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# 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 perspective in the educational landscape, and the literary classroom is revealed to be one of the classes that can quickly adopt this change. Teachers of literature began to curate on their syllabi texts that will signify the global feeling and experience of the pandemic. This transforms the literary classroom into a space that directly connects the experiences of students to this ongoing health crisis. The different literary texts read in classes are portals for students to understand the experience of illness as both historical and sociological phenomena. With these events in class, the pandemic becomes both a learning opportunity and a challenge for teachers and students. This paper examines the function of Philippine literature as contextualized in health and illness while teaching during the pandemic, the role of the literature teachers as active agents during global crises, and the value of literature classes for making sense of the global pandemic. Through pedagogical criticism as the methodology employed in this paper, texts like Manuel E. Arguilla's "Caps and Lower Case," Benjamin Bautista's "A Summer Goodbye," and other texts that show the rich and valuable role of studying literature about illness and health at the time of COVID-19 are analyzed. The discourses about the figure of teacher are also used to theorize on the role of the literature teacher during the pandemic. Lastly, the construction of a

literary classroom during the COVID-19 pandemic is examined using online articles on education contextualized in the pandemic. This paper uses theoretical paradigms such as critical pedagogy and health and medical humanities to strengthen its framework for analyzing the texts. To fully understand lessons from pandemic time teaching, the paper demonstrates a sample practice of teaching health and illness literature through an online application, *Perusall*.

### **Keywords**

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

## Introduction

The COVID-19 pandemic lockdown magnifies societal issues while illuminating significant human experiences. These matters affect our lives in different ways. Left and right, we receive calls for papers and produce literature about this ravaging pandemic. We also face challenges in navigating our classes to online platforms from the usual face-to-face class sessions. During this crisis, we learn and innovate novel practices from these experiences. Slavoj Žižek comments, “[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). 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” revealed to us, it is how the old normal perpetuates a system that condones and downplays a lot of societal problems. And to put an end to the old system, our educational system must be rethought to consider these issues as important factors, moving forward. This may happen through reflecting on our learning materials in our classrooms like Philippine literature about health and illness, understanding our roles as teachers during the pandemic, and connecting this world crisis vis-à-vis the condition and status of our educational system. Through this, the literary classroom and literary texts about health and illness may hone the agency of literature teachers to contribute to the recuperation of our educational system at the time of the pandemic by providing new practices in teaching and developing students’ knowledge on health and illness.

Literary texts should open the imaginative world of the students and challenge them to think critically and respond empathically to their environments (Appleman 3; Hogan 6). Teachers design their literature classes based on different institutional and personal factors. They 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. 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 perceive the education system. This paper aims to discuss literary texts and discourses about teaching during the pandemic. By criticizing the pedagogical practices and system, teachers were able to highlight important lessons from their profession that aims to uphold the values of humanity and the continuity of a progressive society. The experiences of literature teachers and the literary texts they supply from their classes, such as Philippine literature like Jose Rizal's *Noli Me Tangere*, Manuel E. Arguilla's "Caps and Lower Case," and Benjamin Bautista's "A Summer Goodbye," are indispensable, especially during 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 will only create 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 the practice of 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 closely the text, pay attention to its formal structure, and mimic its language (Martin 96), instead of exploring the themes and analyzing them from perspectives of racial oppression, gender issues, or in this matter, health and illness. From this context, the study of literature has become a missed teachable opportunity for the Philippine educational system to learn about the rich Filipino culture and languages of healing. By supplying texts about snobs, romances, and American life, colonial education has become another missed opportunity to reflect on Filipino identity

and cultivate the Filipino history by parroting the language of colonizers and alienating readers from their own culture.

Historically, one cannot deny that issues or themes about health and illness are observable in the development of Philippine literature. Philippine literature often depicts health or illness as either part of the plot development, conflict, or struggle of an important character in a story. During the Spanish colonization, the poem “May Bagyo Ma’t May Rilim,” “Though It Is Stormy and Dark” (1605) narrates the experience of the speaker as someone who needs to “renew [his] strength” (line 22) through the holy book even though he is weak and “disabled and limping” (line 25). The speaker wishes to gain his strength through the Catholic faith, which reflects the condition or experience of the Filipinos during this time. Similarly, during the American occupation, Dr. Arturo Rotor wrote “Zita” (1930), a short story about a teacher who moved to a different 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 broken heart to a situation similar to having 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,” or “The Gambler” a narrative poem about the grief of a mother who has lost her child: “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 turned the mother to become a *panggingera* (*pangginggi* is a rummy-based card game). She gambled a lot to the point that she was also neglecting her own health. Meanwhile, under the Philippine republic (Lumbera 180), Alberto S. Florentino’s play *Cadaver* (1954) presents the life of Torio, who lives in a Manila cemetery and is enduring poverty. In this play, Torio suffered from a cut wound caused by a bone from a grave he ransacked. This wound symbolizes how the poor suffer from the inequalities of 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 also reveals issues concerning oppression and the probable 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 theme of the play about absurdity and proletarian struggle.

From the Spanish period to the establishment of the Philippine republic, one may see how the historical development of Philippine literature always incorporates the condition of health and illness into literary texts. The texts above showed how in Philippine literary tradition, illness and health are troped into the world of fiction as either an integral part of the plot, a motivation of a character, or an accessory to the story. These texts are like "tissues," as Barthes states it, and reading texts as tissues is similar to dissecting human bodies. The parallelism between texts and human bodies creates an analogy: to dissect a body is to study medicine while to analyze a text is to study literature. There are two evident things from this analogy. First, illness and health are always imagined in the Philippine literature, and second, colonial education falls short to accommodate more progressive pedagogical strategies in teaching interdisciplinary texts. Colonial education has permeated throughout the American occupation and has affected the school curriculum, policies, and instructions developed throughout the history of the Philippine educational system (Martin 91–92). The downside of this is having little room 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. With this kind of colonial orientation, the Philippine educational system during the American period fails to render health and other social conditions as indissociable in a literary text.

### *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 to the pandemic time teaching. Reading texts about health and illness develops interdisciplinary thinking in the discipline of 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 future profession better. The exposure of his students to poetry helps them develop their judgment and “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. Interdisciplinarity, 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 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 be healed or not. The experience and construction of healing and illness, from Eagleton's essay, prove that health is also political and ideological. Integrating these kinds of texts inside our classroom can be challenging at this time of pandemic for literature teachers. However, the skills that the students can gain from reading texts about illness and health such as analyzing power dynamics and reflecting on the human condition are 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 "l"*, this burden can be even more daunting for English or language teachers who have apprehension about using literature in their classes (12). This proves that teachers of literature have an inherent apprehension and anxiety that can be even heightened by a global pandemic like the coronavirus.

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 scientists but as well through the lens and perspective of other disciplines such as the social sciences and medicine. This proves that literature, like twenty-first-century trends in education, can 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. Teachers who are trained in this field are expected to learn both key concepts about literature and medicine to guide students. 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 medicine students 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 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. Their classrooms can be the places where they can build a community that connects them with each other at this time of isolation and social distancing. The literature class can cater to these exercises in confronting this global problem and moving to a place of empowerment and a better future.

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 during the pandemic, proving that learning is always bound to happen. Learning is inevitable and it is always present. Education appropriates the learning experience into an organized system. The pandemic affects both the learning experience and educational system, and the literary 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 Philippine literature about health and illness can help students communicate and translate their feelings, whether they be anguish, hope, or frustrations. Furthermore, these literary classrooms, by curating different texts about health and illness from East to West, open 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, and this paper also follows this by practicing a relatively new method of writing, analyzing, and researching teachers' practices or educational systems. Pedagogical criticism 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 our literary 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 study closely reads literary texts and interprets them using the approaches on 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 discourses on speeches, news articles, or essays. One of the challenges of the study is to look for materials that directly discuss any of the following

topics, such as the relevance of teaching medical humanities through Philippine literature classes, research on the pedagogy of illness and health in Philippine literature, the role of the literature teacher during the pandemic, or the role of Philippine literature classes during a pandemic. Because of the lack of 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, and that can be analyzed as causes for overdetermination. An overdetermined event is 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 literary 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 Rizal's *Noli Me Tangere*, one will notice how illness plays an important role in developing the text's narrative. In *Ibong Adarna*, King Fernando gets extremely ill after a terrible dream where he sees his youngest son Don Juan being killed by two evil figures. This has set the action and conflict of the Filipino epic. The illness of King Fernando pushes his sons on a journey of finding 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” prove how this illness is a painful experience. However, no matter how excruciating this experience is, Rizal offers his work as a cure for social cancer that his fellow countrymen experience. He envisions that through his work Filipinos can reflect and be liberated from their oppressive situations. His novel, in this sense, becomes an antidote for social cancer. Reading, based on Rizal’s belief, then medicates the consciousness of the Filipinos, whether those who were blindly following the Spanish rule or those who remained apolitical in the time of colonization. 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. These texts once employed in the literary classroom can let the students witness how health and illness be imagined during the Spanish colonial period and through a classic Philippine epic.

Meanwhile, other than the two examples above, epidemics are also depicted in several Philippine literary texts. The works of Manuel Arguilla and Benjamin Bautista narrate stories about the suffering of people from tuberculosis (TB) during the American period. Arguilla’s “Caps and Lower Case” follows the life of a proofreader named Alfredo Santos. This story unravels the troubles of labor exploitation from 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 him suddenly 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 never granted:

“I’ll tell you what 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 antagonist aura that oppresses and aggravates the ailing condition of the poor employee more. Illness from this story entangles itself with the complications of middle-class struggle and 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)

This condition elicits the worst experience of an individual who cannot afford to lose his work and earn money for his family. This problem further complicates the illness that the poor Fred Santos experiences. The text reveals



how labor and health issues coincide within the grinds of the literary world. This allows readers to understand how the human condition is so vulnerable to power play produced by the complex and intersectional system of society. Through Fred, readers are given a glimpse of how a country's economic status directly affects its citizen's labor system and health conditions.

Bautista's "A Summer Goodbye" narrates the summer experience of an unnamed eighteen-year-old female main character who is battling tuberculosis. Similarly, during this time, 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 are forced to "get divorced" and sent back to their families for isolation (53). Further, they added that places like "city slums" tend to have poorer health care systems which make it harder for women from a poor family 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, just like how other women suffer because of the malignant disease and the struggle in getting medication. The unnamed protagonist suffers from a moderately advanced tuberculosis and must endure a life of 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. The only person she can talk to at this time is Father Ty, a white Australian priest. But 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 protect her from the outside environment.

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 one's health. The depiction of illness and health conditions in this text also reflects the development of medical procedures decades 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 in Philippine literature are *Biyahe ng mga Ibong Dayo*, or *The Flight of Migratory Birds* (2013), by Luis Gatmaitan and *Orosa-Nakpil, Malate* (2006) by Louie Mar Gangcuangco. Gatmaitan's *The Flight of Migratory Birds*, on the one hand, 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 novel *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 lets the readers empathize with the characters through its sentimental tone and digest the narrative of suffering. However, it challenges the readers as well to imagine a better the 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 entangle their respective narrative to social issues like homophobia, safe sex, labor, and family relationships. The literary and medical imagination from these texts could help students know more about the nature of infectious diseases while associating their perception of the real world and the text's world. Furthermore, these texts illuminate the local imagination of Filipino authors about epidemics/pandemics and how the Philippines responds to global health crises. In these recent examples of epidemics, power and authority 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' 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, a 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 prove two points. First, two different fields such as medicine and arts can coexist in one cultural form. This is how interdisciplinary works, as Altschuler mentions, 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, the discussion above proves that power dynamics are part of our lives, and oftentimes, this can also be appropriated within the fictional world of stories. Because of this, discussing these stories in literature classes is also promising. Using these texts in the curriculum or syllabus is a teachable moment to introduce key ideas about health, illness, and their relationship with power and authority. 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 becomes an effect that aims to teach 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 the 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 existing health condition. Additionally, the main character is embroiled with her feelings toward the only person who gives her attention and care during her 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, in this story, becomes the result of the experience of isolation. Unlike Fred in the first 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 part of the plot. This helps train readers to first spot the existing health conditions by reading the signs and symptoms of an ailment; second, to familiarize themselves with medical terms and conditions; and lastly, to recognize the connection of illness into a larger structure that can always worsen the existing condition of an individual, similar to Charon’s training of medical students. With this kind of reading and studying texts, the practice, and encounter of reading Philippine literature about illness and health develop a different kind of

learning experience for students away from the old tradition of colonial education.

### *The Pandemic-Time Literature Teacher*

In the first quarter of the pandemic in 2020, the lockdown continued to cripple the whole Philippine society. Former President Rodrigo Duterte, who initially made fun of the virus, suddenly backpaddled his statements, warning the public about the dangers of the coronavirus and considering it a serious threat. Every person in the country was put into isolation. Social distancing was imposed on everyone going out. Then every night, people were both terrified and annoyed by a late-night press conference of the president. This press conference made everyone endure an old man ranting or cursing on national television. Meanwhile, former Vice President Leni Robredo also delivered public announcements and speeches through her social media accounts at that time to update the public on the state of the country during the pandemic. This observation reflects a picture of how different the two highest figures in the country are. While the former president 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 on a considerate schedule for the public to watch in the daytime. She would deliver a more concise yet detailed plan for the pandemic, which she would always offer to government officials as a suggestion to solve the problems. In a speech in August 2020, Robredo enumerated several concerns that our country was facing and the solutions that the government can do. Some of these issues are the following: ensuring that government agencies' budgets should consider 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. Aside from these concerns, former Vice President Robredo also emphasized the importance of the continuity of education 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 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 give them a sense of security for tomorrow.)* (my trans.)

Teachers from her speech are part of the last line of defense against COVID-19, and they deserve to earn more as they sacrifice their lives in teaching the future citizens of this country so that they can secure a better future that is safe from the effects of the pandemic. This speech empowers teachers to imagine their roles as the vanguard of society's survival and recuperation. While the speech emphasizes the call for better pay for both teachers and medical frontliners, it also highlights the shared tasks of teachers and medical practitioners, which are healing and preserving human society.

This task of the teacher is reiterated by Ms. Lou Sabrina Ongkiko, a recipient of Metrobank Foundation's Outstanding Filipino Teacher Award. Ongkiko delivered her speech about the role of teachers at the time of the pandemic and the meaning of being an "Outstanding Filipino" during the second year of the pandemic. Ongkiko and other awardees spoke to the public through an online conferment ceremony in September 2021. In her speech, she asks the public about what kind of outstanding Filipino they wanted to be. She answers this by citing her co-awardees and their great contribution to their fields. As she concludes her short speech, she highlights 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 constructs the figure of the teacher during a pandemic similar to Vice-President Robredo’s speech. This is a teacher who carries the tasks of “protecting” the child of the present for the future and of “bringing” the best out of every child, maximizing their potential. And once the students feel like they are winners at this time of the pandemic, this is also the time when teachers can feel that they are winning by fulfilling their task, which is, as to wit from the same speech, “a pandemic 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 values and carrying the important lessons of this health crisis to the next generation. The figure of the teacher, again from this discourse, becomes an important agent of healing and facilitating authority.

Another figure of power is a doctor who teaches and writes at this time of the pandemic. If from 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, Dr. Ronnie Baticulon’s essay explicates the roles of a doctor during this pandemic which includes the task of teaching amongst other:

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, one who carries a stethoscope and stands wearing an unstained white coat. Nevertheless, 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 heavier during the pandemic, for they too have to be researchers, leaders, or advocates. For society to figure out the true nature of the virus, the doctor-researcher should study it, 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, allowing 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 in the future (138). On this account, one can see that the figure of the teacher can as well overlap with 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 proves the necessity of interdisciplinarity in the field of medicine and medical education, while as a doctor-teacher he exercises his authority to enable healing that will transcend the present time.

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 titles that narrate the same theme, one can connect different fields and help students

learn more about the human experience from the artistic world of literature vis-à-vis other intellectual and scholarly fields like medicine. This practice of connecting the field of humanities which Dr. Baticulon exercises is similar to 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 lead students to understand health and illness that is grounded on Filipino experience. Through this, students are trained to learn more about humanity while at the same time familiarizing themselves with 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). At this rate, teachers of literature help to defend society from ignorance and illiteracy, thus combatting these problems by strengthening the social fabric. This also expands Eagleton's notion of healing as power and authority to pedagogical practices. This means that teachers of literature practice both power and authority to allow healing and recuperation for society. Through the literary classroom, the global crisis can be fully comprehended through this kind 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. For the past year, educators rush to different 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. These shifting modes of learning and planning caused teachers to experience pandemic burnout as Tim Pressley studies in his article "Factors Contributing to Teacher Burnout During COVID- 19" (325). The pandemic

magnifies these problems, from the lack of technological investment in our institutions for computers, printers, and learning management systems to online resources for libraries. These problems are just part of the bigger problem 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 for this negligence and be accountable. Teachers should organize and lobby together with other nongovernment 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. Lastly, teachers should use education to confront the problem rather than celebrate the impasse as "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 undeniably affects the current educational system. There is inequality, and teachers may take a break from school, but it should not blind nor hinder them. Together with the available literary materials and the continuous lobbying for a safer back-to-school for every Filipino, teachers may use the literary classrooms to respond to this collective trauma that everyone is experiencing. 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. As 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 plays an important role to pave way for resistance—something we can always appropriate for our classes. Other than this, many scholars also study global crises, such as climate change and the AIDS pandemic, and their educative benefits to their classes. 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). Meanwhile, 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 prove that literature can be employed in the literary classes to respond to the different crises that humans experience across time.

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 literature 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 literary classroom to be transformed into a space to practice agency, activism, and healing by providing an area for students to practice 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 *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 effect of COVID on their lives to become more responsible citizens and vigilant for the possibility of encountering new forms of health crisis in the future. In doing this, science subjects are important to the learning experience of the students; however, literature, arts, and even history classes are also useful spaces 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 neglecting the healthcare system, portray apathetic characters, or even depict questionable representations, students can be trained to practice criticism and interrogate different structures presented in the imaginary world. Literary classrooms that allow 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, relate their realities to the condition presented by texts, or use literary texts as an inspiration for creative projects or advocacies. This integration of different fields transforms our classes into a space that invites the global crisis to be part of the development of the episteme of survival at the time of continuous mutation of a virus, war, 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*

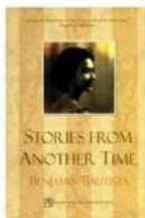
Practicing active learning in the literary classroom requires engagement, critical thinking, and community building. With the pandemic widely spreading all over the world, literary classes have migrated to different learning management systems, creating new challenges and avenues for students to continue studying. With this premise, teachers and students could still use a dialectical method in teaching literary texts and learning through them. Studying literary texts similar to what 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)

From a constructivist lens, studying texts can be a moment for both teachers and students to engage with one another, and then to use online tools or learning systems to hone students' skills. By becoming connected through the text world and 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. 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

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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).

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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 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 are granted the power to develop a discourse through the communal reading process. This also veers away from the isolated form of reading by allowing students and teachers to comment on one another's annotations from the text. With the task, "Focus on how the literary element or literary feature develops the theme or issue of the text," the student needs 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 as a system. The activity also wants to expound on this skill of recognizing 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.

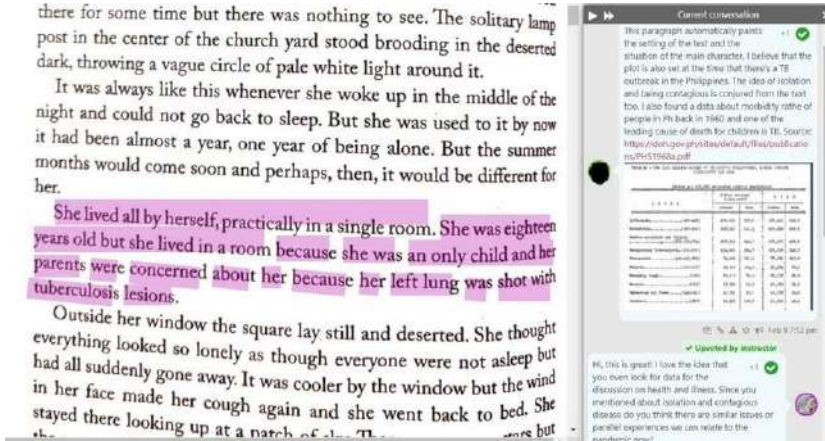


Fig. 3. Sample annotations

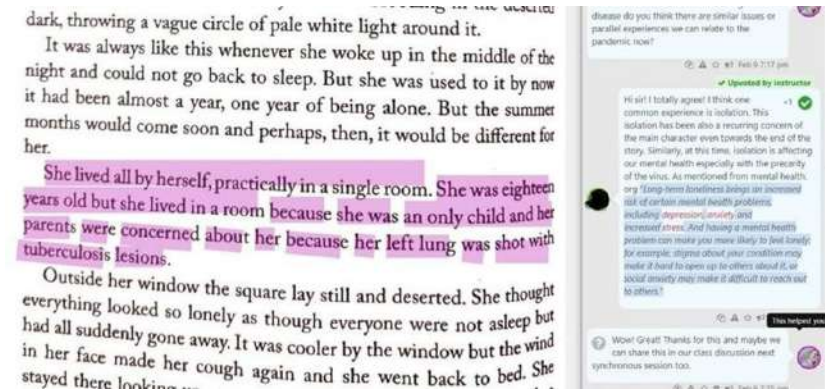


Fig. 4. Sample annotations

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 pushes the student to expound on the answer and further investigate the text. The student continues to interact and even provide news articles about mental health during the pandemic and provide 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 and allows them to freely converse with one another too. In this manner, the annotation and close-reading activity become a shared experience of students who read by expounding 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 may create worksheets for activities that expound 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 from the American occupation. 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 a chance to depart from what Maria Luisa Torres Reyes calls the “first decade of American colonial education” (20)—a type of education that neglects to hone critical thinking and skills. 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 students is now moving to a practice that creates a “web of meanings” from the World Wide Web. This lets students know more about their identities, culture,

and history, or even explore the interdisciplinarity of literature and medical humanities.

## Conclusion

American colonial education in the Philippines has an undeniable impact on teaching literature, as Martin and Torres mention. Whether through curriculum or instruction, the first decade of studying literature is highly teacher-centered, leading students to parrot words and read texts that alienate them. Interdisciplinarity and critical thinking are left with no room for practice. But as time passes by, more Filipino writers and teachers have explored writing, and Maria Lulu Torres Reyes called this 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 is often called local color. Local color 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 text provides more sense of comfortability than alienation. 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 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 familiarized with first the signs and symptoms of TB and second, 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 a worst-case scenario once oppres-

sion and internal conflicts overpower the individual. Understanding the text through these layers can lead students to further investigate the text that they encounter and even relate them to their realities by reading scientific or medical studies that coincide with the narrative of the text. These ideas prove two things—first, studying texts about health and illness empowers both teachers and students to carry out the responsibility of healing society; and second, learning inside our classroom is a web of connections from the outside to the inside. The encounter of students with texts about illness and health, through the teacher facilitator, authorizes them to become active agents of the recovery and recuperation of society.

The world inside schools is connected to the world outside. According to Tompkins, “I’ve come to realize that the classroom is a microcosm of the world” (656). Tompkins thinks that the literary classroom is a miniature version of the world outside, mimesis but a reduced version. (I used to believe in this, but as COVID-19 happened, I would like to depart from it. I do not think that our classrooms are a minimized or atomized version of the world anymore. I think our classroom is our world.) 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 are lessons we can collect from our teaching experiences at this time of the pandemic, and they can be expounded by the texts teachers deploy in the classroom like the Philippine literature on health and illness. 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 the important values of society while reworking a broken system through her expertise, values, and students learning experiences. Lastly, the global crisis asks teachers and students to confront it through education.

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