



Review Article

Dapitan in Rizal's Time: A Criticism of his Poems

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ABSTRACT



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This study critically examines the socio-political, economic, and religious conditions of Dapitan during Dr. Jose P. Rizal's exile (1892–1896) through an analysis of five poems he composed in the city: Hymn to Talisay, Josephine, Josephine, The Song of the Traveller, To Don Ricardo Carnicero, and My Retreat. Using historical criticism as a framework, the study contextualizes these literary works within the colonial period, revealing their significance in understanding the lived experiences of Dapitanons under Spanish rule. The findings highlight Rizal's depiction of Dapitan as a place of solitude and intellectual growth, reflecting his ideals of education, nationalism, and resilience amid oppression. His poems illustrate the transformation of Dapitan from a neglected settlement into a flourishing community through his civic initiatives in education, infrastructure, and agriculture. Additionally, the study identifies themes of nostalgia, social injustice, and hope for liberation embedded in Rizal's poetic expressions. The research underscores how literature serves as a historical artifact, offering insights into the socio-political realities of its time. Furthermore, the study recommends the integration of Rizal's lesser-known works into academic curricula to deepen students' appreciation of his contributions beyond Noli Me Tangere and El Filibusterismo. Ultimately, this research enriches the discourse on Rizal's legacy in Dapitan and reinforces the enduring relevance of his writings in fostering nationalism and historical consciousness.

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Introduction

The heroism of Dr. Jose P. Rizal is a manifestation of strength of the Filipinos to face the challenges of time with valor. His contributions to attain freedom bring about changes in the lives of the Filipinos and that makes him everyone's epitome. Ocampo (1998) and Bayron (2018) said that the life of Dr. Jose P. Rizal is a living example among Filipinos to live with their intelligence and help bring the country to the pedestal through intelligence and abilities. The talents and skills of our national hero are evidences of a god-chosen human being and a teacher chosen by God. He gave his everything to all which made him a teacher who taught through examples. Jalosjos (2009) added that Rizal was the first to build a school for Dapitanons, aimed to establish specialization in Hongkong and believed that the Philippines can acquire freedom through education. It cannot be argued that Rizal is the source of strength and hope of the Philippines which is observed during his four-year stay in Dapitan. His four years of exile in the city is not actually a torture for him but an opportunity. He spared his time imparting his talents, skills and abilities as well as his knowledge to the Dapitanons and continued his idealism for the improvement and attainment of freedom of his beloved country. His arrival in Dapitan according was an inspiration to all Dapitanons (Verstraeten, 2009; Jalosjos, 2009; Bayron, 2018).

This paper discussed the situation of Dapitan City, a place of exile as shown in the poems of Dr. Jose Rizal, an exile for four years in the city because of his anti-Spanish doings. Rizal wrote five poems in Dapitan City during his four-year stay – “My Retreat”, the longest poem penned by Rizal which he wrote in response to his mother Teodora Alonzo known also as Doña Teodora's will that talked about his serene life as an exile in Dapitan and was sent to the latter on October 22, 1895; “Josephine, Josephine” which was dedicated to Josephine Bracken, a sixteen-year old Irish woman from Hongkong who came to Dapitan with her blind American engineer foster parent George Tauffer. Rizal was often sad because of his solitary life plus the death of his beloved Leonor Rivera that he needed someone to cheer him up and to dispel his melancholic mood; “The Song of the Traveller” which he wrote out of gladness and out of his joyous thoughts of resuming his travels because at last the Malacañan sent him a message freeing him and once more he was going to travel to Europe and Cuba again; “To Don Ricardo Carnicero” which he wrote to greet his guardian, Don Ricardo a happiest birthday; and lastly, “Hymn to the Talisay Tree” which he wrote for his pupils to sing in honor of the talisay tree where he used to hold classes in his home in Talisay, Dapitan. His favorite rendezvous with his pupils was under the talisay tree which the place was named after.

The researcher problematized the social, religious, economic and political conditions and well-being of the place by exploiting

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the poems written by Dr. Jose Rizal in Dapitan in 1892-1896. The “context” refers to the environment in which action and outcome occurs. In this paper, the five literary pieces written by Rizal were very much useful in describing the situation of the city during the Spanish period. These pieces of literature served as evidence of what was going on at the time at which the works were produced, and that also looked at historical events to explain the content of literary works written by an exile who became the pride of the Malayan race after his significant and nationalistic battle for the good of the country and the humanity.

Methodology

The study utilized the qualitative research method through historical criticism. Data was gathered from reading materials, journals, books, internet and theses. Data gathered from readings was the basis of the present study. Words and phrases were central during the analysis as the study identified the context for which the poems emerged. The social, religious, economic and political aspects were problematized and were looked into in the poems written by Rizal in Dapitan City, Zamboanga del Norte.

Results and Discussion

Poems written by Dr. Jose P. Rizal found in Dapitan City, Zamboanga del Norte were “Hymn to Talisay”, “Josephine, Josephine”, “The Song of the Traveller”, “To Don Ricardo Carnicero” and “My Retreat”. The poem “My Retreat” was a poem written by Rizal which was composed of twenty-four stanzas describing to his mother the actual world he lived in. The poem “Hymn to Talisay” was written by Rizal for his pupils in Dapitan to sing whenever they rendezvous under the talisay tree.

Rhythm and meter are poetic elements which caused the regular recurrence of the accent in Rizal’s poems. The four poems were metered and rhymed, and were composed of twelve syllables per line except for “Josephine, Josephine” which was composed of six syllables. The poems significantly manifested the pulse and beat those readers feel and eventually derived their sense of rhythm from everyday life and from their experiences with language and music. They experienced the rhythm of day and night, the seasonal rhythm of the year, the beat of their hearts and the rise and fall of their chests as they breathe in and out in the poems of Rizal. Oneness and solitude are vividly represented in the poems. Rizal gave life to an idea to inform the readers of his hardships and sorrows and his desire to attain happiness despite difficulties.

He extended his well-thought plans for the improvement of Dapitan, and Carnicero’s positive outlooks and longing for the benefit of Dapitan in his poem “To Don Ricardo Carnicero”. In his “Hymn to Talisay” was a clear portrayal of the exceptional strength of the Filipinos, thereby extending his strong admiration

to the Filipinos. In his poem he was also nostalgic, and wanted his reader to feel his treasured memories of his childhood. Moreover, “My Retreat” showed Rizal’s idealism and his aspiration to gain independence diplomatically, not through rebellion. He made fun of his life in his poem “The Song of the Traveller” when he compared happiness and sorrow, and trials and sacrifices. The lines seemed to foreground his failures in attaining happiness. He exposed his ill feelings toward the Spanish government in the poem aforementioned, and magnified envy toward him by the Spaniards because of his wit which later led to an accusation of a sin he had not committed. In his letter to Blumentritt on September 28, 1896 (Jalosjos, 2009) he discussed his happiness for the approval of the Spanish government for his travel to Cuba to help Cubans. He expressed his sadness for prolonged approval, at the same time hatred because of the betrayal done by the governor-general in return of his pure desire to help.

Rizal’s unique literary style in presenting his literary pieces made life complexities filled with pleasures and fun. Through Rizal’s writings, readers understood and made sense of the world around them and deepened their perspective in dealing with things and situations happening in the society that helped them explore the human condition and analyzed how and why people think and feel to things surrounding and affecting them. Through this, readers developed their thoughts analytically and learned a lot of human passions realistically experienced in real life and experienced from the mankind as they had seen the world through the eyes of the national hero who wrote the poems. Human experiences taught them various insights of life as these poems represented more than just a historical and cultural artefact.

Depicted in the poems of Rizal specifically written in Dapitan City were happenings in the lives of Dapitanons during his exile. In his poems, strengths and weaknesses of the Dapitanons during the Spanish regime were exemplified. Their weaknesses were manifested in Rizal’s poems – Dapitanons lacked education during his exile which led to timidity. They did not have the strength to send their predicaments to the Spanish government. However, they found glory in fighting against the Spaniards because of the aspiration of Rizal’s sense of freedom. These meant that Dapitanons were strong and determined to overcome trials and remained stronger in meeting all the hindrances in life. Dapitanons’ strong determination and bravery all together brought the spirit of nationalism and humanism including the love of nature and the love of God. The poems reflected the social, religious, economic, and political conditions of Dapitan City in the eyes of the national hero during the Spanish regime. The table below shows the conditions abovementioned.

Literary Pieces (Poems)	Conditions of Dapitan City during the Spanish Period			
	Social	Religious	Economic	Political
Hymn to Talisay	Dapitan was a very peaceful and calm place where he could rest his weary brain. It has a spreading beach with sands soft and fine. Rizal find Dapitan as a favorable place for reflection, for a careful decision making toward the common good of the humanity and condition of the nation, the gains and drawbacks of	Rizal believed that Dapitanons have great souls and that pure soul can help them survive thunder, waves and rain and in peril, these men can wage the fight against enemies that may come their way. The youth of Dapitan soon can guard their families against fright and fearlessly interfere Satan’s oppression.	Evident with the darkness of the place due to the absence of the street lightings, the city was economically poor. A water reservoir was constructed with the help of his students. In his capacity to speak several languages, he capacitated the Dapitanons to speak and understand the same as	Dapitan is a small district in Zamboanga del Norte. The city was affected by the government system of the Spaniards.

	revolution and his role in it. Rizal strongly believed in Dapitanons and he wholeheartedly treated them as equal and even called themselves Talisayans with mighty souls.		he believed Dapitanons are intelligent people which only lacked education. He also valued the richness of the Dapitan soil of natural resources. Fishing is the main source of living.	
Josephine, Josephine	Dapitan had vibrant shores that occupied Josephine.	Rizal believed in luck and in divine intervention.	Dapitan had no capacity to accommodate Josephine's capability to conveniently live	Dapitan city is easy to find.
The Song of the Traveller	He felt so alone in Dapitan and because of that, he wanted to roam without a purpose abroad			He was positive that the Spaniards were laughing because of his exile
To Don Ricardo Carnicero	The sea gave him pleasant days. His faith is great in Dapitan. The Dapitanons are helpless folks that need a voice to be listened to. These people are vulnerable and chose to be silent to still live-in peace in the city.	He believed in birthdays and God's blessing is given to a person spending another day of his life. He also believed in God who granted Dapitan its people, woods, mangroves and sea and the sand that gave life to it.	Don Carnicero contributed much for the development of Dapitan such as building of the bridge, roads and lightings. The land planted with maize (corn) and palay. Rizal planned to build a school and bring the water down from nearby liniao.	Don Ricardo Carnicero was a Spanish governor in Dapitan district who had the authority to run it. He wished that as a Spaniard, Don Ricardo shall remain good to the Dapitanons and continue working for the good of Dapitan
My Retreat	Dapitan is a silent place, so peaceful, so calm that he did not worry about dreadful events in the future. He even praised the divinity of the place.	Dapitanons are believers of ghosts and dead people. They are prayerful that they awfully sang the songs to protect their dead loved ones	Fishermen woke up early to have a great catch that day.	The mother Spain that he treasured forsaken him already and Dapitan was the only place where he could feel he was loved

Despite his disagreement to the conditions provided by Fr. Pastells, superior of the Jesuit Society in the Philippines as reflected in his letter to Fr. Obach, a Jesuit missionary to Dapitan that he could live in the Jesuit house provided that Rizal retracts his errors concerning religion, and make statements that are clearly pro-Spanish and against revolution, that Rizal performs the church rites and make general confession of his past life, and that Rizal conducts himself in an exemplary manner as a Spanish subject and man of religion (Zaide, 1992; Jalosjos, 2009), even he had a long and scholarly debate with Fr. Pastels on religion, Dr. Jose Rizal proved that he was a religious man and a follower of God's words. In fact, he believed in divine intervention. According to him, he wanted to hit the friars who utilized religion not only as a shield, but as a false and superstitious religion to fight the enemy who hid himself behind it. Clearly, he believed that religion goes with individual judgment as a gift of the Supreme Being which should be used as a lantern to show the way.

To Don Ricardo Carnicero, Rizal was not a filibuster, but a fine and an educated man who could go along with other people so well. Despite the Spanish influences to the Dapitan leaders, the guardian of Rizal sent a very good word to the Spanish leaders in Manila and gave Rizal a complete freedom to go anywhere he wanted. The successor of Don Ricardo grew fond of Rizal as well

and retained the freedom he had during the time of his predecessor, Don Ricardo Carnicero.

Dapitan City the time he set foot to the city was a dirty, unkept and unprogressive district (Jalosjos, 2009). The city was a remote town in the Mindanao archipelago far from the reach of the Spaniards. It is a secluded place and a swampy area full of mosquitos which caused malaria. Dapitan was so dark that with the five hundred pesos Rizal had received from his English patient as a payment for a treatment, he equipped Dapitan with the lighting system consisted of coconut oil lamps placed in the streets. Rizal beautified the city and set off for a remodelling of the town plaza with the help of Fr. Francisco Sanchez, his former Jesuit teacher and friend.

Dapitanons were not cultured and well-mannered during the Spanish period, so Rizal taught those who came in contact with him about the elements of urbanization or courtesy at parties which led to the big change in the social status of Dapitanon women as they were greeted by men with señoritas or señoras, indicative of great respect for women (Maratas, 2025; Jalosjos, 2009) instead of "Ka". Rizal did a great job for equality as Dapitanon women were changed to someone equal to the race who had the sovereign power. The social condition Rizal imposed was accepted by Dapitanons.

The system of education Rizal introduced to the Dapitanons had holistically developed the mind, the body and the spirit of the latter in a very functional manner. During the Spanish period, Dapitan was rich in botanical and biological specimen enabling him to pursue with his scientific pursuits. He set Dapitanons to agricultural, business and cooperatives, and fishing practices to make them earn a living out of the rich resources of the place.

Conclusion

The less educated can become educated people with proper guidance. The widely dispersed can act as one with one great leader initiating for camaraderie. Rizal's services to the community and active involvement in community activities and keenness in societal issues have helped a lot for the upliftment of the social, religious, economic and political conditions of Dapitan City. Dr. Jose P. Rizal's poems "Hymn to Talisay", "Josephine, Josephine", "The Song of the Traveller", "To Don Ricardo Carnicero" and "My Retreat" written during his four-year exile in Dapitan City, Zamboanga del Norte are the living witnesses of Dapitanon's insightful ways of surpassing life hurdles and showing up to a borderless myriad human experience to become better citizens infused with a genuine Filipino cultural enrichment and refinement. Dr. Jose P. Rizal who was admired for possessing intellectual brilliance and for taking a stand and resisting the Spanish colonial government showed the condition of Dapitan City during the Spanish regime in his poems. Words of Rizal embedded in his poems depict religiosity among Dapitanons. Great ideals of the national hero are focused on promoting education among youth and involving in civic movements which are deemed helpful to uplift independence. Consumption of Rizal's poems and other poems related to these widens Filipinos' societal awareness not only among youths, but among all people. The poems encourage understanding of Rizal's life and works in Zamboanga del Norte and his significant contribution in attaining freedom and in upholding nationalism.

Recommendation

The fall of the Spaniards after dominating the Philippines for more than three hundred years bare significant literary works in literature, but because of the appearance of Rizal's highly nationalistic writings in the nineteenth century, Philippine literature in Spanish once again advanced both national and international prestige. In the light of this amazing fact, widespread consideration of Rizal's creative works is essential to evaluate fully his greatness. To value and acknowledge Rizal's heroism and significant contribution to the Malayan race, a compilation of his poems may be made and used in the academia. His poems as reflective of his brilliance are useful springboard materials in the teaching literature to stimulate the sense of nationalism among students and make them appreciate and utilize the same in promoting Philippine culture and tourism. These poems serve as stimuli in creating another poem reflective of the happenings of their community to tell the wider audience of the condition of Dapitan City at present. Encouraging learners to devise their own masterpiece specifically a poem related to the happenings in their community or in the country helps in reaching out the concerned

agencies toward its development. In terms of promoting cultural heritage and tourism, activities may be conducted featuring Dr. Jose Rizal as a living epitome of the country's future asset. These activities may be spearheaded by the Department of Education, the Local Government Unit, and other government agencies in the city. The city government should continuously implement activities like the "Handuraw" to commemorate Rizal's heroism and worthwhile contributions to Dapitan City, and to spread knowledge about the life of the national hero in Dapitan. The moment Rizal arrived in Dapitan where he worked hard to build his ideal society where people have a deep sense of dedication, service (not a career, but something that all Filipinos must do), and duty should be paid tribute that is, July 17 should be the national commemoration to be remembered and celebrated, the fruitful years in Dapitan (the least appreciated legacy), not every December 30, the time he was executed in Luneta, the saddest point in the life of Rizal.

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