the evolving narrative. Works such as Syjuco's "Ilustrado" and Arcanghel's "Insurrecto" delve into the complexities of modern existence, offering nuanced insights into identity and history.

Contributing depth to the discourse are poets like Conchitina Cruz and novelists like Lualhati Bautista, exploring themes of identity, history, and power (Salonoy, 2020). These works showcase the resilience and depth of modern Filipino literary expression, adding layers to the ongoing narrative.

The comparison of these literary eras—prehistoric, classic, and contemporary—holds profound significance in Filipino education. These narratives traverse social issues, identity struggles, and historical contexts, providing a comprehensive understanding of the Filipino literary heritage. In classrooms, students not only delve into the masterpieces of Rizal and Recto but also explore the vibrant tapestry woven by contemporary voices like Syjuco and Arcanghel. The echoes of prehistoric tales persist through the written word, connecting the past to the present.

Traversing the literary bridge from ancient narratives to contemporary dialogues reveals a dynamic continuum. The engagement with languages, content, and historical contexts not only celebrates Filipino literature but also fosters a profound understanding of its roots. The echoes of ancient tales, the resilience of the Propaganda Movement, and Recto's advocacy converge in a narrative continuum—a testament to the enduring spirit and ever-evolving expressions of identity and resistance in Filipino literature.

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