

# Hispanic Poems in Philippine Literature: Materials in teaching Regional Culture and History

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**Abstract** This paper discussed the use of Hispanic poems as sources of Filipino culture and local historical data (directly or indirectly mentioned in the poems), in teaching regional culture (of Bicol) and history. The poems are originally written in Spanish language and are translated into English by Hornedo. The analysis employed qualitative-descriptive approach of literary criticism, anchored on the theory of New Historicism and formalist-contextualist approach. In particular, the analysis delved on the content rather than on form and structure. Findings revealed that the poems are good sources of information about the image of the places in terms of physical and cultural milieu. Furthermore, the poems were found to be reflective of reliable materials in understanding Bicol soil and of the way of life of its inhabitants. These findings suggest that literature and history be taught side by side with original materials from a certain locality that eventually unveil cultural identity.

**Keywords:** *Formalism, new historicism, Philippine literature, regional culture and history*

## Introduction

The primary aim of teaching literature is the appreciation and understanding of life through expressions of shared human experiences in various oral, written, and visual forms. Hence, it is highly imperative for a teacher of literature to employ appropriate approaches and use suitable materials to develop appreciation, and creative and critical responses in learners. According to Connors (2010), in order to justify one's readings, it is necessary to consider some clear and lucid theoretical account of what is admissible in reading. Literature requires

breadth of dispassionate scholarly knowledge of other literature, of history, of psychology, and other related arts.

### *Teaching Regional Culture and History*

It is important to note that Literature is not simply a product of History. It also actively *makes* history. The role of the author in any literary product is primarily determined by historical circumstances. In the article, *Literature as a Historical Source (Toward the Historiography of the Problem)*, Mironets (1978) tackles the development of the history discipline. He stresses its demands with increasing imperiousness study of questions pertaining to its interaction with other fields and other modes. Accordingly, they include “perceiving historical reality, particularly the connections between historical scholarship and literature” (Mironets, 1978 p.57). Hence, new historicists see literature as actively involved in the making of history through its participation in discursive practices.

In the Philippine perspective, Hornedo (2000) discusses the 19<sup>th</sup> century Philippine literary relations as evident in the *Antologia Poetica* of Melendreras. The literary relations of Filipino writing can be traced through readings of such anthology. The Filipino literature written in the native languages of Hispanized cultural communities also serve as literary legacy. This study agrees to the idea of O’Brien (1968), who posits the significance of regional studies in the development of a country. He emphasized:

It seems that no one can get a true and complete picture of Philippine history or what have been the formative influences on the nation’s culture unless successful attempts have been made to gather and preserve historical, linguistic, and cultural data of various regions of the country and its people. (O’Brien, 1968, p.1)

Similarly, Hornedo (1997) advanced the role of regional identity in national development. “Regional identity therefore, becomes a matter of pride because it is the contribution of the region to the nation and not because it enables the region to surpass all the other regions.” (Hornedo, 1997, p.58). Hence, both O’Brien and Hornedo believe that literary materials are important contributions to regional identity. The latter stresses that “region is constitutive of the nation and that the nation is a

family of regions whose benefit is defined by the well-being and prosperity of its components.” (Hornedo, 1997, p.58)

### *Materials for Teaching Culture and History*

Hornedo (2000) states that literature can be taught considering the four reality frames, namely: literature as a theme; literature as script; literature as aesthetics; and literature as history. It finds ally in Lumbera and Lumbera’s book (1997) which presents both history and anthology of Philippine literature”. He also mentions in the same book the need for integration of research and evaluation, and translation of regional literatures in order to understand and appreciate one’s regional identity.

There are about 70 Philippine languages, eight of which are considered major and possess extensive recorded literature. The number of the said literature excludes those written in English and Spanish. According to Lumbera (1997), with the exception of Tagalog, English, and Spanish literatures, the histories of various literatures remain in need of intensive research. He suggests that the literary scholar can also act as a historian in order to integrate the discussion of regional vernacular literature into an overall study of Philippine literature. He further suggests that translations may be deemed necessary to recognize the achievement of regional writers.

### *The Nature of New Historicism*

The new historicism is defined as “a mode of critical interpretation which privileges power relations as the most important context for texts of all kinds (Brannigan, 1998). It means treating the literary text as a space where power relations are obvious and easy to notice. The idea of ‘power relations’ refers to the connection of the text to the subject that sees literary participation in the course of history. It adheres to the practice of literary analysis to highlight the interrelatedness of all human activities. It also provides a more complete understanding of a text through its narrative discourse.

### *The Formalist-contextualist Approach*

This type of formalism is a kind of literary criticism that deals with the content rather than the structure of the material under study. The main contention of this approach is to focus on the aesthetics to reveal the message of the text. Accordingly, formalism views literature as a special mode of language and proposes a fundamental opposition between poetic/literary language and the practical/ordinary language. Literary language is self-reflexive, which is referred to as ‘literariness’ of Jacobson (1969).

### **Framework of the Study**

This paper is anchored on the idea that the literary content of poems can be used in identifying historical facts. The aesthetics in the poems do not necessarily affect the message. Similarly, the text is connected to a subject with relevance to the course of events. The Formalist-contextualist approach and the New Historicism pave way in presenting cultural history as well as literary relations. Those are relevant to the idea of Hornedo (2000) that identifies the four reality frames in teaching literature, one of which is teaching literature as history where the sociological and cultural background of the six poems translated in English are considered to reveal the milieu embedded in the poems. Likewise, the theory of New Historicism as used in this paper defined as “reconstructs literary texts as historical objects by considering documents and methods previously excluded from traditional literary and aesthetic study” (Makaryk, 1993, pp.124-128). Both regional and national identity can be deciphered from literary materials written during a particular time.

### **Objectives**

This paper’s major goal is to analyze some literary materials, Hispanic poems in particular, as part of regional literature. The main intention is to come up with authentic materials from the Bicol region and to highlight the identity of Bicol soil from the said poems to prove that the Hispanic poems can be good sources of understanding one’s history and culture.

Specifically, this paper primarily aims to initially trace the themes of the English translation of the Hispanic poems. The context and content of the poems are also considered in understanding one's history. Second, to prove that the poems serve as both Hispanic legacy and regional literary materials as source of information on history. Then, to reveal both material and non-material culture in the early times during Spanish colonialization. Finally, to serve as a proof that *Ibalong*, the popular Bicol epic is indeed another Spanish poem and not an oral epic.

## **Methodology**

### **Research Design**

This paper employed descriptive design. It is a type of literary criticism intended to trace historical facts from the literary materials. The content of the six poems were analyzed rather than their form. The implied period and setting when they were constructed form part of basis in their chronological presentation in this paper.

### *The Materials*

The six poems under study are part of the archived collection of fifty-four poems of a Franciscan Priest, Father Bernardino Melendreras. They come in a typescript form with introduction by Father Pastrana-Riol. The English version of poems were published in the book of Dr. Hornedo, *Culture and Community in the Philippine Fiesta and Other Celebration*.

### *The Poet*

Father Bernardino Melendreras, a native of Gijon, Spain arrived in Manila on February 11, 1893. In 1844, after his five years of stay in the Philippines, he served in Quipayo and Bombon in Camarines. He was then transferred to Libmanan after a year then back to Bombon in 1846. In the year that followed, he served in Libmanan for more than 20 years. In 1865, he was then assigned in the parish of Guinobatan, in Albay province, where he stayed with an anthropologist named Feodor Jagor. He died in Manila at the age of 52 in 1867. He had left a collection of 54 poems, called *Antologia Poetica*. They were written in a 32 x 22 cm

paper with 98 leaves of poetry where text is only on one side. The six poems were translated into English by Dr. Florentino Hornedo.

### *The Translator*

Dr. Florentino Hornedo is a literary icon whose interests include the field of anthropology, philosophy, literature, social science, ethnology, and history. He is a poet, painter, and sculptor aside from being a multi-awarded book author. His translations of Melendreras' poems, which are materials of this study, are his personal selections from among the collection of poems. He explained that Melendreras was one of the Spaniards from Peninsular Spain. He was a well-read poet and brought in literary trends of the time and was heavily influenced by current Iberian trends.

### *The Locale*

Region 5, also known as Bicol region, is composed of six provinces, four of which—Camarines Norte, Camarines Sur, Albay, and Sorsogon—are geographically connected, while two of which—Masbate and Catanduanes—are island-provinces. The region has long been referred to as *Ibalon* as described by Scott (1994). The word *ibalong* was also the old name of Sorsogon Bay.

### *Study Context*

Analysis of the poems delved more on context and content rather than form and elements of poetry. The themes of the poems unveil the material and non-material culture of the locale. Moreover, the identified custombrismo style supports the understanding of the background of the places where Melendreras stayed. For validation purposes, those places in the Bicol region were also traced and discussed.

## **Findings**

The analysis is divided into three parts: the description of the themes interpreted from the translated poems, the discussion of each poem based on their context and content that helped understand one's history,

and the presentation of the deciphered material and non-material culture from the poems.

The sequence used in presenting the analyses of the six poems was based on the inferred ideas through historical details. Similarly, the material and nonmaterial culture of the region were identified based on the historical texts deciphered from each poem.

### **The Translated Hispanic Poems and their themes**

Table 1 contains the titles of the translated poems and their deciphered themes. The poet's collection significantly identifies the nature of the Bicol soil and its ancient way of life. On this note, the contemporary teachers of Literature may discuss the poems with consideration of the themes and relevance to historical ideas.

Along with the themes of the poem, their tone is also important to consider in analyzing them. Tone indicates the mood or attitude of the poetic persona, thereby helping identify the message or the purpose of the poet.

Table 1. The thematic aspect of the poems

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	<b>The poems</b>	<b>The themes</b>
1.	The Mountain Dweller (El Igorote)	The idea of existence and survival in the society
2.	<i>The Mountains of Bicol</i> ( <i>Los Montes Del Bicol</i> )	The exotic but grandeur dwelling place
3.	<i>To My Companions After Having Visited 3.The Cave of Colapnitan on 11 August 1861</i> ( <i>A MisCompañeros, Despues De Haber Visitado La Cueva De Colapnitan El 11 Agosto De 1861</i> )	The gothic versus the awesome beauty of nature
4.	<i>To a Friend</i> ( <i>Un Amigo</i> )	Companionship and Solitude
5.	<i>To The Rivulet Aslon</i> ( <i>Al RiachueloAslon</i> ) <i>Despedida</i>	On leaving and living

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6. <i>To a Friend Who Asked Me for Verses (A Un Amigo Que Me Pidio Versos</i>	Customary threat and inspiration
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The first poem discusses the life of early inhabitants of the place that can be philosophically regarded as the idea of existence and survival. The second poem reveals the importance of the prominent mountains in Bicol that serve as the dwelling place of animals that may now be considered as endangered. The ironic reality on the gothic side of a place as an awesome presentation of nature's beauty is the theme of the third poem. It encompasses the idea that not all gloomy and dark are morbid; they are also sources of exquisiteness and splendor. The binary idea of companionship and solitude is evident in the fourth poem, where the poet considers Mayon volcano as his only companion during his solitude, day and night. It implies that the place was sparsely populated and there was an obvious lack of technological advancement.

The fifth poem suggests the choice between leaving the place in order to live and affection to it as his reason to stay. The theme of the last poem unveils the decade-long amazement of the poet towards the way of life of the Bicolanos who withstand volcano's constant threat of eruption amid its majestic presence.

## **The context and content of the Poems in understanding one's history**

### ***Mountain Dweller***

The poem *Mountain Dweller* describes the features and the kind of life of the native inhabitants of Bicol. Accordingly, the Spanish missionaries refer to the mountain-dwellers as *Igorote* until the 19<sup>th</sup> century. However, it may be the *Dumagat* rather than the Remontados who were originally referred to by Melendreras. The former are commonly called *Negritos* to whom the *Agtas* belonged based from the negritoethnolinguistic group. The first three lines of the poem state:

Jungle Man from Isarog am I,  
A stranger to enslavement  
I'm happy because I'm free,

It can be traced that Agta tribes are distributed in various regions of Luzon such as Regions 1, 2, 3, and 4, while some inhabit the mountainous areas of Camarines Norte and Camarines Sur. They are typically short, with dark skin and kinky hair, thick lips and have small noses. With the help of the National Commission on Indigenous People (NCIP), some are given the chance to attend school and be part of the mainstream community. In the early years, they simply adopt the name of the family whom they worked for and lived within the same household.

Also mentioned in the poem are the *remontados* which got its name from *remontar*, a Spanish verb which means “to flee to the hills”, “to frighten away”, and “go back to the mountains”. The *Remontados* were believed to be descendants of those who lived in the plains but preferred to go up in the mountains during the early Spanish occupation to avoid conquest. Consequently, due to intermarriage between them and the *negrito* groups, also called *Dumagats*, they were later called *tagabundok* (mountain dweller) or *magkakaingin* (slash-and-burn farmer).

The mention of Mt. Isarog asserts itself as the second highest mountain in the region given the physical features which the poem highlights. The dramatic situation in the poem suggests that the inhabitants in the mountain mainly include wild animals such as boars, deers, monkeys, serpents, and other reptiles, which were considered as the source of nourishment or exotic type of food during that period.

The jungle is my palace	,	The colossal serpents
Conquerors of a thousand		I feed on their meats
Wild boars and deers		I conquer wild beasts and
		reptiles
And of monkeys innumerable		I'm the king of Isarog

The speaker in the poem, “I,” seems to be very robust and uses ancient weapons, bow and arrow. In addition, the poem highlights the view of the ocean which still abounds with dolphins and whales. Similarly, the last two stanzas imply that the voice in the poem lives a very simple life with his partner. Their only worry is their freedom that they may have found somewhere in Mt. Isarog.

## ***The Mountains of Bicol***

The second poem, *The Mountains of Bicol*, originally *Los Montes Del Bicol*, absolutely refers primarily to Mt. Isarog and Mt. Mayon, being that they are the prominent mountains in the Bicol region. Mt. Isarog is found in Camarines Sur, while Mt. Mayon is in Albay. The entire poem speaks of serenity from the detailed description of sound produced by every creature which dwells in the mountains.

The voice in the poem suggests expression of nature's beauty, which Melendreras puts as beauty during the day and during the night. Note the following lines: "By day, that grandiose hymn, incomparable; by night, the monotonous and harsh sound". It denotes the idea that the place was characterized as ancient peaceful environment, where one can glean no trace of electricity. Notice in the following lines:

The mountains of Bicol are the home  
of beautiful serpents that inspire terror;  
of bees that gather up honey eagerly;  
and merry insects which imitate their ardour  
flying and buzzing in wild abandon

The poetic persona is aware of the creatures, from insects, wild animals, to reptiles and amphibians, which form part of the rich natural resources contributing to the general wonder of the place. The persona attributes to all these to God almighty. The image that one may envision of the locale in the poem is a mountainous place with sparse populated.

## ***To My Companions after Having Visited the Cave of Colapnitan on 11 August 1861***

The third piece, *To My Companions after having visited the Cave of Colapnitan on 11 August 1861* (*A MisCompañeros, Despues De Haber Visitado La Cueva De Colapnitan El 11 Agosto De 1861*) could have been written by Father Melendreras in 1861. The poem implies dedication to someone who visited the Colapnitan cave in Libmanan, Camarines Sur. It can be interpreted that the person referred to as companion in the poems is Fedor Jagor, who was an anthropologist who lived with the poet in Libmanan. In the book, *Travels in the Philippines*, ideas on relics that were found in the same cave were mentioned (Jagor,

1965). In the poem *El Ibal*, Eugenio (1996) mentioned the cave as *hantik* (weaver ants). *El Ibal* was popularly known before as Bicol's epic, but later literary scholars found out that it was just another poem in *Antologia Poetica* of Father Melendreras.

The entire poem reveals that the poet is inspired by the physical form of the cave. The presence of exotic birds contrasts the word *gothic*. The Bicol word *colapnit* literally means, bat, hence the name of the cave.

The tourism website of Libmanan describes the cave in modern times in the following lines:

Libmanan Caves National Park is a protected area of the Philippines located in Barangay Sigamot in the municipality of Libmanan, Camarines Sur in Bicol Region. It is centered on the massive 2,856 meter-long Colapnit Cave, the tenth longest cave in the Philippines. The park itself covers a total area of 19.4 hectares across the hilly farmlands of Libmanan, known to host at least 18 more limestone caves of varying lengths, shapes and wonder. It was established in 1934 by virtue of Proclamation No. 654. The park is famous as the habitat of thousand of bats whose guano has been gathered from the cave for decades. It is also home to swift lets and some great long-armed spiders of the species *Phrynus*, known to be poisonous. (Retrieved from [http://dbpedia.org:8890/page/Libmanan\\_Caves\\_National\\_Park](http://dbpedia.org:8890/page/Libmanan_Caves_National_Park) . Accessed on February 18, 2014)

### ***To a Friend***

The majestic Mayon Volcano could be the friend referred to in the fourth poem, *To a Friend (Un Amigo)* by poetic persona. The following lines prove the reference Mayon volcano as the friend.

In deep solitude  
I spend nights and days,  
and it is my happiness  
to watch the furious  
rotound eminence  
of Mayon exploding,  
tempestuous giant,  
whom now I call my friend.

The poem suggests friendship that transcends through time and place as implied in the aforementioned lines. The dramatic situation

implies that the image of Mayon volcano is anywhere in sight when one lives in the southern part of Camarines Sur and in Albay.

The poet describes the eruption of Mayon with word, *furious rotound eminence*, which is an oxymoron that implies his acceptance of ironic reality that despite the danger, the volcano possesses such a captivating beauty.

In a symbolic in-depth interpretation, Mayon signifies the Bicolano's strength and resiliency to face and to rise from the ravages caused by Mother Nature. Every eruption also becomes an opportunity for people to befriend other people. It may also point out to the satirical idea of Bobis (1997) in her novel, *Banana Heart Summer*, where she mentions, "one eruption, one mansion". She purposely means that every eruption is equivalent to one mansion of politicians who directly receives the calamity aid of the national government or other nations.

### ***To the Rivulet Aslon***

*To the Rivulet Aslon (Al Riachuelo Aslon Despedida)* can be interpreted and analysed based on the poet's leaving Guinobatan in the early months of 1867 because of illness. On October 7, 1867, he arrived in Manila to seek treatment but he died a day after. The poem has an obvious sad tone which reveals farewell note to speaker's present sanctuary. The idea on bidding goodbye are suggested in the following lines:

The rivulet received my parting gifts  
And, turned into a nymph, fell on her knees,  
And said, "Bring with you the sky to your native haven".

The term *rivulet* may mean the Bicol river as it is anciently called *tico*, a native term which means bent or curved. Moreover, the word *Aslon* also means *Ibalon*, the old name of the region. In a general interpretation, the poetic persona is evidently bidding goodbye to the Bicol region where he stayed for more than two decades.

### ***To a Friend Who Asked Me for Verses***

This short poem, *To a Friend Who Asked Me for Verses (A Un Amigo Que Me Pidio Versos)*, expresses the feeling of concern and apprehension of the poetic persona towards the Bicolanos, who may have served as inspiration for the poem. It mainly focuses on the likelihood of a volcanic eruption, which, despite the volcano's majestic appearance, constantly poses a threat to the inhabitants. Melendreras may have written this poem during his early years in the region, when he was not yet accustomed to the parishioners' way of life. The said ideas are evident in the following lines:

Can you tell, perhaps, because it is serene,  
that it does not harbour the fury and bitter rue  
with which by habit it floods that field  
with incandescent brimstones and sand?

The third stanza strengthens the anxiety of the voice in the poem; it mentions Cagsawa church, now a tourist attraction in Daraga. It is referred to in the poem as the *ruins of Daraga*. Historical data say the church was built in 1587 in the small town of Cagsawa. It was burned by Dutch pirates in 1636 but was rebuilt in 1724 by Franciscan Friars under Father Francisco Blanco. During that period, Daraga was only a barrio of Cagsawa. On June 12, 1772, Cagsawa was named Salcedo then later renamed as Daraga. It had passed through series of names, such as Budiao, Cagsawa, and Locsin. The name Budiao was given by Franciscan missionaries, while it was through RA 993 in 1954 which declared it as municipality of Daraga. However, five years later, RA 2805 changed its name to Locsin. The name Daraga was restored in 1967 through RA 4994 and in 2012, Daraga held its first Cagsawa Festival.

### **The deciphered material and Non Material culture in the poems**

The two interrelated aspects of human culture are the physical objects and the ideas associated with it. Material culture refers to the resources, spaces, and objects that people associate themselves with. They include the entire environment around the community. The said physical aspects help define the society's beliefs, behaviors, perceptions, and perspectives. On the other hand, non-material culture refers to the

nonphysical aspect such as values, norms, morals, beliefs, language, organizations, and institutions.

Moreover, one of the four qualities in which the vernacular temper finds expression, as listed by Galdon (1979) from the essay of Venus Salangang (1978) refers to the romantic nature of Philippine literature. Accordingly, it expresses itself in the tradition of sensibility, the tradition of romance and the pastoral tradition. He discusses pastoral tradition as:

The pastoral tradition persists today in the reaction to progress and industrialization and consists of a nostalgia for rural surroundings, rural beauty, rural life. It is the ancient call to go back to one's beginnings, to one's childhood self, which all men experience. (Galdon, 1979 p.13)

## **Discussion**

The thematic element of the six poems showed the various custombrismo style which also indicates history. The six poems are also in similar presentation and construction with the believed, Bicol epic, "*Ibalong*," which was later proven to have been written by the same poet, Melendreras. It was titled *El Ibal* in his book, *Antologia Poetica*. In 2013, Realubit, a retired UP Professor and a Bicol scholar, renounced that *Ibalong* is not a Bicol Epic but a long narrative poem of Father Melendreras. The idea was first published in the article of Hornedo (1984) in the *Journal of Philippine Studies*.

The custombrismo style is also depicted as the general tone of the six poems. Likewise, from the deciphered themes, all the translated poems can be treated as personal accounts of the poet during his stay in the Bicol region. The poems of Melendreras are somewhat similar to Antonio Pigafetta's narrative in his *First Voyage*. He was a part of a crew of 265 to 280 men in five ships who joined the voyage of Magellan. As discussed by Mojares (2002), Pigafetta's narration of the Philippines is driven by more pragmatic concerns of the expedition—the markings of the navigation routes, description of ethnological features, survey of natural resources, and initiation of political and trade contacts.

Accordingly, Pigafetta's account remains inadequately studied as *text* since it particularly pertains to the "discovery" of the Philippine islands. His narrative is considered both a distinct literary creation and a key source in Philippine historiography just like the Hispanic poems as materials in this paper. The mode of representation is determined not only by the anticipations of the narrator, but the actual experiences in the voyage in Pigafetta's case. In Melendrera's case, the lived experiences and the personal accounts of the poet served as actual representation and expression of the Bicol soil.

The poems also served as both Hispanic legacy and material in teaching regional culture and history. They are part of Philippine writings under the Spanish colonialism. The content analysis revealed material and non-material culture of the Bicol region. However, the poems do not carry the rudiments of a secular literature which marks the basic influence of this era. It is far from the *awit* (song) and *corrido* (metrical romance), the two narrative poems that are sung and chanted and never simply read (Eugenio, 1988).

The poems of Father Melendreras are also far from Balagtas' poems that establish their significance to Philippine history (Lumbera, 1997). Instead, it uncovers the sad reality that the long-known Bicol epic *Ibalong* is in fact, just another poem of a Spanish Friar. Nevertheless, this paper posed the idea that literature, history and cultural identity are always interrelated. In addition, Hornedo (2000) explains, "Culture is the mode and pattern of the encounter of humans with their environment. Mode is determined by horizon of consciousness; pattern is the recurrent method of human action vis-à-vis elements of the elements of environment. The method is guided by the horizon of consciousness of historical agents" (p.14).

The poems by Father Melendreras indeed represent an authentic literary legacy to the Filipinos in general, and the Bicolanos in particular. The first poem, *The Mountain Dweller*, focuses on the early inhabitants of the place; the second poem, *Mountains of Bicol*, highlights Mt Isarog and Mayon volcano as habitat of exotic and endemic wild creatures; the third poem, *To My Companions After Having Visited The Cave of Colapnitan on 11 August 1861*, presents the beauty of nature in Colapnitan Cave, which until now is considered as one of the tourists

attractions in Camarines Sur (accessed from <http://www.philchm.ph/featured-cave/>); the fourth poem, *To a Friend Who Ask me for Verses*, regards Mayon Volcano as the poet's inspiration and constant companion day and night; the fifth poem, *To the Rivulet Aslon*, reveals the old name of Albay province; and the sixth poem, *To a Friend Who Asked me for Verses*, is considered to be dedicated to the Bicolanos with reverence to their way of life along with the threat of the majestic Mayon Volcano.

The six poems therefore may be used as literary materials discussing regional history. This paper's contention finds ally in the idea of Lumbera (1997) who states that "A course in Philippine Literature cannot be a simple chronology of 'masterpieces' or a parade of fine writers; otherwise Filipino literary works, given their roots in contact with the culture of colonizers, might appear as nothing but an array of pallid reflections or indigenized importations" (p 4).

This paper also adheres to the idea of Rizal in his annotation of the work of Antonio De Morga, in 1609, *Sucesos de las Islas Filipinas*, as mentioned by Mojares (2002) in the article, "Rizal Reading Pigafetta." Rizal saw the Spaniard's work as a convenient peg for tracing a counter-narrative of the Filipino past. He further inquired into connections among Philippine and Malay languages and the links that could be drawn from the study of customs and material culture in the Malay region and the wider Asian continent. In the same manner, in this paper, the poems of Melendreras contain ideas on both material and non-material culture of the Filipinos, Bicolanos in particular.

## **Conclusion and Recommendations**

The study traced the themes of the six poems originally written in Spanish. As published materials translated in English, they served as Hispanic legacy and proof of the 19<sup>th</sup> century Spanish and Filipino relations. The poems revealed both material and non-material culture of Bicolanos.

Based on the materials used in this paper, history and culture are inherent in literary materials, Hispanic poems in particular. Those materials can be used in teaching Philippine literature, particularly regional literature. This paper studied six poems of Melendreras being

authentic literary materials from the Bicol region that can be considered good sources of understanding one's history and culture. The poems can be used in teaching Bicol history and culture since they reveal ideas about the Bicol region, in terms of historical, cultural, and physical aspects. This goes without saying that aside from the popular genres like prose, both fiction and non-fiction type, as well as prose narratives such as legends, myths, and folktales, poems may also be used in the study of culture and history. In addition, the poems are regarded as 19<sup>th</sup> century relations as Hispanic literary expressions.

Moreover, this paper suggests that culture and history are always embedded in literature. Every genre hints a contextual representation of a particular period or era which any nation has experienced. In the case of poetry, it is indeed an expression not only of emotions but also of wide array of subjects that may be as old or older than history.

Furthermore, the poems reveal current Spanish romanticism, local color, and costumbrismo involved as well as Spanish contemporary formal conventions. The tradition of "costumbrismo," as Hornedo (2000) points out is the description of local customs and practices designed to awaken the public to the variety of cultural forms and institutions. Apparently, the same idea was applied by Rizal in his novels, such as allusions to myths and legends, types of food, children's games folksongs, and rituals.

For further study, this researcher recommends that other poems from various regions of the country be traced and be used in teaching local culture and history. Literary materials from respective places may provide rich source of people's way of life and ancient customary practices. Literary materials written in various respective regional languages may also be translated for wider dissemination and understanding of Filipinos and the entire global community toward cultural understanding and social identity.

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