



## **RESIL MOJARES AND THE CRISIS OF COMPARATIVE LITERATURE IN THE PHILIPPINES**

Amado Anthony G. Mendoza III

University of the Philippines Diliman  
Roxas Ave, Diliman, Quezon City, Metro Manila, Philippines  
Email: [agmendoza3@up.edu.ph](mailto:agmendoza3@up.edu.ph)

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### **ABSTRACT**

*After its heyday from the 1950s until the early 1970s, a crisis in the field of comparative literature was declared present by its practitioners during the 1980s. The effects of the perceived crisis were felt not only during conferences but also through brutal budget cuts and the downsizing of comparative literature departments across the world. In the decades that followed, various attempts to address the crisis were made by critics such as Franco Moretti, Pascale Casanova, Alexander Beecroft, among many others. As a result, methods and concepts such as “distant reading,” “evolutionary literary history,” “literary ecologies,” and “world republic of letters” easily became the theoretical and methodological bulwark of numerous comparative literature departments against the perceived effects of the crisis. Incidentally, in his seminal *Origins and Rise of the Filipino Novel*, Resil Mojares deployed similar ideas and concepts, however, to different ends. This paper, then, is first an attempt to analyze Mojares’ deployment of the said concepts and methods vis-à-vis to that of Beecroft, Casanova, and Moretti’s. Finally, the paper also seeks to identify and elaborate on specific implications and possibilities made visible by Mojares’ methodological interventions in the field and practice of comparative literature in the Philippines.*

**Keywords:** Crisis, comparative literature, literary history, Mojares, methodological intervention, Philippines.

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### **1.0 INTRODUCTION**

This paper draws inspiration from Beecroft’s (2015) call to “engage” with comparatists and specialists in the field of literary, linguistic, and cultural studies. The attempt to spark engagement with specialists is most evident in Beecroft’s ongoing correspondence with

Sheldon Pollock, a known Sanskritist and an expert in the language and literatures of South Asia, and fellow experts in ancient Greek literature such as Gregory Nagy. More on this ongoing engagement in his *An Ecology of World Literature: From Antiquity to the Present Day*. The study also heeds Kadir's (2011) call to reclaim comparative literature's touchstones. Kadir's project to reclaim comparative literature's touchstones is premised on a historical reading of authors that inspired debates, methodological shifts, and problems in the field. Such reading is geared towards hazarding a response to the field's age-old problems via historical inquiry. In doing so, Kadir was able to come up with a response without falling to the tempting trap of creating artificial metaphors, a tendency viewed by critics from within and outside the field as mere abuse of technical and scientific terminology. In this connection, one is reminded of Bennett's (2010) observation on the assumptions of critics regarding the relationship between literature and society. That is, that an immediate relationship between what is considered the "literary" and the "social" exists. This assumption, as Bennett (2010) noted, leads to a host of problems related to method, direction, and philosophy.

Both calls to action are, of course, in light of the ongoing polyvalent efforts to combat the decline of comparative literature as a legitimate field and intellectual mode of inquiry in the academe. Such polyvalent efforts are in response to three main criticisms directed against comparative literature: its overreliance on close reading, the unquantifiable conclusions that the said method inspire in past and existing critical literature, and its inability to solve real-world problems. These criticisms do not only constitute a theoretical or methodological crisis but also bring to light practical ones as well. As a result, the effects of the said crisis also took shape in spaces beyond the field's jurisdictions and its practitioners' control, e.g. downsizing of comparative literature departments.

These criticisms are not new. The responses to them are not as well. Even known practitioners in the field, such as Franco Moretti, Pascale Casanova, and Caroline Levine have already fielded their own alternatives to close reading, with the most vocal being Moretti and his controversial and oft-misunderstood distant reading – a clear manifestation and crystallization of the ideas and critical tendencies during the "sociology of literature moment" during the 1980s. The said crisis also ran parallel with the controversy brought to light by the Sokal affair during the 1990s against giants in the continental philosophy community, such as Deleuze, Derrida, Foucault, Lacan, and Kristeva. Emboldened by these attacks on the said figures, intellectuals from various fields such as evolutionary and cognitive psychology started the quest of saving the humanities, specifically literary studies, from itself.

The quest to develop alternatives to close reading has taken, to say the least, disparate routes. On the one hand, there is Dworkin's (2003) project to bring out the "political" in formalism in his *Reading the Illegible*. On the other hand, scholars such as Pasanek (2015) developed what he calls "desultory reading," a method derived from corpus linguistics and dictionary reading methods, in *Metaphors of the Mind: An Eighteenth Century Dictionary* in order to draw out the implications of texts beyond themselves. One also finds another route in Love's (2010) "Close but not Deep: Literary Ethics and the Descriptive Turn".

On the other hand, the paper also tries to hazard a reading of Mojares' (1983) *Origins and Rise of the Filipino Novel: A Generic Study of the Novel Until 1940*, considered a touchstone in Philippine literary criticism and literary history, vis-à-vis concepts, methods and what Beecroft calls "mental isolates" (the term he used to frame his discussion of the affordances of emic and etic methods in the study of world literature) deployed by scholars in response to the

aforementioned crisis. The paper however does not find its impetus in merely identifying similarities between Mojares, Moretti, Casanova, and other comparative literature scholars. Such an approach limits the study to cherry-picking and affirms the accusation of single-mindedness and indiscipline levied against the field's practitioners. I am more interested in drawing out possible implications in the process of reading Mojares' seminal work through the works of what I would want to call as his *accidental contemporaries and successors*. It must be also noted that the project does not concern itself with the burden of solving the crisis of comparative literature at one fell swoop. As Mojares pointed out in the Introduction of *Origins*, the work is in no way a definitive history of the Filipino novel, but rather a contribution to its beginning. It is also in this light that I view my own project: a beginning steeped in possibilities.

## 2.0 SAVING COMPARATIVE LITERATURE: SOME IMPULSES IN RESPONSE TO THE CRISIS

Ferris (2011) once said that the problem of comparative literature lies in its indiscipline and its lack of definition. The said indiscipline and lack of definition were once viewed as comparative literature's most significant strengths. However, as economic instrumentalism and rationalization took over the university and the field of humanities, these strengths became the field's most glaring liabilities. This turn became even more evident with the growing confusion of comparative literature and the humanities with the challenges and questions they need to face. Ferris' (2011) account of the issue (and the questions it raised) is worth quoting here at length:

*Comparative Literature are faced with a problem, but they have not posed the question whether these self-reflexive examinations are themselves part of the crisis they proclaim to the extent that they sustain humanities at the limit of their significance (and precisely in order to sustain this limit so that such reflections remain repeatable). Nor have they critically explored the link between and economic and intellectual crisis. Has the current economic crisis become confused with what was already a problem for the humanities, namely, the question of their significance, the question of what they can be compared to? Do the economic terms of the current crisis obscure the extent to which the humanities have sustained themselves? (p. 29)*

The convergence between the economic and intellectual crisis constitute a point "where institutional economics, value, and limit coincide" (Ferris, 2011, p. 29). This means that the problem is not only that of discerning the implications of indiscipline to the field as whole but rather examining its effects in the humanities as well. Such a problem calls for, on the one hand, a comprehensive evaluation of the field's history and, on the other hand, a reconfiguration of its orientation. This also means that the problem is something that warrants a response outside the theoretical and methodological jurisdictions of the field. This inspired scholars, as early as the 1980s, to seek refuge in more established methodological fields, such as evolutionary studies, cognitive psychology, systems theory, corpus linguistics, social science, among many others. This semi-migration and exile of practitioners led to the genesis and popularization of sub-fields, such as "evolutionary literary study," "literary computing," "cognitive literary criticism," and "literary ethics" to name just a few.

Joseph Carroll, Jonathan Gotschall, and Brian Boyd, for instance, represent the camp that advocates for an evolutionary approach to studying literature (Carroll, 2011). For them,

especially for Carroll (2011), the study of literature must be rooted in the quest to answer the questions concerning human nature. This frame of mind is obviously diametrically-opposed to the belief that literature had already lost all its concrete and quantifiable functions in modern society, that its function is to remain “function-less” in a society where everything is subsumed by economic reason. This led Carroll and like-minded critics to advocate for Literary Darwinism as a definitive alternative to existing approaches in comparative literature. This is obviously a response to what Carroll (2011) called the crisis of overproduction. In a snide manner, he describes the descent of literary studies to mere speculation and unbridled obscurantism:

*By the late seventies, signs of overproduction had become unmistakable. Most of the major projects in hard-core scholarship had been adequately completed. Critics interpreting single works were forced into ever more tenuous and improbable speculations. To publish interpretive commentary, one has to say something new, and most of what could reasonably be said at the level of common observation had already been said. The solution, of course, was to turn to European speculative philosophy, first structuralism, and then, almost immediately, “poststructuralism.” The structuralist, supposedly, had demonstrated that structure is autonomous, a matrix or primary source, transcending content, and poststructuralists demonstrated, supposedly, that structures are not only autonomous but anarchic, chaotic, impossible to pin down, and impossible to escape. ‘There is no outside the text,’ and the text itself is a house of mirrors – fun – house mirrors – signifiers generating signifiers, with no signified anywhere in sight to anchor the endless recession of distorted images. Deconstruction swept through departments of literature like flag-waving cadres of the French Revolution, galvanizing all the inhabitants, striking terror in some, provoking others into obstinate resistance, but in most exciting rapturous enthusiasm. The inferiority complex that had long dogged literature professors vis-à-vis scientists, who actually got things done, suddenly gave way to an extraordinary hubris in which literature professors believe they had unique access to the ultimate nature of things (pp. 71-72).*

Not only did Carroll imply that literary scholars do not “get things done” but he also accused them of arrogance. This accusation is directed against the orientation of poststructuralism and related approaches to be the moral compass for intellectuals, to be the voice of the marginalized and oppressed, and its [poststructuralism] claim that all social norms, institutions, and activities are products of the political and ideological machinations of a homogenous ruling class. Moreover, the impulse of Carroll and his cohorts to ground literary study in evolutionary science is obviously an effort to foment a response against the criticism that literary studies do not offer real solutions to pressing human problems. By grounding the study of literature in evolution, literature is afforded a place in the history of human functions, to wit, that is our capability to understand, appreciate, and create literature is based on a response by early humans to a specific set of problems in the course of his evolution. With such an approach, the long-held belief that humanities scholars are inferior to scientists and/or engineers will come to an end or mitigated to, at least, a tolerable hullabaloo.

Literary Darwinism, for all its promise and verve, has had its share of critics and detractors, most notable of which is Jonathan Kramnick. Kramnick (2011) raised three fundamental problems of Literary Darwinism, namely, its overreliance on “utility” as a justifying factor of literature’s emergence and continuing relevance in modern society, its outright dismissal of

critical theory, and a set of theoretical foundations based on questionable scientific assumptions advocated by a marginal and isolated subgroup in the field of cognitive psychology and evolutionary science.

Meanwhile, another impulse is represented by the systemic approach advocated by Franco Moretti and Pascale Casanova. Moretti (2013), most known for his controversial distant reading, advances the most comprehensive, coherent, inter-disciplinary, and ambitious project of the two. The impact of Moretti's intervention in the field cannot be measured by merely following the methodological debates it has inspired amongst practitioners from various fields, but also in the way he has made multi-disciplinary collaboration a necessary work method in comparative literature, a field known for its individualism and its glorification of the author and critic. This is evidenced by the host of scholars active in Moretti's Stanford Literary Lab. A cursory view of the monographs published in LitLab's website provides its visitors with a preview of Moretti's collaborations with scholars from various fields, such as Matthew Jockers, Dominique Pestre, and Eric Steiner, among many others.

Moretti (2013) biggest contribution, however, still rest on his two essays in *Distant Reading*, namely "Conjecture on World Literature", where he provided a definition of distant reading, and in "The Slaughterhouse of Literature," where he tried to read English detective novels using the said method. Also found in the essay is his first attempt to introduce terms such as "formal mutation" and "cultural selection," which are obvious attempts to incorporate both literary and evolutionary terminology in developing new concepts.

In "Conjectures", Moretti (2013) defined and describe reading as a condition of knowledge. His succinct definition is worth quoting in length here:

*Distant reading: where distance, let me repeat it, is a condition of knowledge: it allows you to focus on units that are much smaller or much larger than the text: devices, themes, tropes—or genres and systems. And if, between the very small and the very large, the text itself disappears, well, it is one of those cases when one can justifiably say, Less is more. If we want to understand the system in its entirety, we must accept losing something. We always pay a price for theoretical knowledge: reality is infinitely rich; concepts are abstract, are poor. But it's precisely this 'poverty' that makes it possible to handle them, and therefore to know. This is why less is actually more (pp. 53-54)*

Distant reading, as its name suggests, does not only entail the rejection and subversion of proximity or closeness as the optimal condition of knowledge in the study of literature, but also enables a scholar to train on, as Moretti puts it, a "micro-literary unit" and locate it in the grander scheme of things. This grander scheme of things is for Moretti, borrowing from systems theorists, what constitutes the "core," "periphery," and "semi-periphery" in world literature, with each term referring to several points or axis in a system divided geographically, politically, and economically. The three terms can also refer to the canon (what is continuously read, interpreted, and received as legitimate literature), popular (what is read by the largest segment of the population, the bestsellers), and the "great unread" (or what vanishes into obscurity).

As was mentioned, Moretti's proposal "to read without reading" was met by some critics such as Arac (2011) and Holbo (2007) with varying degrees of resistance. Most notable of which came from Arac when he declared distant reading as a "formalism without close reading"

(Morretti, 2013, p. 52). Interestingly, Moretti responded that Arac's criticism actually captured what he meant when he was formulating distant reading. Trying to test his method and responding to Arac's criticism, Moretti (2013) had this to say:

*Where I did act responsibly was in the amount of reading I did for the essay: all those forgotten detective stories that I chart in the text. But was it still reading, what I was doing? I doubt it: I read 'through' those stories looking for clues, and (almost) nothing else; it felt very different from the reading I used to know. It was more like what Jonathan Arac described, in the controversy around 'Conjectures', as a 'formalism without close reading'; a nice formulation, of which 'Slaughterhouse' was perhaps the first clear example: identifying a discrete formal trait, and then following its metamorphoses through a whole series of texts. The 'Quantitative Formalism' that gave its title to the first pamphlet of the Literary Lab had not yet occurred to me; but, after 'Slaughterhouse', it was really just a matter of time. (p. 69)*

While Moretti admits that distant reading is indeed a type of formalism without close reading, what escapes earlier critics of Moretti is his penchant to *come near* his unsuspecting materials after scanning them from a distance. This is most evident in "Style, Inc: Reflections on Seven Thousand Titles (British Novels, 1740-1850)," where he focused on the changing length of the titles of British Novels and analyzed them in light of prevailing ideas during a specific period on abstract concepts such as love, charity, chastity, deceit, among many others. This tendency is also manifest in a recent pamphlet of LitLab entitled "On Paragraphs. Scale, Themes, and Narrative Form", where Algee-Hewitt, Heuser, and Moretti reflected on the "scale", that is the macro and micro scales, at which literature is studied. So, while it is true that Moretti approached his materials at a global scale, that is by beginning to present and express them in the form of statistics and graphs, it is not entirely true that he was able to avoid reading them. Thus, while Moretti indeed treats distance as a primary condition of knowledge, one would be remiss if one misses his tendency to read his materials desultorily. In this particular case, desultory does not mean an aimless or haphazard reading of texts (and contexts) but rather a deliberate to-ing and fro-ing between the macro and the micro, which accounts for the shifts unnoticed in both micro – and macro-analyses.

It must be noted, however, that although Moretti's (2013) method affords him the opportunity to move between the micro and macro, one still finds a kernel of determinism and reductionism in his ways. This determinism comes from the fact that Moretti sees the micro, the meso, and the macro as clearly defined scales, clearly an evidence of his borrowings from systems and evolutionary theory. This, however, is not the case for Beecroft (2015) or, in the case of this study, Mojares (1983). As will be discussed later, this attention to that which is located between the micro and macro is one of the few things that characterize Mojares' scholarship in *Origins*.

While Literary Darwinists are interested in finding the origins and continuing relevance of literature in humans adaptive traits and Moretti (2013) in conceiving a theory of world literature by accounting for the extra-literary structures (e.g. markets and archives) and its impact on literary activity, Beecroft (2015) and Casanova (2004) view literary activities and culture as relatively autonomous spaces and endeavors, as spaces existing alongside the political, economic, linguistic, and religious spaces. The difference between them, however, lies in how they view the metaphors they developed in the process of elaborating on these spaces and activities. While Casanova (2004) believe that mental isolates such as the "world republic of

letters,” “literary capital,” and “combative literatures” are real and concrete processes, Beecroft, on the other hand, sees his literary ecologies as artificial metaphors, as etic constructions aimed at explaining the impact of para- and extra-literary factors on disparate literary cultures.

Their difference is evident in how both viewed their projects. For instance, here is Casanova’s (2004) take on the dominant literary consciousness in the present:

*As a result of the appropriation of literatures and literary histories by political nations during the nineteenth century, although we do not always realize it, our literary unconscious is largely national. Our instruments of analysis and evaluation are national. Indeed the study of literature almost everywhere in the world is organized along national lines. This is why we are blind to a certain number of transnational phenomena that have permitted a specifically literary world to gradually emerge over the past centuries or so (p. xi)*

This view on the overly national character of literary institutions and its attendant modes of analysis accounts for Casanova’s primary argument for a change in perspective in literary studies. This new perspective proffered by Casanova (2004) accounts for the internal and external configuration of the national literary space, which precisely mirrors the structures and hierarchies in the international literary world as a whole. For writers, this means that creative autonomy can be only achieved through a complete break with his/her nation, which might be considered, following Casanova’s economic formulation, as “literarily destitute.” Some attention should be accorded to Casanova’s usage of the adjective destitute.

As mentioned earlier, while most comparative literature scholars borrow from other fields in order to form organizing metaphors, she conceives of “literary republics” as real polities, with their own governing logic, culture, and economy. In the adjective mentioned previously, it is clear that she considers literary tradition as a measure of a nation’s literary capital, that is the cumulative stock of writers and works recognized in literary centers. Interestingly, Casanova still believes that, despite the relative autonomy of literary republics, events and changes in extra-literary spaces still impact the literary republic. Therein however lies the problem. Invoking the autonomy of literary republic is almost tantamount to a forced application of etic concepts to an emic situation. The irony of Casanova’s position, in this case, lies in her inability to describe the emic space she constructed in its own terms.

For scholars and critics, this means a wholesale reorientation of age-old literary beliefs and practices. This, in turn, also changes the way literary knowledge is produced, disseminated, and received. The view that there exists an autonomous literary republic, a space which mirrors the structures and contradictions within global political and economic spaces, is indeed a very controversial proposition. Much like Moretti’s intervention, Casanova calls for a total overhaul of literary institutions across the globe. For this reason, Beecroft, though inspired by both Casanova and Moretti, finds fault in both of their ways. In lieu of Moretti and Casanova’s, Beecroft posits what he calls literary ecologies to understand literature as both local and global phenomena.

Unlike Moretti and Casanova, Beecroft (2015) views literature as a phenomenon that encompasses the social, political, cultural, and linguistic fields. As such, Beecroft (2015) believes that the existence of literary cultures and texts are not solely determined by a homogenous set of factors but by a host of disparate responses to the said factors carried out

by its producers and receivers. In this context, adopting the ecological metaphor captures the essence of Beecroft's project to conceive of literature as a set of practices and responses in various literary cultures since it accounts for the many ways through which particular literary texts and practices have thrived over time. Avoiding the deterministic models of Moretti and Casanova, the ecological metaphor sees the continuous thriving of, for instance, epics as a form of survival.

Beecroft identifies six distinct literary ecologies, that is the "epichoric," (which accounts for the smallest ecology), "panchoric" (which forms in regions with small-scale polities speaking more or less the same language and have a long shared history), "cosmopolitan" (literary ecologies that emerge wherever a single language becomes its primary literary language), "vernacular" (usually emerges out of cosmopolitan literary ecologies), "national" (borne out of the vernacular ecologies of Europe and the emergence of nationalism), and "global" ( which presents a limit case).

From all the previously discussed impulses in response to crisis of comparative literature, Beecroft's model is the most similar to the method deployed by Mojares in *Origins*. In the next section, I will hazard a reading of Mojares' methods in *Origins* which, in my view, constitute his contribution to Philippine comparative literature.

### **3.0 THE 'ORIGINS AND RISE OF THE FILIPINO NOVEL': THE INTERNAL HISTORY OF THE FILIPINO NOVEL**

Mojares' *Origins* is considered as one of the most important works in Philippine literary criticism and history. Any self-respecting student of Philippine literature or intellectual worth his/her salt would be remiss if he/she has not read Mojares' seminal work. The book is divided into seven chapters, with the first chapter constituting an introduction to Mojares' project of contributing to the beginning of the writing of the history of the Philippine novel. The second chapter focuses on folk narratives as one of the veritable sources of Philippine novelistic tradition. The third and fourth chapters, meanwhile, focus on the early and late colonial literary forms such as the epic, *pasyon*, *corrido*, *costumbres*, and the proto-novels. Chapter four, in particular, focuses on the rise of the Filipino novel through a discussion of Rizal's *Noli Me Tangere* and *El Filibusterismo* as well as the writings of his ilustrado contemporaries such as Pedro Paterno, Marcelo H. Del Pilar, and Isabelo de los Reyes. Chapters five and six discuss the Filipino novel during the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, its golden age and its decline due to commercialization and the impending war. The final chapter offers some final notes on the origins and nature of development of the Filipino novel, the events and circumstances that influenced its current form and possible iterations in the future.

In the Introduction of *Origins*, Mojares (1983) describe his project as a "generic study" of the Filipino novels "which involves a historical approach to the subject" (p. 2). Going from that description, there does not seem to be any resemblance between Mojares' method and that of, for instance, Moretti or Beecroft's. However, as was mentioned earlier, my project intends to primarily read Mojares' deployment of his own methodology through the impulses present in the works of Moretti, Casanova, and Beecroft.

In that case, one must start by saying that Mojares is both a comparatist and a specialist all at once. That is, Mojares' work breathes the scope and ambition of a comparatist but at the same displays the prudence, control, and precision of a specialist. In *Origins*, this is most



evident in his decision to limit the study of novels to three main languages: Spanish, Tagalog, and Cebuano. The Spanish corpus accounts for the historical basis and sources of the book. The Tagalog corpus, meanwhile, accounts for the national scope of the study. Finally, the Cebuano (and novels written in other regional languages) corpus accounts for Mojares' attempt to find a *meso space* or middle space in between the radical breaks visible in the Spanish and Tagalog texts. In saying this, one gets a sense that, like Moretti and Beecroft, Mojares is also interested in "scale" as a measure at which the history of a literary form is analyzed. However, while Beecroft, Moretti, and Casanova are interested in fully defined organizing metaphors, Mojares does not rely on them as much in his attempt to establish the history of a particular literary form. For instance, although he used the terms "displacement" and "replacement" to describe the process of Hispanization of folk literary forms, Mojares did not consider both terminologies as solid concepts applicable in all instances where change in a literary form is discernible. See, for example, how he evaluated the emergence of a "new narrative" during the American period: "*Unang Pag-ibig* [1915] and other Hernandez novels represent a "new narrative in the tradition, one that effects a different amalgam of impulses and is governed by new conditions of production" (1983, p. 202)

Moreover, though he throws in technical terms, e.g. ecology, to describe the ethos of the study, he also avoids the trap of framing his historical analysis based on the principles of ecology. And while there is always the tendency for some critics to apply etic categories on their unsuspecting materials, the specialist in Mojares prevents him from doing so. This is most evident in his analysis of the early and late colonial narratives, where he prevents himself from using the explanatory framework and descriptive terminology he used to describe, for instance, the displacement of folk literary forms.

As a result, he is able to avoid what Bennett (2010) observes to be the tendency of many literary critics to assume an immediate relationship between the literary and the social. The scholarly prudence manifest in the said chapters and in the whole work is not only a sign of Mojares' prowess as an intellectual, but also of his necessary difference from Beecroft, Casanova, Moretti, and other critics who ostensibly tried to formulate new models of literary analysis. In the case of Mojares, *Origins*, and most of his work, one can almost glean a certain natural (even organic) and unassuming quality in his scholarship. This is manifest even in the terms he used to explain the emergence of new literary forms, e.g. displacement, replacement, and ecology. While Beecroft, Casanova, and Moretti were conscious that they were performing a kind of intervention in the field, Mojares' "style" or "method" is an inenxorable product of his own position and condition as a third-world intellectual. Unlike his American and European-trained counterparts, Mojares and most of his contemporaries in Asia, Africa and Latin America have to consistently deal with lack of resources, inconsistent institutional support, and the general apathy of third-world post-colonial governments for cultural and intellectual endeavors.

Further, while Moretti and Casanova are interested in creating concepts in order to explain the workings of a literary system, and to describe how such systems cause the emergence or loss of certain literary forms, Mojares' concepts or mental isolates in the *Origins* specifically deal with the mutations in form itself. This is most evident in his discussion of the Filipino novel's polygenetic character, with its ancestors being the corrido (the most protean of forms), epic, pamphlets, and shorter prose narratives. While the former (Moretti and Casanova) described complex systems where mutations in various literary forms occur, Mojares dealt with the issue of form not only as product of the system but also as a response to the system's own

convulsions. This is evidenced by the Mojares' characterization of 19<sup>th</sup> century writers such as Balagtas, Del Pilar, De los Reyes, Paterno, and Rizal.

Mojares, as mentioned earlier, shares a methodological affinity with Beecroft in their attempt to write a literary history that also takes notice of the moments where no clean break is discernible. The difference between them however lies in their motives. While Beecroft intends to spark an engagement between comparatists and specialists, Mojares is more interested in thinking about the possibilities afforded by the impossibility of coming up with a "unified theory of the Filipino novel" (p. 367). While Beecroft and other comparative literature scholars direct their efforts towards the resolution of the crisis in the field, Mojares is more interested in catching the "novel in flight" (p. 370), that is to describe and evaluate possibilities pertinent to the form.

In the context of comparative literature in the Philippines, Mojares' scholarship reminds us of the importance of rigorous and precise scholarship despite the fugitive nature of source materials and the archives from which they came from. Moreover, the *Origins* reminds us that literary studies in the Philippines is far from the dangers of what Carroll and his flag-waving cadres call the overproduction in the field. On the contrary, there is still much work to be done. In this sense, a young scholar can look at *Origins* as a map in order to locate possibilities yet to be described, analyzed and evaluated. The problem of comparative literature in the Philippines is not so much a problem of method as it is a problem of taking stock of its untapped resources, its vast reserve of unutilized "literary capital". In Mojares' scholarship, we are left with a blueprint that teaches us different ways to engage and analyze our own literary resources from various vantage points, which, in the final analysis, is one of the touchstones of comparative literature.

#### 4.0 CONCLUSION

Similar to what Borges did when he tried to proffer a reading of Kafka through his precursors, I wanted to hazard a reading of Mojares in light of the current issues and debates in comparative literature. While Borges started to appreciate Kafka's greatness because of his readings of Zeno, Han Yu, Kierkegaard, I started to see the significance of Mojares' scholarship when read alongside some of the leading scholars in the field, or what I would want to call his unintended successors. The question of precedence or succession is actually immaterial at this point. The challenge of creating lifelines for sustainability is what remains for both comparatists and specialists.

In the Philippine context, the challenge does not only require comparative literature scholars to think of new modes of literary analysis, but also for them to persevere in the face of a lingering crisis that has ushered the field into a "permanent midnight" (Deyto, 2018, p. 1) with no end or light in sight. That is to say, to continue producing in the face of the rampant instrumentalization of knowledge, weaponization of culture, continuous budget cuts, the fugitive nature of materials, and the inevitable "dangers" of being an intellectual in this side of the world. If the first two decades of the 21<sup>st</sup> century serve as any indication, comparative literature in the Philippines finds itself traversing several paths – most of which were borne out of the demands of the global intellectual industry, while the others gesturing towards interventionist trends.

The first discernable path or trend consists of critics who try to stay in the path of tradition. This is exemplified by the current works of critics, such as Lumbera Almario, and Abad, who

continue to build on the interpretive, nationalist, and somewhat nativist critical tradition of the 1970s and 1980s. The second trend is exemplified by critics who gravitate towards postcolonial theory, politics, and aesthetics. This is represented by Garcia (2004), Legasto (2004), and Tadiar's (2009) works. The third trend is typified by works that attempt to recuperate the "literature as national allegory" paradigm by eschewing the easy assumption that there exist a readily palpable link between nation and literature, avoiding the homogenizing tendencies of the "nation" as an analytical paradigm, and incorporating issues concerning race, diaspora, gender, and class in their analyses. The works of Hau (2000, 2004, 2014), Blanco (2009), Pison (2010), and Neferti Tadiar come to mind when referring to this trend. The fourth trend is represented by works that try to introduce new analytical methods from other disciplines such as computer engineering, applied physics, corpus linguistics, among others. This is represented by works of Guillermo (2009), Myfel Paluga, among others. The final strand, though existent, still remains in the fringes. It is characterized by a metacritical and confrontational mien, and gesturing towards a more political type of literary criticism, or as some critics are wont to say: a demonstrably polyvalent, multivectoral, and self-reflexive Marxist critique of politics and culture. As of writing, only Garcellano (1998, 2001) and his many and eponymous interventions exemplifies this path or trend in literary and cultural criticism. In saying this, the task for future literary scholars, therefore, is metacritical. While the rest of the world is preoccupied with being "new," "hip," and "global," the task for comparative literature scholars in the Philippines in the 21<sup>st</sup> century should be both metacritical and forward-looking, while gesturing towards all possible modes of analysis. While many will say that the future of the field is in question, I remain steadfast in saying that it is still ours for the taking.

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