

# Toward A Pedagogical Criticism

## The Text, the Teacher, and the Global Crisis in Teaching Health and Illness Literature

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### Abstract

The COVID-19 pandemic calls for a change of perspectives in the educational landscape, and the Literature classroom is one of the areas that can quickly respond to such calls. Indeed, teachers of Literature have begun to curate their syllabi, reflecting the global sense and concrete experience of the pandemic. The effort to adapt to changes has resulted in the transformation of the Literature classroom into a space that directly connects the experiences of students in the ongoing health crisis. Such a connection has turned the different literary texts studied in classes into portals for students to understand the experience of illness both as a sociological and historical fact, rather than just an individual phenomenon. In the process, the pandemic becomes both a learning environment for the students and a learning opportunity for teachers. As such, this paper examines how the Philippine Literature classroom may be situated in the context of health and illness during the pandemic, how the literature teachers may play the role of active agents of change during this national health emergency situation, and how the Philippine Literature classroom may be a site for making sense of the pandemic more broadly in a global scale. This paper deploys concepts from critical pedagogy and categories from health and medical humanities in the study and teaching of specific Philippine literary texts. To fully understand the lessons conducted during the pandemic, this paper demonstrates a sample practice for teaching health and illness literature through an online application.

**Keywords**

Teaching Philippine Literature, Illness Literature, Critical Pedagogy, Pandemic and Education

## Introduction

The COVID-19 pandemic lockdown has magnified societal issues while also illuminating significant human experiences, affecting our lives in different ways. We, academics and writers, receive calls for papers and create literature about this ravaging pandemic but we have also been faced with challenges in navigating our classes to online platforms from the usual face-to-face class sessions. During this crisis, however, we have learned to innovate and experiment with novel practices. Slavoj Žižek has said, “[T]here is no return to normal, the new ‘normal’ will have to be constructed on the ruins of our old lives, or we will find ourselves in a new barbarism whose signs are already clearly discernible” (3). Indeed, we will never be the same after this pandemic, and we should never go back to our usual practices. For if there is one thing that the so-called “new normal” has revealed to us, it is how the old normal perpetuates a system that condones societal problems. And to put an end to the old system, our educational system must be rethought. One of the ways we might do that is by reflecting on our learning materials in our classrooms during the COVID-19 pandemic. Those of us who have been teaching Philippine literature have taken this emergency situation as an opportunity to reflect upon the state of the educational system. In response, we have incorporated reading materials and developed pedagogical strategies by which local health and illness issues may be connected to larger concerns and contexts such as the current national and global crisis. Through this, the Literature classroom and the choice of literary texts about health and illness, for example, may allow the literature teachers to contribute to the ability of our educational system to adapt to the pandemic crisis by inventing new practices in teaching while also developing students’ knowledge on health and illness.

Literary texts should open the students’ world of imagination and challenge them to think critically and respond empathically to the society and their environments (Appleman 3; Hogan 6). Teachers design their literature classes based on different institutional and personal factors but they also curate their learning materials and outcomes based on students’ varying needs and skills, which are often

affected by events and experiences outside schools. The space that the students traverse inside the school is not disconnected from the world outside because whatever happens to the world outside will always have a direct effect both on teachers and their students. A global health crisis like COVID-19 affects the way teachers and students learn in the classroom and think critically about larger issues like the education system. In this light, this paper aims to discuss literary texts and discourses about teaching during the pandemic since recent challenges have enabled teachers to reflect critically about pedagogical practices broadly in the context of the educational system. As such, this paper aims to share the experiences of Philippine Literature teachers in the teaching of canonical texts such as Jose Rizal's "Noli Me Tangere," Manuel E. Arguilla's "Caps and Lower Case," and Benjamin Bautista's "A Summer Goodbye," which are relevant to this time of the pandemic.

## **Concepts and Theories on Teaching Literature Health and Illness**

### *Philippine Literature about Illness and Health*

Reading literary texts about illness and health can train students to recognize different histories and ideologies embedded in the world of the text. As Barthes states, "text is a tissue, a woven fabric" (60); meaning to say, a text is not a monolithic space that is limited to a single interpretation; rather, reading a text can reveal multiple significations that, like a "woven fabric," may overlap or intersect to one another. However, reading and appreciating the multiple meanings of a text is not always the case in studying literature. There are observable shifts and changes in the way readers approach texts that can be seen in different pedagogical practices. Since the occupation of the Americans in the Philippines, schools have taught students to read the text closely, pay attention too narrowly to its formal structure, and mimic its language (Martin 96), instead of also exploring its relevant themes and analyzing them from the perspective of racial oppression, gender, or for this matter, health and illness, as the text might also require to be fully understood. As a result, the study of literature has become a missed teachable opportunity to learn about the rich Filipino culture, in general, and languages of healing, in particular. In

the context of colonial and neo-colonial education, by merely focusing on snow and American life, and parroting the language of colonizers and alienating readers from their own culture, Filipinos have lost their identity and forgotten their own history.

Historically, issues or themes about health and illness have been inscribed in literary texts throughout the development of Philippine literature. Often, texts depict health or illness as part of the plot development, conflict, or struggle of an important character in a story. Written during the Spanish colonization, for example, the poem “May Bagyo Ma’t May Rilim,” translated as “Though It Is Stormy and Dark” (1605), narrates the experience of the speaker who needs to “renew [his] strength” (line 22) through the holy book as he is weak and “disabled and limping” (line 25). A text reflecting the experience of religious conversion during the early Spanish colonial period, the speaker wishes to gain his strength through the Catholic faith. Similarly, during the American occupation, Dr. Arturo Rotor wrote “Zita” (1930), a short story about a teacher who moved to a barrio to work. On this journey, he met Zita, his student and love interest. The protagonist did not experience any medical illness, but Rotor compares his experience of suffering from a broken heart to a situation somewhat similar to suffering from a disease: “He is sick. You remember Father Fernando? He had a way of looking like that, into space, seeing nobody, just before he died” (14). In 1912, Lope K Santos published “Panggingera,” translated as “The Gambler,” a narrative poem about the grief of a mother who has lost her child that is described as, “That baby so full of health and of goodness, / who could have said / that aged but a month, it soon would be dead? //” (lines 63–66). The sudden death of the baby caused the mother to become a panggingera (pangginggi is a rummy-based card game). She gambled too much to the point that she also neglected her own health. Later, under the Philippine Republic, Alberto S. Florentino’s play, “Cadaver” (1954) presents the life of Torio, who lives in a Manila cemetery, enduring poverty. In this play, Torio suffered from a cut wound caused by a bone from a grave he had ransacked. This wound signifies how the poor suffer from the inequalities in society. As Torio says: “The doctor’s afraid that instead of paying him, I would beg money from him. If he came, I would have begged from him” (219).

The illness that Torio suffers from reveals a number of issues to the readers, ranging from oppression to possible infidelity of his wife. In another play in 1969, Paul Dumol's *Ang Paglilitis ni Mang Serapio*, or *The Trial of Mang Serapio*, showcases two crippled characters as witnesses of a crime that Mang Serapio is accused of. Both witnesses are flat and only secondary. They do not affect the narrative at all, but their presence in the play contributes to the overall themes of the play about the absurdity of a society that is unfair and unjust, the irrational social system and the proletarian struggle.

From the Spanish colonial period to the establishment of the Philippine Republic, one may see how Philippine literary texts have incorporated the condition of health and illness. The texts mentioned above show how in Philippine literary tradition, illness and health are incorporated as tropes that become integral literary elements through plot, motivation of a character, figures of speech and language, or the thematic dimension of the narrative. These texts are like "tissues," as Barthes refers to it, perhaps allusive of the experience of reading texts as tissues, and suggestive of the act of dissecting tissues in the human body. The implicit analogy between texts and the human bodies is unmistakable: to dissect a body is to study medicine while to analyze a text is to study literature. There are, at least, two ways this analogy might be made to work in this paper: First, illness and health are imagined and manifested in the Philippine literature, and second, colonial and neo-colonial education is so "sick" that it is unable to accommodate more dynamic and progressive pedagogical strategies. American colonial education had made its indelible mark in the school curriculum, policies, and instructions developed throughout the history of the Philippine educational system (Martin 91-92). The downside of this is little room is left to explore the production of creative writing, literary criticism, and literary education that develop sensibilities toward interdisciplinary and critical studies like medical humanities in the twentieth century that would have set the stage for appreciating and understanding the literary text as indissociable from larger concerns like health.

### *Studies on Medical Humanities*

Studying medical humanities could be one of the ways for teachers to recuperate what the society has lost from the history of colonial education in order to teach effectively even at a critical period in the history of a society

like during these years of the pandemic. Reading texts about health and illness develops interdisciplinary thinking in literary studies. As Sari Altschuler states:

In acknowledging the expertise of humanists in thinking about observation, we begin to see how disciplines—not only art history but also literature, history, and interdisciplinary fields like gender and sexuality studies, critical race theory, and disability studies—can make more robust contributions to the study of human health. Certainly, art history provides an excellent set of tools for educating doctors and other health professionals in the art of observation. (201–02)

There is an undeniable relationship between the practice of studying medicine and art according to Altschuler. Her notion of imaginative experimentation is a key term in her study of medical doctors practicing literary arts. Altschuler argues that doctors who also practice literature “[use] their imaginations to craft, test, and implement their theories of health and the role literary forms played in developing that work” (8). She analyzes the works of Dr. Benjamin Rush, one of the Founding Fathers of the United States. Altschuler reveals that the training of medical students through the arts, especially through poetry, enables them to practice their profession better. The exposure of his students to poetry helps them to calibrate their judgment and develop a “microscopic eye” (3–4). Other than treating poetry as a tool to “explore medical questions imaginatively using creative and ordered intellectual thought,” Altschuler adds that other literary genres such as fiction can “[allow] thinkers to test medical phenomena that would have been unethical to explore physically” (11). These examples of analyses are proof that literary studies are useful in the field of medicine and at the same time signify the powerful relationship between literature and medicine in the field of knowledge production. Practicing interdisciplinarity as illustrated here or combining and connecting two different fields, can generate powerful knowledge.

Terry Eagleton’s essay “The Art of Medicine: Literary Healing” discusses the role of literature in imagining one’s process of healing and experiencing illness as a human condition. Eagleton uses different literary texts to elucidate his point, and some of these literary figures are Jesus and King Duncan. Based on Eagleton’s analysis, Jesus Christ is perceived as a powerful figure who considers illness as an evil entity. This evil entity must be exorcised from the human body so that the healing and

reintegration into society can happen again. Meanwhile, in Shakespeare's *Macbeth*, King Duncan is recognized as a powerful figure who can heal someone through his influence and virtue as an authoritative figure. Eagleton argues, "Healing is about power, and thus about authority" (1330). This argument coincides with how each literary figure signifies both authority and privilege, whether through religion or governance, and how this power enables them to decide who can or cannot be healed. Drawing from Eagleton's essay, the experience and imagination of healing and illness, prove that health is also political and ideological. As such, integrating texts that relate to illness and health and the human body inside our classroom use can be challenging at this time of pandemic for literature teachers. However, the skills that the students can gain from reading texts about these texts such as analyzing power dynamics in society and reflecting on the human condition could prove to be rewarding.

### *Concepts on the Figure of the Literature Teacher*

In the book *Teaching Literature*, Elaine Showalter enumerates the different types of anxiety that a literature teacher can experience. They range from research, performance, and training to setting the coverage of our syllabi. She explains that the anxiety over coverage happens because of the overwhelming materials that teachers encounter in teaching. According to her "[o]ur internalized anxieties about the infinite amount of literary knowledge and the finite amount of academic time come together in worries about course coverage" (12). Additionally, as John McRae expands on this issue in *Creative Reading and Literature with a Small "I"*, this burden can be even more daunting for English or language teachers who have apprehensions about using literature in their classes (12). While this proves that teachers of literature have an inherent apprehension and anxiety, this experience can be made much worse by a serious, sudden, and prolonged medical crisis like the coronavirus pandemic.

But who is a teacher of literature, other than the hero or heroine of human civilization, or the facilitator of learning, the stereotyped bookworm teacher? Rosenblatt describes a teacher of literature as an individual who "will awaken his students to an awareness of the complexity of human behavior and society and will stimulate them to seek the understanding that the social scientists are endeavoring to



establish” (143). Like social scientists, teachers of literature direct their students’ learning experience to the literary experience that will arouse their consciousness about society. However, to extend this argument further, one must train students to broaden their understanding of the world not just through the natural sciences, but through the lens of other disciplines such as the social sciences and medicine as well. This way, Literature is able to provide a space of interdisciplinarity where students could explore the world of literature and its relationship to other areas of specialization such as the world of science, health, digital media, economy, environment, history, sex, and gender.

The task of weaving interdisciplinary fields is a project of a teacher that Rita Charon shares in the book *Teaching Literature and Medicine*. Since medical humanities started as a field of inquiry and pedagogy, Rita Charon believes that the practice of interdisciplinarity is a goal and prospect of this program. To guide the students, teachers who are trained in this field are expected to learn both key concepts about literature and medicine. Charon adds that practicing literature and language teaching in her class enables medicine students to be more sensitive to how language and narrative are both crucial in their field. According to her:

a literature teacher wants to educate medical students in the methods of unearthing meaning from language, including in the term language everything from grammar and metaphor to stigmata and scar. Such an education must provide students with the skills needed to read and translate medicine’s texts, not only those that doctors write for one another but also those that the deep structures of the languages of diseases themselves convey. (30–31)

Based on the passage above, the literature teacher proves to be a helpful agent in bringing knowledge to students of medicine and honing their essential skills. More so, this is a manifestation of teachers’ crucial task during the pandemic: to bring fields closer instead of “distancing” from one another to weave epistemic fields that can be functional to humanity’s survival.

### *The Global Crisis and the Literary Classroom*

Cathy Davidson posits that “[e]ducation is an excellent way of moving beyond trauma to a place of agency, confidence, control, community, care, activism, and contribution.” At this point, education plays an important role amid a world crisis and serves as the starting point in reworking a broken society. This is possible through literature classes that encourage students to foster a culture of care, empathy, activism, and healing. Education cannot stop; rather it is a place to begin moving “beyond trauma.” This means, in the context of this paper, combating the effects of the global crisis through education. Digital classrooms can be the places where students gain and exercise their agency, and bring back their confidence when the world outside seems to fail them, where they can build a community that connects them with each other at this time of isolation and social distancing during the pandemic.

Through discussions on illness and health narratives, literary education provides a platform for students to understand global crises like COVID-19. Consequently, literary imagination fulfills this purpose through the association of narratives with the experiences of diseases, recovery, death, or mourning. Students are trained to develop their literary imagination inside English, language, or literature classes in which education appropriates the learning experience into an organized system. The pandemic affects both the learning experience and educational system, and the Literature classroom can accommodate the concerns and issues that arise from it. Echoing Showalter, from her chapter on “Teaching Literature in Dark Times”:

When our lectures, seminars, and conferences are overtaken by public events as terrible and historic as those of September 11, our role is simple and almost inescapable. The event produces the desire to communicate, and insofar as we are able, we should go with that desire and facilitate it for a short while. Students themselves will begin to relate it to some part of the course, to try to understand it in terms we offer. (139)

While fulfilling the vocation of teaching and duty in the middle of a global crisis such as the coronavirus, teachers ought to treat school classes, whether be it physical or digital, as places for students to confront, interrogate, and understand these kinds of events. Discussing health and illness in the Philippine Literature classroom can help students communicate and translate their feelings, whether they be anguish, hope, or frustrations. Furthermore, by curating different texts about health and illness from East to West, the Literature classroom opens up a dialogue about the global experience of suffering and pain while being sensitive to local cultures and histories of their origins. This way, teachers of literature can engage students to think critically and respond emphatically, and they can then let them proceed to the principles and practices of activism, agency, care, and community.

### *Toward a Method of Pedagogical Criticism*

The pandemic calls for a shift in perspective from which this paper tries to study a relatively new method of writing, analyzing, and researching teachers' practices or educational systems. Of particular relevance in this study is pedagogical criticism which is a critique of pedagogical practices, discourses, and systems. It stems from the field of critical pedagogy that primarily deals with interrogating power dynamics in the classroom, capitalism in education, and neoliberal policies in institutions. Suzanne Choo defines pedagogical criticism as "an analytical methodology that proposes historicized and critical readings of interventions occurring in the enactment of disciplinary knowledge" (14). Pedagogical criticism is an approach that criticizes different areas of teaching literature from "conceptual values, the public sphere of the nation-state, and the global public sphere" (14). Additionally, Ben Knights conceptualizes how pedagogical criticism can be useful inside the Literature classroom. According to him:

The aim of pedagogic criticism is to bring into focus the transactions between the study and interpretation of texts and the social forms and rituals of pedagogy. It is a way of articulating a process through which an educational subject (in more than one sense) is talked into being. In this light, literary studies is a form of cultural production, a collaborative process of making, carried out through a specialized form of dialogue. (1)

Often, humanities programs analyze and research Literature through texts and their interpretation. Meanwhile, in social sciences or teacher education programs, the practice of teaching literary texts is being studied through qualitative or quantitative methods. Pedagogical criticism, as a method in a study, focuses on the practices in teaching literature and their relationship with the interpretation of a text, or to simply put it, “reading texts through teaching, and teaching through texts” (Knights 1). One can practice pedagogical criticism in any of the following subjects:

- Formation of conceptual values in teaching literature (Choo 24)
- Historical changes in teaching literature (24)
- Criticizing pedagogical paradigms in teaching literature (27)
- Approaches in teaching literature whether nationalistic, worldly, global, or cosmopolitan (26)
- Interpretation of texts and its relationship to the practice of teaching literature (Knights 1)
- The transaction of meaning-making between the texts and the system of pedagogy (1–2)
- Patterns and conversations about the text and its effect on the educational process (2)

On the one hand, this paper closely reads different literary texts and their interpretation guided by different studies about medical humanities and literary studies. On the other hand, this study analyzes the conceptualization of the figure of a literature teacher and the construction of literature classes through speeches, news articles, or essays. One of the challenges of the study is to look for materials that directly discuss topics, such as the relevance of teaching medical humanities through Philippine literature classes, research on the pedagogy of illness and health in Philip-

pine literature, the role of the literature teacher during the pandemic, or the role of Philippine literature classes during a pandemic. Because of the lack the materials, the study uses different discourses that are related to the concepts of the teacher, the practice of teaching, or the educational system produced during the pandemic that can be analyzed as factors for overdetermination. An overdetermined event is understood to be formed by different causes that might not be related to one another, but since these causes are often dominant, popular, synchronously happening, or common, these different events or phenomena actually lead to causing one effect. The effect or the overdetermined event that this paper focuses on is the construction of the figure of a literature teacher and Literature classroom at this time of the pandemic.

## **Discussion**

### *Illness as Portrayed in Philippine Literature*

Healing is about power as Eagleton mentions (1330), and different literary texts are fertile sites for imagining how this power is being exercised in different social contexts. These exercises of power in relation to illness and health are also evident in Philippine Literature. From the earliest works of Filipino authors like the *Ibong Adarna* to Jose Rizal's *Noli Me Tangere*, illness plays an important role in developing the text's narrative. In *Ibong Adarna*, King Fernando gets seriously ill after a terrible dream where he sees his youngest son, Don Juan, being killed by two evil figures. This event sets the action and conflict of the Filipino epic, as the illness of King Fernando sends his sons on a journey to find the magical *Adarna* bird that will cure his illness and restore happiness in the kingdom of *Berbanya*. Meanwhile, in *Noli Me Tangere*, other than the famous depiction of the mentally ill *Sisa*, Jose Rizal uses the metaphor of social cancer at the start of his novel to describe the status of the colonial regime in the Philippines. According to him:

Recorded in the history of human sufferings is a cancer of so malignant a character the least touch irritates it and awakens in it the sharpest pains. Thus, how many times, when in the midst of modern civilizations I have wished to call thee before me, now to accompany me in memories, now to compare thee with other countries, hath thy dear image presented itself showing a social cancer like to that other! (Rizal 3)

This introduction of Rizal serves as an apostrophe addressing our country as terminally ill. The descriptions such as “suffering,” “malignant,” “irritates,” and “sharpest pains” shows how this illness is a painful experience. However, no matter how excruciating this illness was, Rizal offered his work as a cure for the social cancer that his fellow countrymen were experiencing. He envisioned that through his work Filipinos could reflect upon their oppressive colonial condition and achieve national liberation. His novel, in this sense, becomes an antidote for the social cancer. Following Rizal’s belief, reading (the novel) then medicates the (sick) consciousness of the Filipinos who were blinded by obscurantism or remained passive and apolitical under the weight of the repressive Spanish colonial rule. These two texts show how healing is also a matter of power. First, in *Ibong Adarna*, the siblings compete with each other to get the cure for their father since this will grant them favors and the possible inheritance of ruling the kingdom. Second in *Noli Me Tangere*, healing the social cancer grants agency to the readers to liberate themselves from the shackles of colonialism and ignite nationalism. In these two early texts, illness and health operate in the narratives that empower people. Healing becomes a promise of reworking national consciousness and possession of power. Once employed in the literary classroom, these texts help the students witness how health and illness constituted the Filipino literary imagination during the Spanish colonial period.

Epidemics are also depicted in other Philippine literary texts. The works of Manuel Arguilla and Benjamin Bautista narrate stories about the suffering of people from tuberculosis (TB) during the American colonial period. Arguilla’s “Caps and Lower Case” follows the life of a proofreader named Alfredo Santos. This story unravels the troubles of labor exploitation in a pre-World War II setting. It highlights the

life of the overworked Fred and how his working environment— especially the ill-treatment of his boss and coworkers— affects both his mental and physical health. Towards the end of the story, Fred Santos suffers from TB, along with the burdens of underpaid work and maltreatment from his colleagues in *Illustrated Weekly*. The poor proofreader, or “galley-slave,” as the literary editor calls him, stays in the office despite being sick, spitting blood and phlegm, worsening his health condition. He even works overtime just to meet his boss’s deadlines while his request for an increase in salary is rejected:

“I’ll tell you want I’ll do,” Mr. Reyes said, as Santos remained silent. “You wait until December and I promise you a ten-peso raise.” He waited for a brightening up of the downcast face of Santos. There was none. Mr. Reyes began to feel again his old irritation toward the boy. What did he want? Did he think a man in his position should risk his job to get just anybody a raise?” (Arguilla 160)

Fred remains faithful to his work even if the system is taking a toll on his health. The figure of Mr. Reyes, a mestizo, exudes the aura of the antagonist who oppresses and aggravates the ailing condition of the poor employee. Illness in this story is entangled with the complications of middle-class struggle and hope for social mobility:

He stood there leaning over the urinal while he cleared his throat and spat out more blood. It was bright red blood with pale streaks of saliva. Calmly he flushed the urinal and watched the blood flow away. Then faintly at first, but quickly becoming stronger, the pulse and roar of the presses came to his ear. The pressmen had arrived. He must hurry back to his proofs. He spat once more into the urinal. At sight of the yellowed enamel stained with the blood from his mouth, an overwhelming sense of disaster, futility, hopelessness come upon Santos. Tears sprang to his eyes. Oh, God, why should this come to him now? (162)

These descriptive and narrative details concretely depict the worst experience of an individual who is desperate to keep his work and earn money for his family, further complicating the illness that the poor Fred Santos experiences. The text reveals how labor and health issues coincide within the literary world,

allowing readers to understand how the human condition is so vulnerable to power play in the society that the main character inhabits. Through Fred, readers are given a glimpse of how a country's economic status directly affects its citizen's labor system and health conditions.

"A Summer Goodbye" written by Benjamin Bautista narrates the summer experience of the main character, an unnamed eighteen-year-old female who is battling tuberculosis. Interestingly, about the time it was written, the Philippines and other Southeast Asian countries struggle to combat the disease. Mark Quintos and Minami Iwayana's study on sex and illness from 1960 to 2012 notes that women who were found to have an active TB were forced to "get divorced" and sent back to their families for isolation (53). They added that places like "city slums" tended to have poorer health care systems, making it harder for women from poor families to access medication (53). Vivek Neelakantan mentions that the same struggle with TB happened to the Filipinos under the presidency of Magsaysay. According to his article, in the 1950s, "[d]iagnosis for tuberculosis was based only on radiological findings and not bacteriological examinations. Patients could not follow-up on treatment as drugs were un-affordable" (5). The conflict of the story zeroes in on surviving life in isolation, as women suffer because of the malignant disease and struggle in getting medication. The unnamed protagonist suffers from a moderately advanced tuberculosis and must endure a life of isolation on her own away from the city: "She lived all by herself, practically in a single room. She was eighteen years old but she lived in a room because she was an only child and her parents were concerned about her because her left lung was shot with tuberculosis lesions" (Bautista 74).

The main character's parents and her doctors suggested isolating her from the community in order for her to convalesce. Aside from being contagious, TB is portrayed in terms of how it can affect human socialization, which may in turn affect one's mental health, and in this literary text, the only person she can talk to at this time is Father Ty, a white Australian priest. Unfortunately, after a week of conversation and after providing her comfort, he must go to another town as part of his task as a Redemptorist. This results in the worsening of the young lady's health, which ends up in hemorrhage, spitting of blood, and nausea:



“Take care of yourself,” he said as he left the room. She nodded yes, but how could that matter now that he [Father Ty] was going away . . . She did not sleep that night and the next morning she tried to sit up in bed, and she felt a sharp pain in her back . . . She felt extremely weak and when she coughed again she could no longer control it and she placed her hand over her mouth and then she felt something warm and moist on her palm. She is having a hemorrhage. (Bautista 81–82)

Toward the end of the story, the unnamed main character leaves the old fishing village. Her mother brings her back to the city to be checked up again. She then drops her to a sanitarium in order to closely monitor her progress and provide her further care.

Unlike the other stories mentioned, “A Summer Goodbye” is more of a reflective story about one’s life and health. It shows how one’s environment or social relationship could have a direct effect to on one’s health. The depiction of illness and health conditions in this text also reflects the development of medical procedures and protocols in the decades following after World War II in the country.

Both “Caps and Lower Case” and “A Summer Goodbye” reflect the struggles and issues from the 1950s to the 1960s that Quintos and Iwayana’s, and Neelakantan’s articles mention—the struggle in accessing medication and the sad reality of isolation. Meanwhile, the narrative uses illness in order to stir the plot into motion. The short story “Caps and Lower Case” is also a good example of how the experience of isolation proportionately affects one’s convalescence. This text helps us to investigate a reality from the past that surprisingly parallels our reality right now. The concept of healing from the two texts about tuberculosis again reflects conditions of power. In the work of Arguilla, healing becomes impossible as Fred is buried under the toxic labor system of capitalism. His oppression from the capitalist system makes it impossible for him to be cured. Meanwhile, the second story depicts the privilege to access medicine. The young, educated lady and her family can afford to send her to a far province and transport her to the most advanced and safe facility to cure her illness. However, this privilege is not enough to keep her healthy and heal from the

disease. Bautista's short story also recognizes the fact that human interactions or relationships are crucial in the healing process of an individual. These conditions, from the two short stories, show the disparity in access to medical intervention during that time and the nuances of power and privilege surrounding this issue.

Other texts that parallel the experience of pandemic/epidemic Philippine literature are "Biyaheng mga Ibong Dayo," or "The Flight of Migratory Birds," by Luis Gatmaitan and "Orosa-Nakpil, Malate" by Louie Mar Gangcuangco. On the one hand, Gatmaitan's "The Flight of Migratory Birds," introduces us to Nilo and his interest in migratory birds. This picture book does not only tell the story of a smart kid and his love for birds but also his relationship with his Filipino overseas worker parents and the perils of bird flu. On the other hand, Gangcuangco's "Orosa-Nakpil, Malate" allows the reader to feel the pain and suffering of Dave as he witnesses his lover succumb to human immunodeficiency virus/acquired immunodeficiency syndrome (HIV/AIDS). The novel allows the readers empathize with the characters through its sentimental tone and imagine the narrative of suffering. However, it challenges the readers as well to imagine a better future for people living with HIV/AIDS. These texts use the narratives of contagion and virus to let the readers know more about the experience and dangers of getting ill, as well as hope under the circumstances of infectious diseases. Both texts are narratively entangled with social issues like homophobia, safe sex, labor, and family relationships. The literary and medical world imagined by these texts could help students understand the nature of infectious diseases and relate their knowledge with their own perception of the real world and the text's world. In these recent examples of epidemics, power and authority are understood to work in a larger context as government and medical systems are shown to play crucial roles in mitigating these outbreaks.

From the stories from the Spanish period, the American period, to the current time, Philippine literature always showcases narratives of illness and health. In these stories, illness and health become a matter of interdisciplinarity, power, and authority.

Following Altschuler and Barthes's argument, the stories above show how the field of health can be connected to the world of literary arts. Texts such as Ibong Adarna and Noli Me Tangere trope the real lived experiences of suffering and wellbeing into the text world. These texts used conflict and literary elements, to show how power is an important factor to complete the meaning of the texts. Healing in Ibong Adarna compounds the idea of influence and inheritance, while in Noli Me Tangere, healing is a power to liberate oneself. The second set of texts, "Caps and Lower Cases" and "A Summer Goodbye," use stories about TB to depict different health and social conditions that people experience during an epidemic. In these works, access to healing or medication magnifies the differences between people's classes. For the unnamed educated young lady in "A Summer Goodbye," the privilege of having all access to medication comes with the ironic situation where she cannot have the person she wants for life. Meanwhile, in "Caps and Lower Case," Fred's access to health becomes difficult because of his working conditions, which turn him into a "galley slave." These narratives of illness hem themselves into the fabric of texts the same way Barthes theorizes texts as "a woven fabric." In the last two examples, stories reflect more recent forms of health crises like the HIV/AIDS epidemic and bird flu. In these stories, "outbreak" narratives are deployed to construct the plot of the text. Healing in these stories becomes an issue of controlling and mitigating the outbreak. To stop the infection, these stories depict authorities like government control and the healthcare system achieving and preserving wellbeing. These texts from the arsenal of Philippine literature evince that Filipino authors can imagine health and illness as part of our daily lives. Furthermore, for each depiction of such, these texts prove that access to healing and wellbeing is implicated with power and authority.

These discussions indicate two points. First, that two different fields such as medicine and arts can coexist in one cultural form. As Altschuler mentions, this is how interdisciplinarity works when two different fields integrate. These works of literature show how art can use medicine to create stories about the human experience of pain and well-being. Second, that power dynamics are part of our lives, and oftentimes, this can also be appropriated within the fictional world of stories. Because of this, using these texts in the curriculum or syllabus

is a teachable moment for introducing key ideas about health, illness, and their relationship with power and authority.

In this sense, one may read how “Caps and Lower Case” uses illness as a consequence of action rooted in desire and complicated by labor conditions. Here, illness teaches readers about how illness can alter our well-being. Fred, as the protagonist, caught up by the pressure from both his family and work, is collateral damage, the victim of the oppressive societal system. Both the plot and the character of the text help readers see the world of fiction as an avenue for interrogating the system of oppression and how it can compound the issues an individual may face about health and illness. Meanwhile, the second short story, “A Summer Goodbye,” utilizes both the character and the setting to illustrate the condition of illness and the internal conflict of the main character. The setting of the short story depicts the struggle of isolation and the effects it can bring to one’s health condition, as the main character’s situation is made more complicated by developing feelings toward the only person who gives her attention and care during her period of isolation. In this story, the setting and the characters’ conflicts give a way for readers to realize the value of literary structure in developing a theme about health and illness. The deteriorating health condition results in the experience of isolation. Unlike Fred in Arguilla’s story, the heroine in Bautista’s story has no control over her situation. The two texts use the TB outbreak in the Philippines as an important element of the plot. This helps the readers to spot the existing health conditions by reading the signs and symptoms of an ailment; then, to familiarize themselves with medical terms and conditions; and lastly, to recognize the connection of illness to a larger structure that can always worsen the existing condition of an individual, as suggested by Charon’s training of medical students in the story. With this kind of reading and studying texts, the encounter with Philippine literature about illness and health develop becomes a different kind of learning experience for Filipino students, so unlike the experience allowed by the conventional way of reading learned from our colonial and neo-colonial education.

### *The Pandemic-Time Literature Teacher*

In the first quarter of the pandemic in 2020, the lockdown continued to cripple the whole of Philippine society. The head of state who initially made fun of the virus, suddenly backpedaled on his statements, warning the public about the dangers of the coronavirus and considering it a serious threat, ordering people found to be infected with it to be isolated and to strictly follow social distancing in public places. While the former President of the country held late-night press conferences which both terrified and annoyed many people, the former Vice-President, Leni Robredo, also delivered speeches, issued updates, and public announcements through her social media accounts on the state of the country during the pandemic. This somehow created a clear contrasting images the two highest ranking figures in the country. While the fascist figure would curse and drag everyone to stay up even during the wee hours just to listen to his rants and confusing reports, the vice-president would give a speech during waking hours. In a speech in August 2020, Robredo enumerated several concerns that the country was facing and her proposed solutions that the government could implement, which included the following: ensuring that government agencies' budgets consider including the cost of the pandemic's onslaught; improving the health care system, gathering data on positive cases and contact tracing quickly; matching jobs with the people who lost their work, including OFWs; and empowering different in-demand businesses like garment industries for PPE production. Among the most significant of these concerns, former Vice President Robredo emphasized the importance of the continuity of education of the students during the pandemic. According to her:

Panahon nang iangkop ang sahod ng mga empleyado sa ambag nila sa lipunan, sabay ng pagsigurong may sapat silang benepisyo, kagamitan, at suporta, na lalong kailangan ngayong panahon ng pandemya. Halimbawa na lang ang mga health workers na abot-abot ang sakripisyo sa panahong ito, at mga guro na tumatayong last line of defense para hindi na tumawid sa susunod na henerasyon ang mga epekto ng COVID-19. Mahalagang hakbang ito para magkaroon sila ng kumpiyansang sumuong sa panganib, at bigyan sila ng sense of security para sa kinabukasan. (Robredo 12:37–13:18)

*(It is time to align the wages of employees to their contributions to society, along with ensuring that they have sufficient benefits, equipment, and support that is most needed during this pandemic. For example, health workers have sacrificed much at this time, and teachers have served as the last line of defense so that the next generation does not suffer the effects of COVID-19. It is an important step for them to develop the confidence to take risks and be given a sense of security for tomorrow.) (my trans.)*

Based on her speech, teachers are part of the last line of defense against COVID-19, sacrificing their lives to provide instruction to the country's citizens, safeguarding their future, and keeping them safe from the effects of the pandemic. While the speech emphasized the call for a better pay for both teachers and medical frontliners, it also highlighted the shared tasks of teachers and medical practitioners healing and preservation of the society.

The task of the teacher was reiterated by Ms. Lou Sabrina Ongkiko, a recipient of Metrobank Foundation's Outstanding Filipino Teacher Award. Ongkiko delivered a public speech during the conferment ceremony held in September 2021 about the role of teachers at the time of the pandemic and the meaning of being an "Outstanding Filipino" in that context. Ongkiko and the other awardees spoke through an online program. In her speech, she asked the public about what kind of outstanding Filipino they wanted to be. She answered this by citing her co-awardees and their great contribution to their fields. As she concluded her short speech, she highlighted the role of teachers during a pandemic:

I would like to conclude this by leaving a few thoughts for us to ponder on and draw inspiration from: when we are recognized as an “Outstanding Filipino,” let’s make sure to own it not just as a badge of honor but a call to mission. That as teachers, we are given the sacred task of recognizing, protecting, developing, and bringing out the outstanding person in every Filipino. And that moment when learners feel like winners, that is our true winning moment. (2)

Ongkiko’s speech drew up the figure of the teacher during a pandemic similar to former Vice-President Robredo’s speech. It was the picture of a teacher who “protected” the child of the present for the future and of “brought” out the best of every child, maximizing their potential. In this picture, both the teachers and students became winners, rising out of the whole wreck caused by the pandemic. As she said in her speech, “we need to confront and we are expected to fix its ruins” (Ongkiko 1). By dealing with the pandemic, students and teachers take an active role through education in defending progressive values and carrying the important lessons of this health crisis to the next generation. Indeed, the image of the teacher is one of an important agent of healing and authority.

Another figure of power is a doctor who teaches and writes at this time of the pandemic. In the speech of former Vice-President Robredo, the figures of the doctor and of the teacher overlap with one another as they both signify the hope of survival during the pandemic. In an essay, Dr. Ronnie Baticulon of the University of the Philippines, explains the role of a doctor during the pandemic which includes that of a teacher:

Sa University of the Philippines College of Medicine, kung saan ako nagtapos at ngayo’y isang kawaksing propesor, itinuturo sa amin ang konsepto ng five-star physician. Ayon dito, ang imahen ng isang doktor ay hindi dapat ikahon sa loob ng ospital at clinic, bitbit ang stethoscope, at pusturang-pustura sa white coat na walang mantsa. Bagkus, ang bawat isa ay hinihikayat na tuparin ang isa o higit pa sa mga sumusunod:

- Una, manggamot
- Pangalawa, magturo
- Pangatlo, manaliksik

- Pang-apat, mamuno
- At panlima, magtaguyod (137)

*(At the University of the Philippines College of Medicine, where I graduated and now am an associate professor, we are taught the concept of the five-star physician. According to it, the figure of a doctor should not be boxed inside the hospital and the clinic, carrying a stethoscope, wearing an unstained white coat. Instead, everyone is encouraged to fulfill one or more of the following tasks: first, to heal; second, to teach; third, to research; fourth, to lead; and fifth, to advocate.)*  
(my trans.)

Here the task of the doctor-teacher-writer is even more serious during the pandemic, for they too have to be researchers, leaders, or advocates. For society to discover the true nature of the virus, the doctor-researcher should study it, while the doctor-teacher also has to teach the next generation of doctors the ways to cure people who are affected by the virus (137), and the doctor-advocate must critique the system and healthcare policies to achieve a quality and accessible medicine for the masses (141). But among these tasks, Dr. Baticulon underscores the role of the doctor-writer. He believes that this role allows doctors to better understand the condition of their patients, which in turn, allows them to write better stories. These stories, for him, are a powerful tool in narrating the conditions of patients that can train future doctors' skills in diagnosing and helping patients to heal. (138). On this account, one can see that the figure of the teacher may as well overlap with the other important agents in society. As a practitioner of medical humanities or liberal arts in medicine, Dr. Baticulon expounds on the construction of the figure of a literary teacher at this time of the pandemic. As a writer and medical doctor, he is a testimony to the necessity of interdisciplinarity in the field of medicine and medical education, while as a doctor-teacher he exercises his authority to enable healing.

The social fabric that we weave through our classes, at this time of the pandemic, intersects with literary and pandemic experiences. By choosing texts that highlight illness in Philippine literary imagination such as “Caps and Lower Case” and “A Summer Goodbye” or other literary texts that narrate the same theme, one can connect different intellectual and scholarly fields and help students learn more about the human experience from the



artistic world of literature. This practice of connecting the field of humanities which Dr. Baticulon exercises is aligned with Rita Charon's practice of teaching her medical students to develop empathy and sensitivity through reading literature. Moreover, one does not simply discuss illness and health in Philippine literature. One must also help students understand health and illness that is grounded in Filipino experience. Through this, students are trained to learn more about the humanities while at the same time acquiring medical knowledge that is sensitive to the local cultures and histories. In this manner, teachers can effectively "fix the ruins" (Ongkiko) and be part of the "last line of defense" (Robredo). In so doing, teachers of literature help to defend society from ignorance and illiteracy, and strengthen the social fabric. This also expands Eagleton's notion of healing as power and authority to pedagogical practices, with teachers of literature practicing both power and authority that give way to the healing and recuperation of society. Through the Literature classroom, the global crisis can be more comprehensively understood based on these principles of learning and pedagogical activities.

### *The Global Crisis Overlaps the Literary Classroom*

The pandemic compelled different schools and universities to migrate to online platforms. For some educational institutions, especially private schools, this is the chance for them to "flex" their systems and market their technological advancement for students' learning experience, while for other small schools or public schools, this is quite a challenge. While there is no problem with teaching innovations at this time of the pandemic, the problem with the digital divide is still a huge hindrance to students' learning in general. Educators rush to seminars or webinars to equip themselves with this new "trend," spending sleepless nights designing their classrooms and combating anxieties caused by the new learning environment. The shift in modes of learning and planning have caused teachers to experience pandemic burnout as Tim Pressley studies in his article "Factors Contributing to Teacher Burnout During COVID- 19" (325). The pandemic

has magnified these problems due to the lack of technological investment in our institutions for computers, printers, and learning management systems to online resources for libraries. But these problems are just part of the bigger and more basic problems in our educational system, ranging from an insufficient number of classrooms to teachers' low basic pay. But instead of backing down, teachers should rather push back and make the people responsible and accountable for this negligence. Teachers should organize and lobby together with other non-government institutions. Furthermore, teachers should fight for a higher budget for the educational sector so that the new normal will not be just a rehash of the old normal but becomes a way of revolutionizing our educational system. And lastly, teachers should use education to confront the problem rather than celebrate the impasse as a simple matter of "resilience."

In an article about the status of Philippine studies during COVID-19, Charlie Veric mentions that "one of the biggest impacts of the pandemic on teaching, for instance, is connectivity inequality wherein those in Manila enjoy a relatively more stable internet than those in the provinces." The global crisis has undeniably affected the current educational system. There is inequality, and teachers may take a break from school, but it should not blind nor hinder them from playing their role as educators. Together with the available literary materials and the continuous lobbying for a safer back-to-school for every Filipino student, teachers may use the Literature classrooms to respond to this collective trauma. Historically, the Philippines is no stranger to different crises. For example, during Martial Law, protest literature and theater contributed to educating the masses by revealing the atrocities of the Marcoses. For example, Doreen Fernandez says, "Drama has indeed been- in the past, in the Martial Law era, and in our time—the literary form quickest to respond to current history, cleverest at handling the reality of unspoken censorship and the risk of arrest" (136). Even in the most difficult times, such as the rule of an authoritarian regime, literature has played an important role in paving the way for resistance—an idea that we can always discuss in our classes. Other than this, many scholars study global crises, such as climate change and the AIDS pandemic which are also instructive as points for discussion in their classes. Moreover, in her book chapter on teaching about AIDS, Sandra Stephan explains that literary and

cultural texts are useful tools in composition classes for freshmen college students to educate themselves about the AIDS crisis and its effects on the LGBTQ community (218). In a book about the crisis affecting the environment, Philipp Siepmann emphasizes the role of studying nonfiction texts in understanding the effects of environmental crises like Hurricane Katrina. Siepmann uses literary nonfiction texts to analyze strategies that train the students to discuss inequalities and social justice amid environmental crises. He believes that “[s]chool education can certainly contribute to preparing future citizens for the social and ecological challenges of a globalizing world” (144). The works of Veric, Fernandez, Stephan, and Siepmann above show that literature can be employed in Literature classes to respond to the different crises.

To survive the setup of the new normal, the Department of Education (DepEd) adjusted the curriculum for basic education teaching. This modified curriculum guide is called the Most Essential Learning Competencies (MELCs). In this new guide for teaching, the DepEd selects the “most essential and indispensable competencies” that teachers of online learning can utilize in their digital classes (1). These competencies are evaluated based on their application to real-life events, alignment to local and international standards, versatility, and necessary relationship to other subject areas or concepts (2). For example, for the subject Twenty-First-Century Literature from the Philippines and the World, DepEd retains its performance standard:

The learner will be able to demonstrate understanding and appreciation of 21st Century Philippine literature from the regions through:

1. a written close analysis and critical interpretation of a literary text in terms of form and theme, with a description of its context derived from research; and
2. an adaptation of a text into other creative forms using multimedia. (500)

In the first quarter of teaching Twenty-First-Century Literature from the Philippines and the World, teachers may still use literary works

to train students to interpret texts by paying attention to their form, message, and context. In terms of illness and health, novels like *Mga Batang Poz* (Segundo Matias, Jr.) or *Orosa- Nakpil*, Malate are possibly useful in this context since these works are about the HIV/AIDS epidemic in the twenty-first century and are written by Filipino authors. The recent publications and literary works about pandemic literature by journals such as *Kritika Kultura*, *Likhaan*, and *Tomas* may also be utilized. By analyzing these kinds of works, students may explore the connection of Philippine literature with other critical fields such as medical humanities, gender studies, Marxism, or even postcolonialism. Similar to the practice of reading the texts of medical students, students in senior high school may focus their analyses on the characters' lives as these characters experience both illness and the process of healing, evaluate the language that texts utilize as both medical and literary, or assess the value of the genre in both honing critical and health literacy. DepEd's MELC guide can allow the Literature classroom to be transformed into a space in which to practice agency, activism, and critical thinking through texts and literary representations, or a critique of illness and health conditions as reflected by this type of literature during the pandemic.

The COVID-19 crisis also compelled lawmakers to rethink policies that can help the education sector survive the pandemic and other potential pandemics in the future. With this, Bonz Magsambol of Rappler interviewed Aral Pilipinas and the Teachers' Dignity Coalition for recommendations. This is the response of the two NGOs to the question of Senator Pia Cayetano:

### **Integrate or strengthen health crisis education in the curriculum.**

One of the main observations during the first week of face-to-face classes in select schools was that young students tended to take off their masks while inside the classroom. Most of students [sic] also disregarded basic health protocols, such as observing physical distancing and limiting interactions with their peers, due to lack of knowledge about the importance of these protocols. (Magsambol, emphasis in the original)

Students should realize the serious effects of COVID on their lives to learn to become more responsible citizens and vigilant about the possibility of encountering new kinds of health crisis in the future. In doing this, science subjects are important to the learning experience of the students as well; however, literature, arts, and even history classes are equally useful spaces in which to train students to develop an awareness of the impact of a global health crisis like the coronavirus. By reading texts that narrate the consequences of being oblivious about the “health” of the healthcare system itself, or portray apathetic characters, students can be trained to practice critical thinking and interrogate the different structures presented in the imaginary world. The Literature classroom that allows the students to analyze texts about illness and health can help to strengthen the purpose of health-crisis education by asking students to have an active role in the meaning-making process and criticism, relating their realities to the condition presented by texts, or using literary texts as an inspiration for creative projects while being committed to advocacies. This integration of different fields transforms our classes into a forum for discussion on what is called the episteme of survival in the global crisis during the pandemic, wars, and even ecological crisis. The episteme of survival is again a product of power granted to the key agents of education like students and teachers. Furthermore, this is a necessary aspect of healing and moving forward for this society.

### *Into the Online Literary Classroom During the Pandemic*

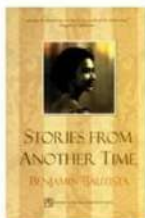
Practicing active learning in the classroom requires engagement, critical thinking, and community building. With the pandemic widely spreading all over the world, Literature classes have migrated to different learning management systems, creating new challenges and avenues for students to continue studying. With this premise, teachers and students could still use a “dialectical” method in teaching literary texts and learning through them. As John Vincent Ignacio pointed out in his article entitled “Thomistic Elements in Constructivism and Learner-Centered Teaching,” learning is

an active process. This element of Constructivism is also found in Aquinas' principles of learning and teaching. Aquinas strongly affirms that the dialectic approach is far better as a teaching strategy than mere reading. Secondly, Aquinas presents that the student and the teacher form a mutual relationship to actively engage in the learning process. (135)

As such, from a constructivist point of view, studying texts can be a moment for both teachers and students to engage with one another with the use of online tools or learning systems in honing the students' skills. By becoming connected through the world of the text and the online learning system, the experience of studying Philippine literature about illness and health can be nurtured. The two websites below will illustrate active learning in the literary classroom. Here are some steps teachers may follow:

1. Upload a text of your own choice that presents illness or health as part of its narrative. In the selection, consider both fiction and nonfiction based on your grade level and the subject being taught.
2. Write your instructions and tasks based on the objectives and target competency/competencies set on the curriculum guide or syllabus.
3. Develop questions using the formalist approach on sections, stanzas, paragraphs, or literary elements such as conflict, plot, settings, themes, figures of speech, or characters. This will help students to support their interpretations with textual evidence.
4. Ask students to expound on their answers either by giving another question relating the text to historical and other contexts like medicine or asking them to elaborate on their answers to previous questions.

The practice of annotation, which sharpens your ability to identify textual elements and provide textual evidence, is necessary for your participation in this Literature class.



## Annotate

*Suggested Submission Date: 22 September\*\**

1. Access the class Perusall. ([If you have not yet used Perusall, follow the steps in activating your class account.](#))
2. Read "A Summer Goodbye" by Benjamin Bautista.
3. Highlight a phrase or a statement from the story. (Ensure that this has not yet been highlighted.)  
Supplement this marking with a value-adding comment or thought-provoking question. Focus on how the literary element or literary feature develops the theme or issue of the text.
4. Engage in another reader's marginal note. Reply to their marginalia with a related comment or question. You may include links or photos that are related to the issue from the text such as news, historical information or medical information about the text and illness.
5. Copy your posted marginal notes to the text entry box for this assignment. (This will be helpful in keeping track of your submissions.)

As a general rule, limit each of your annotations to two sentences. This will allow you & your fellow readers to form more meaningful engagements with the text (vs. writing notes for the sake of writing).

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Fig. 1. Canvas sample reading activity



## Reading Illness in Literature

Jp Sarce • 18:07

15 points

The practice of annotation, which sharpens your ability to identify textual elements and provide textual evidence, is necessary for your participation in this Literature class.

Suggested Submission Date: **22 September\*\***

- **Access** the class Google Drive.
- **Read** "A Summer Goodbye" by Benjamin Bautista.
- **Highlight** a phrase or a statement from the story. (Ensure that this has not yet been highlighted.) Supplement this marking with a *value-adding comment or thought-provoking question*. Focus on how the literary element or literary feature *develops* the theme or issue of the text.
- **Engage** in another reader's marginal note. Reply to their marginalia with a related comment or question. You may include links or photos that are related to the issue from the text such as *news, historical information or medical information* about the text and illness.
- **Copy** your posted marginal notes to the text entry box for this assignment. (This will be helpful in keeping track of your submissions.)

As a general rule, limit each of your annotations to two sentences. This will allow you & your fellow readers to form more meaningful engagements with the text (vs. writing notes for the sake of writing).

Fig. 2 Google class sample reading activity

The task trains students to read the text closely and to expound on the issues and themes they can relevantly associate it with. To build a community of readers, both activities shown in figures 1 and 2 use web-based annotation tools. These online tools help students see the comments and interpretations of their classmates. And with the task of commenting or responding to one another, students empowered to develop a discourse through the communal reading process. This activity also veers away from the isolated and solitary form of reading by allowing students and teachers to comment on one another's annotations on the text. With the task, "Focus on how the literary element or literary feature develops the theme or issue of the text," the student will need to see how the literary text operates and can develop its themes and messages through its elements. It hones students to become critically engaged by reading texts. The activity also wants to expound on this skill of recognizing a text as a system that can be connected to the realities and histories outside of the class by replying to their marginalia with a related comment or question. Students may include links or photos that are related to the issue from the text, such as news, historical information, or medical information about the text and illness.



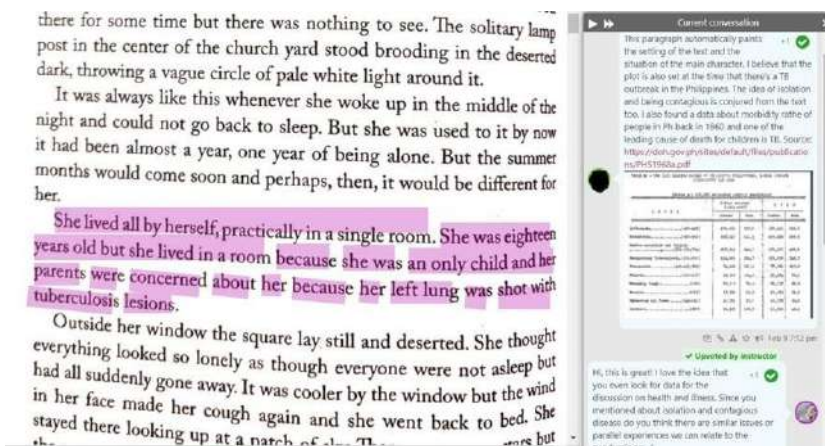


Fig. 3. Sample annotations

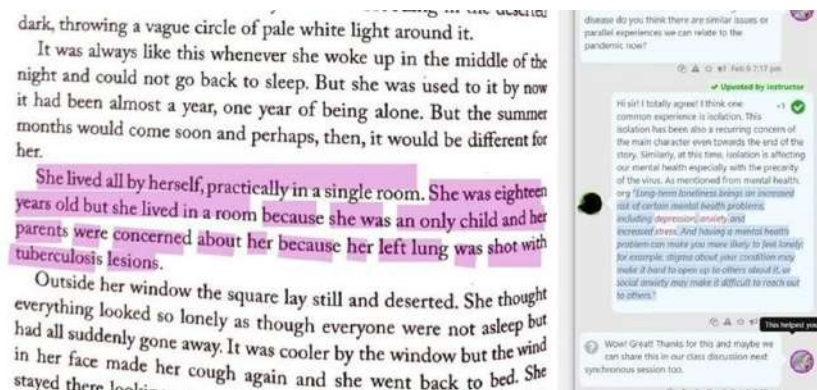


Fig. 4. Sample annotations

The sample annotations from figures 3 and 4 show how a student interacts with the teacher and expounds on the answers. The student points out the literary features that the text is utilizing, such as “setting,” “situation,” and

“character.” The student connects these literary features to the issue of “illness” and “isolation” from the text while the teacher acknowledges the contribution of the student in the discussion and even encourages the student to expound on the answer and further look into the text. The student continues to interact and even provides news articles about mental health during the pandemic and data about TB cases back in 1960. This kind of task and dialectical interaction between the student and the teacher make the class even more engaging, not to mention that the annotation is open to all the members of the class, allowing them to freely converse with one another too. In this manner, the annotation and close-reading activities become a shared experience of students who read by expounding on a text and creating a community of readers. This activity is also made possible for low-bandwidth users through Google Drive and Google Docs annotation tools. For offline classes, teachers create worksheets for activities that elaborate on the issues of the text and connect them to other issues in society. These worksheets may be included in student reading materials or be distributed in a face-to-face setup.

By engaging students and guiding them to investigate a text, studying literature in the twenty-first century can be a more liberating experience, compared to the old way of studying Literature inherited from the American colonial regime. Once we allow students to bring in different ideas and beliefs in the class, teachers can see how the students can develop critical thinking and active learning. Interrogating or expounding on the meaning of the text and connecting it to their realities, or even to the current climate of the pandemic, provides them an opportunity to depart from what Maria Luisa Torres Reyes has criticized about the “first decade of American colonial education” (20)—a type of education that failed to hone critical thinking and skills among the Filipino students. Looking at the current landscape of the online literary classroom, one can see that from the solitary and individualistic practice of reading and studying text, the students are now moving to a practice that creates a “web of meanings” from the World Wide Web, allowing the students know more about their identities, culture, and history, or even better, explore the exciting and relevant interdisciplinarity of Literature and medical humanities.

## Conclusion

American colonial education in the Philippines has had an undeniable impact on the teaching of Literature, as Martin and Torres have remarked. Whether through curriculum or instruction, the first decade of studying Literature was highly teacher-centered, leading students to parrot words and read texts that alienate them. But as time passed by, more Filipino writers and teachers explored writing critically away from the conservative ways of old, which Maria Luisa Torres Reyes called this Philippine literary development a product of “modernisms” (24). Modernism, in this sense, is the permutations of literary genres and infusions of Filipino experience into different literary texts. These Filipino writings began to explore different genres, styles, and themes. This new wave of Philippine literature also presents a context and culture inherent to the land and consciousness of the Filipino people. These elements form part of what used to be often called “local color,” which, if combined with western generic conventions, becomes a unique literary technique for Filipino writers to narrate local cultures, traditions, rituals, and manners. This feature of Philippine Literature provides students the chance to read a text and enter a textual world that is familiar to them. Reading this type of texts provides more sense of kinship than alienation.

To reiterate, utilizing these texts that showcase Philippine culture and history vis-à-vis an epidemic or pandemic like TB can help students to actively engage and learn more about history, art, health, and illness. With a proper and well-thought-of material selection, active learning can be a rewarding experience in studying literature. The texts above show that the students’ familiarity with the context of the text and its literary features is a good starting point for investigating and expounding on the issues they found in the text. By discussing the characters like Fred and the unnamed lady, students can be made familiar with first the signs and symptoms of TB and can empathize with the experience of a suffering individual. And lastly, through elements such as plot and settings, readers can see how illness is actually a life condition that can lead to an overpowering sense of oppression and internal conflict for an individual. Understanding the text through these layers can lead students to further investigate the text that they encounter and even actually relate them to their realities by reading scientific or medical studies that coincide with the narrative of the text.

The world inside schools is connected to the world outside. According to Jane Tompkins in *Pedagogy of the Distressed* (1990), “the classroom is a microcosm of the world” (656). Tompkins thinks that the literary Literature classroom is a miniature version of the world outside, a sort of mimetic representation. It is connected and disconnected, and it never is a different version but is always a version that relates and can get affected by the different global events. It might be a different world, but it is always the world that eclipses other worlds. These spaces overlap, interact, and interrupt other spaces. These texts help students have a grasp of illness and health as an experience that is universal yet sensitive to local particularities. The teacher of Literature defends affirms the important progressive values of society while reworking a broken system.

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