

Tracing the Epic Tradition in The Fantaserye: GMA 7's "Encantadia" As an Epic

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ABSTRACT

In the mid-2000s, the television landscape in the Philippines was raised to a higher level. Shows that incorporate folklore and combine it with today's realities started to dominate the primetime block. These shows are dubbed called fantaserye, a pun on the words fantasy and series, and in 2005, one of the biggest television networks in the Philippines released its biggest *fantaserye* "Encantadia". As such, this paper is an attempt to fill that dearth by fleshing out the elements of the traditional conventions of the epic. Through the theories on the conventions of the epic and the function of the epic hero propounded by Damiana Eugenio and Isagani Cruz respectively, the researcher looks at the possibility of the fantaserye as an offshoot of the traditional epic. John Fiske and John Hartley's notion on television as today's bard was also utilized in this study. The method used throughout the study is Conceptual Content analysis.

Results show that folk epics share similar characteristics such as having the epic hero, the hero's moral and physical transformation which in turn paves the way for the hero to become the embodiment of the people's beliefs and aspirations. As such, the folk epics did not die with our forebearers, but it has adapted, retold, and performed through a new medium that can be accessed by people from all walks of life.

To conclude, the fantaserye gets its materials and inspiration not only from mythological tales, but also from the folk epics, thus making oral literature survive in another form, but at the same time deviates from these inspirations which makes it a postmodern take of the traditional epic. This proves that the popular culture as a field of study that can be associated to other similar fields such as literary studies. Also, the folk epic did not die a natural death in the oral tradition; it adapted through a medium which is relevant and accessible to all: the television.

Keywords: epic tradition, epic conventions, fantaserye, Encantadia

INTRODUCTION

The Philippines has a rich tradition of literature before the arrival of the colonizers. Rosario-Braid and Tuazon (1999) contend that such literary tradition among the early inhabitants of our country exists and is best exemplified in the folk epics (293). The folk epics are revered literary works because they mark the highest point of the development of Philippine folk literature (Eugenio, 2001, xi) and have been part of the rich folklore that we boast today (Mojares, 1998, 13). These literatures have also served as conduits for other folk and phantasmagoric tales due to its attribute as irredeemably elitist, stable, and canonical (Hersh, 1993 1; Santos, 1997, 125 & Kumar, 2016, 793). Manuel (1985) further defines the epics as

“narratives of sustained length which are based on oral tradition, revolving around supernatural events or heroic deeds in the form of verse which are either chanted or sung” (69). These narratives are exemplary literary masterpieces of oral and written literature and an embodiment of one’s ideology and culture. Roque (1967) probes on the cultural traditions embedded in these literary forms, particularly in the Mindanaoan “Bidasari,” which featured an epic heroine instead of a male epic hero. In this study, the researcher posits that despite the existence of female epic heroes, yet their depiction and role are limited compared to the male epic hero figures. In the epic, the heroine Bidasari was never involved in warfare, unlike the male epic heroes, whose masculinity lies in their prowess and strength in warfare and battle. Roque also observes that “Bidasari” provides the ideal female model in the Mindanaoan context because it embodies how a female should conduct themselves in public. The epic underscores the traits of meekness, obedience, and chastity as characteristics practiced by Mindanaoan women.

The Philippine folk epics are not only monumental examples of oral literature; but they also serve as repositories of both culture and history that reflect a community’s identity (Aligan, 1992, 21; Mojares, 1998, 13; and Eugenio, 2001, xi). These narratives also serve as the bastion of collective consciousness because they paved the way for uniting people of different communities (Tolentino, 2006, 40) and have functioned as metanarratives of one’s culture, which later gave birth to the concept of the nation (Tolentino, 2006, 58). Demetrio, a Jesuit scholar, points out the following characteristics of the epic:

- (1) the story must contain a body of ancient traditions centering around supernatural or heroic persons or deeds;
- (2) there must be a living faith in these traditions and contents;
- (3) these traditions must be molded into a single person or group of persons by specially gifted persons;
- (4) the poem must be invested with a certain sacred or venerable character, not only for their antiquity, but also for their cosmic, national, and social significance, in as much as they validate the beliefs, ideals, values, and life values of a people or race (quoted in Eugenio, 2001, xi)

Calleja-Reyes (1968) probes on the Bicolano epic “Ibalon” and how it reflects and preserves Bicolandia culture and ideals. Her study also attempts to restore as faithfully as possible the pristine context of that fragment of ancient Bicol literature, which gives the epic a special value as it underscores a profound significance Bicolandia pre-historic culture (321). She finds out that a great number of these songs of the ancient Bicolanos, communicated orally as they have never been written down, which makes Fr. Castaño's fragment an important piece because it poses the possibility that it is the only written account of this cultural artifact of the ancient Bicolanos(322). Also, the fragment gives an interesting account of the dwellings of the ancient Bicolanos when it mentions the *muog* which is a house constructed by the natives on a tree-top to protect themselves from wild animals. This form of house construction is defined in Fr. Lisboa's “Vocabulario de la Lengua Bicol” and undoubtedly gives verisimilitude to the epic's account of the early dwellings of the Bicolanos (323). This study points out that the epic is the compendium of one’s pre-colonial culture and history though it may come in several versions,

which is why preserving this epic is essential to ensure cultural continuity and the region's heritage.

The folk epics are performed literary pieces, somewhat a precursor to the stage plays and street performances in the Philippines. These are staged in communal gatherings and on solemn or religious occasions. These performances are accompanied by music, dance, and ritual action, which relate to religious or cultic functions (Mojares, 1998, 9 and 10). They are meant to evoke "magical efficacy" on special occasions or ceremonies (Santos, 1997, 116). Highly trained singers and orators are handpicked to perform the said epics (Baldick, 2001, 82).

The central character in the epic is the epic hero who embodies the people's beliefs, ideals, and aspirations, which reflects his maturity and moral transformation through a series of adventures. Mythology and folklore serve as inspirations of these oral narratives. Roque (1967) gives three distinct attributes to the nature of these heroic adventures. First, the actions in these adventures are exaggerated to highlight the moral or value the epic hero needs to project. Second, these events integrate prominent and historical characters and events upon a common scene. Lastly, remembered incidents with imaginary accessories drawn from myth and legend are fused which make up a conflation of fact and fancy (10). These oral literature mirror one's culture which also makes it historical documents.

The birth of popular media revolutionized changes in society especially on the way people perceive and construct their truths. It cannot be denied that popular media made literature accessible to people from all walks of life. Popular culture (specifically popular media) serves as "a potent force for persuasion and value building and the perception of consciousness" (Fernandez, 1981). Through popular media which are quite accessible, people's manner of thinking and behaving were affected by these forms of consumed literature. Because of the technological advancements that began after the Second World War, the television shows because of their multi-sensory attribute. They do not only attract in the visual sense of the viewer, but also in other senses such as the auditory and emphatic senses. Television shows also have the power to transmit the spoken word through another medium which makes them hypertextual and anachronistic (Tolentino, 2006, 24). These shows are the repositories of contemporary culture since they act as representations of signs, symbols, images, portrayals, depictions, likeness, and substitutions, seen and experienced in reality (Sanchez, 2015, 347). They have not only captured but also influenced people's way of thinking and their perception of reality (Fiske and Hartley, 2003, 2) to the point that the divide between simulation and the actual is blurred.

Despite their contribution to popular culture and media studies, television shows still faced criticisms. For instance, critics assert that television viewers only need minimum intelligence to be able to comprehend and make sense of what is shown on screen (Fiske and Hartley, 2003, 3). What the critics fail to see is a mismatch on the constructs used in pointing out the advantages and disadvantages of television viewing. Television shows should not be read as a literary text because any attempt to decode a television "text" as a literary text is doomed to failure and would likely result to a negative evaluation of the material based on its inability to do a job for which it is fundamentally unsuited (3).

The critics also fail to realize that the television as a material is an equal, if not more than demanding, compared to traditional forms of text such as the printed and written forms.

In viewing television shows, there is no way for viewers to go back over the material unlike in the printed forms of text wherein readers can flip back and through printed materials (Fiske and Hartley, 2003, 4). Also, television shows which are electronically transmitted have different features compared to the written and printed texts (Fiske and Hartley, 2003, 2 and 3), yet they have the capability to unite and examine one's culture because of its storytelling functions (Sauro, 2013, 80). These shows are not only for entertainment but also for being aware of one's reality. One of the contributions of television shows in the field of both literary and media studies is the emergence of the soap opera which evolved into what is known today as the *teleserye*.

Teleseryes have lured viewers on the boob tube since these shows can simulate realities and re-actualized them to a different medium. These are shows that mirror today's experiences which are relevant in today's society (Aranda, 2014). Also, these shows would operate on motifs which are quite relevant in the Filipino palette such as family ties, personal relationships, morality, and politics. Some studies, however, point out that the *teleserye* slowly loses its grip to attract and lure viewers to the television screen. *Teleseryes* occupy various timeslots on television and still gain avid viewership. As observed by Kantar Media Survey in 2012, Filipinos spend an average of three to five hours in television watching *teleseryes* (quoted in Aranda, 2014). Because of its popularity, these *teleseryes* further morphed into what now known as the *fantaserye*.

Fantaserye is a sub-genre of the *teleserye* that would often combine folkloric characteristics in the narrative. Sauro (2013) defines it as a variation of the conventional soap opera combining elements of magic, myth, and enchantment (1). Its roots can be traced with the folk epic since both share roots in mythology and folklore. However, these two differ in terms of the mode it is transmitted: the former is transmitted through the television, while the latter is by oral tradition.

In view of the above, this paper probes in the attributes of the *fantaserye* vis-à-vis the traditional roots of the epic. Moreover, the researcher strengthens the association among media studies, popular culture and literary studies by probing into the literariness of the *fantaserye*.

METHODS

The researcher watched and scrutinized the one hundred and sixty episodes, which were downloaded in GMA Network's YouTube channel, to a qualitative relational content analysis in the course of the research work. This design zeroes in on the interpretation of the material examined (either in linguistic or visual formats) and to generate statements or findings which pertain to the explicit and implicit meaning of the material (Sauro, 2013, 18).

The advantage of doing a qualitative relational content analysis in literary studies is that it gives the researcher a focus on the actual content and internal features of the material. It is also used to determine the presence of certain words, phrases, characters, or sentences within texts or sets of texts through qualitative content analysis. Also, qualitative, relational content analysis looks directly on the examined material which leads to its centrality. It also gives way to cultural and historical insights, which is one of the angles touched in this study. Finally, qualitative content analysis is an unobtrusive means of analyzing the relationships and

interactions within the examined material which is considered as a relatively exact research method if placed side by side and compared with Discourse Analysis (Sauro, 2013, 24-25).

Through this paper, the researcher probed that the first release of “Encantadia” in 2005 traces its roots in the traditional conventions of the folk epic which makes it today’s rendition of the oral lore. Also, the researcher utilized mostly local theories especially that of Eugenio (2001) and Cruz (1985). The former’s theory looks in the conventions of the traditional epic and matches it with the characteristics and elements of the fantaserye, while the latter was adapted from Propp’s morphological function of fairy tales, thus it concentrates on the epic hero’s journey.

RESULTS

“Encantadia” as a Traditional Epic

Using Eugenio’s epic motifs and conventions (2001), the following results were obtained:

“Encantadia” is “performed” through the aid of the television. This is somehow akin to the performances of the traditional epic in communal gatherings on special occasions; however, people do not gather in one place on special occasions and listen or watch the trained singers and performers chant and perform the epic. Rather, these people are gathered in their own homes and are glued to the television, the representation of today's bard at a specific timeslot and watch the actors perform their character roles. Unlike during the pre-colonial times where the epic singers and performers take days to complete the performance of the epic, "Encantadia" is only shown at a particular time within the day, and it took months for the show’s entirety to be narrated. “Encantadia” is performed through acting like the traditional folk epics. Actors and actresses who portrayed the roles in the series auditioned for these roles and underwent a series of acting workshops and related training sessions to make their character portrayal authentic and more convincing.

Fighting and resuscitation as motifs in “Encantadia”

Eugenio mentioned that one of the motifs of Philippine folk epics is fighting. These fight scenes comprise most of the epic hero's adventures, which paves the way for the hero’s holistic development(Eugenio 2001). Campos echoes the same thought when he posits that fantasy films rely heavily on the motif of fighting or *bakbakan*. In the case of “Encantadia”, the heroes’ sojourn revolved around these battles. These battles would be in the form of relative rivalries, kingdom warfare, and internal conflict.

	AMIHAN	LIRA
Relative rivalries	Pirena	Pirena, Mira
Kingdom warfare	Hagorn (Hathoria)	Hagorn (Hathoria)
Internal conflict	Duty over love	Duty over own happiness

Table 1: Summary of the conflicts encountered by Amihan and Lira

As shown in Table 1, the characters of Amihan and Lira were the major players in the narrative, so their characters were always engaged in these brawls. Amihan's battle in "Encantadia" started when she and Pirena vied for the queenship of Lireo. Pirena wanted to be queen because she thinks that she is the only rightful heir to the throne given her status as the eldest among the siblings as she said in Episode 2; while, Amihan wants to succeed her mother to avenge and bring justice to her father's tragic demise. Following Amihan's success in the test that will determine the next queen of Lireo, Pirena protested that she was cheated and rebelled by challenging her mother to a duel. In Episode 4, Pirena was not able to win the challenge and vowed that she will avenge her defeat and will plot Amihan's downfall. She also cast a curse in the entire land of Encantadia that it will never experience peace and happiness.

As part of her scheme, Pirena deceived Amihan by acknowledging her queenship. Little did Amihan know that Pirena's scheme and hunger for power reached its peak, that Pirena had sworn allegiance to Hagorn of Hathoria in Episode 4 and switched the real heir to the throne with her own daughter in Episode 7. Pirena succeeded in executing her plan to destabilize Amihan. She usurped the throne leaving the rightful queen defeated and powerless in Episode 42 by destabilizing Amihan's line of defense in Lireo, when Hathoria battled with the troops of Lireo.

Amihan's battle is not only with Pirena. It also involved Pirena's father, Hagorn, the ruler of Hathoria. Hagorn used to be friends with Raquim, Amihan's father, but the two became enemies after the battle of the four kingdoms. In the first episode, Hagorn crossed the realm of the mortals to find Raquim to finish him and his only daughter. Hagorn succeeded in killing Raquim after a long and bloody duel, but the young Amihan attempted to avenge her father's death. Hagorn almost killed Amihan by stabbing her with a sword. Amihan was saved by Aquil and Muros who followed Hagorn and his cohorts. As Amihan finds out her true identity as a *diwata* and one of the heirs of the throne of Lireo, she vowed to herself that she will become queen and avenge her father's death. She says this in the first episode.

When Amihan finally succeeded her mother to the throne in Episode 3, she devoted her reign in fighting Hagorn and his legion of Hathors. Both exhibited their powers and abilities with the gemstones they possess. Amihan was given the stewardship of the air gemstone, while Hagorn stole from Pirena the fire gemstone. The bloody battle concluded at the shores of Adamya in Episodes 157-159, where Amihan finally ended Hagorn's life by thrusting a sword through his heart.

As Amihan reigns over the kingdom, she did not only have enemies who wish her downfall, but she also became enemies with herself when she was given the choice to choose between the queendom and the matters of her own heart. The edict of Lireo clearly states that a reigning queen should never seek marriage for they are directly married to their responsibility as the leader of the kingdom. Amihan almost defied this rule when she fell in love with her child's father, Prince Ybrahim of Sapiro also known as Ybarro. What made the matter more complex is that she and her younger sister Alena fell in love with the same man. Nurturing and giving as she is, Amihan suppressed her feelings towards Ybrahim and focused on her reign as queen and her battle to reclaim the throne from the evil forces of Hathoria. After the last battle

among the kingdoms, Amihan bestowed her blessing to her sister Alena and her husband Ybrahim as the new rulers of the re-established kingdom of Sapiro.

Lira is the promised savior of Encantadia and is one of the epic heroes in the series. In fulfilling her mission, which is to return the peace that was long absent in Encantadia, she was subjected to trials and fights that tested her character's maturity. After being estranged from her motherland and her identity as the future queen of Lireo, Lira returned through the help of her mother's youngest sister, Danaya, and helped Amihan to reclaim Lireo from Pirena and Hagorn. In Episode 89, Lira knew how to defeat Hagorn and his forces with the help of Inang Reyna, who was revealed to be her spirit guide.

Lira's mission proved to be arduous, but she still exerted her effort to convince her aunt Pirena to withdraw her support from Hagorn and join their force so that Hagorn and his cohorts are defeated and peace will return to Encantadia. She also persuaded her mother, Amihan and her other aunts, Alena and Danaya to make amends with Pirena. It will take some time for Lira to persuade them because of their pride. This culminated in Episode 142 when Pirena realized that she was deceived by her handmaid Gurna. Because of this, Pirena killed Gurna by turning her into stone. The four stewards of the elemental gemstones united against the evil forces of Hagorn.

Like her mother who had an internal conflict in choosing duty over self, Lira also experienced it as her character undergoes challenges and fights. In the latter part of the series, she was left with the choice of choosing her mortal lover, Anthony, over her duty as the savior of Encantadia and heir to the throne. Lira chose Encantadia over her mortal lover despite her intense feelings for Anthony. She sacrificed her own happiness in exchange of Encantadia's tranquility. As the final battle approaches, she led its planning and assembled the remaining forces that they have at the shores of Adamya. In Episode 156, after sending her mortal lover back to the human realm, Lira embarked on planning the final battle with Hagorn and his troops, and after the final battle, Lira asked for her mother's blessing to return to the mortal world and marry her lover.

Rivalry among relatives is one of the forms of fighting shown in this fantasy series, and Lira was not spared from this. Like Amihan, Lira had a feud with her cousin Mira who crossed over the realm of mortals to escape the conflicted world of *diwatas*. Mira fell in love with Anthony, Lira's lover. When Lira left for Encantadia to fulfill her mission, she entrusted Anthony to Mira, not knowing that the latter developed feelings towards Anthony. Mira resorted to all forms of magic and incantations in order for Anthony to eradicate Lira from his heart. In Episode 142, Mira, out of desperation, put Anthony under a spell through a *gayuma* so that he will forget Lira and the love that he has for her. The rivalry between the two is only implied compared to their mothers, Amihan and Pirena, because there was no confrontation.

The motif of fighting is seen in the narrative and comes in many forms. The nature of these encounters is to test the character's maturity and personality if she is fit to be the hero and a revered figure in the realm. Both characters fought with their siblings and relatives and kingdoms. Both led the final battle which will finally defeat Hagorn's evil forces, and both had an internal conflict which led them to choose their satisfaction over the duty and responsibility that was given to them.

Unlike in the Western great epics that heroes die after their series of battles, folk epics in the Philippines do not end the epics tragically. Heroes would be brought back to life with the help of some divine or magical person or creature through prayers or incantations. The process would usually take long and tedious. For “Encantadia”, the idea of resuscitation is manifested in several occasions.

Amihan’s character experienced several near-death experiences and was brought back to life with the help of a magical thing or her own willpower. First of this is her first battle as queen of Lireo when Pirena and Hagorn joined forces to kill her in Episode 3. This episode marks the transition of power from Minea to Amihan, and as her first agendum, Amihan faced Hagorn’s forces, but she was almost killed. The latter was not successful because Danaya used her earth gemstone to save Amihan from death’s clutches. Second was when Asval struck a deadly blow to Amihan’s heart during the encounter at Sapiro in Episode 111. Despite Danaya’s efforts in resuscitating Amihan back to health, her efforts were put to waste. It was Amihan’s willpower who prevented herself to succumb to death.

This caused several changes for Amihan’s benefit. First is the disappearance of the lines on her palms which means that she is in control of her own destiny. Second is on environmental changes caused by mere utterance of her will, which included acquiring the ability to create her own twin or *kambal-diwa* named Aera.

Lira's character also had her near-death experience. As she and her aunt Danaya were on their way to Encantadia, Hagorn and his troops prevented them to enter the realm. Hagorn abducted Lira in exchange of the earth gemstone which was under Danaya’s stewardship. Danaya almost gave the earth gemstone when an Avilan’s spirit stole the gemstone from her which led Hagorn to stab Lira using his sword. The future queen was fatally wounded and was brought to Avila, the sanctuary of the Mulawins. Lira almost died, but Danaya sought Mercurio’s magical seeds with the help and guidance of the Mulawins. This encounter fulfilled a prophecy that Encantadia’s future savior would die and would resurrect through the help of Mercurio’s magical seeds.

Resuscitation did not only happen in the lead characters. Pirena, one of the antagonists in the series, was killed by Asval after not surrendering the fire gemstone. She was struck with a spear to her heart which caused her immediate death. As she died, darkness enveloped the entire land and the power of fire died together with its caretaker. Pirena’s remains were left in the mountains to be consumed by animals who feed on remains and carcasses. Amihan and her sisters found Pirena’s body and gave proper burial rites fit for a royalty, but Lira stopped it as it will spell failure to her mission. In Episode 128, Lira sought the help of Evades, the guardian of the tree of life. To be able to get some leaves from the tree, Lira has to answer a riddle from the caretaker himself and she has three attempts to answer it, but she failed. Despite her failure, she did not give up, to which Evades commended; thus, allowing her to take some leaves, which saved Pirena’s soul from going to Devas.

Fighting and resuscitation are two intertwined motifs in the Philippine folk epic because these oral literature always end on a happy note. It has never permeated the Filipino consciousness that lead characters would die a tragic death even for a cause. This attribute is still evident in other forms of media such as films (specifically action films and epic films) and teleseryes wherein the lead character always triumphs over the villain.

Magical modes of transportation in “Encantadia”

Magical transportation in folk epics as a motif is common, especially for the hero and even secondary characters are involved in many adventures. Eugenio (2001) mentions that magic transportation can be part of the epic hero’s supernatural powers and abilities or a mode of transportation is described in the narrative which helps the hero and even secondary characters transport from one place to another (xxxiv).

In “Encantadia”, magical transportation is not only shown through physical depictions, but it was also part of the *diwata*’s supernatural powers and that means of transportation are provided, but only *diwatas* of royal lineage (*sang’gres*) are given this ability. Also, this power makes them invisible from their enemies. They turn into smoke so that they can be transported from one place to another. In Episode 1, when Amihan was in danger of being kidnapped, she unintentionally vanished into smoke, which made her abductors stumble with fear. However, this power has limitations. Diwatas cannot summon this power if they are tied or in the kingdom of Hathoria where the diwata’s power does not affect because the kingdom is protected by prayers and incantations to disarm enemies, especially the *diwatas*. In Episode 54, when Alena was captured by Hitano, she was bound to a chair which prevented her from escaping. In Episode 57, Hitano brought Alena to the kingdom of Hathoria to ask for Hagorn’s blessing for their marriage. Despite being a powerful diwata, Alena’s powers do not affect the kingdom. And lastly, it cannot be used to teleport from Encantadia to the Human World or vice versa.

Modes of magical transportation were created and used in the *fantaserye*. Airships are provided for air travel possible. On several occasions, these airships were used in the series. In Episode 37, Alena and Danaya were able to ride on these airships on their way to Devas to look for the missing water gemstone that was taken allegedly by Bathala from Alena to alleviate her pain from losing Ybarro. In Episode 88, Lira and Danaya also used the same mode of transportation to go to Devas to know her mission as the *luntaie* (savior of Encantadia). Apart from these air ships, Hathors also made use of individual air packets that helps them fly while fighting in mid-air.

Amihan and Lira: The Epic Heroines in “Encantadia”

The epic hero is the lead character in folk epics who also embodies the people’s ambitions, aspirations, and ideals of a community (Eugenio, 2001, xvii). For the regional epics, male characters are often used to depict the epic hero since they are always portrayed to be physically strong and possessing unusual strength. In the case of “Encantadia,” the heroes in the narrative are women: Lira and Amihan. It is in their perspectives that the majority of the fantaserye “Encantadia” is told.

ANDA NG EPIKO	AMIHAN	LIRA
The hero leaves his motherland	Brought by Raquim to protect from Hagorn	brought by Pirena to be killed
On his journey, the hero will receive a sacred object or weapon	Father’s sword Gemstone of Air	Avatar (sword)

The hero starts his journey and finds a distant relative	Finds out mother is still alive Goes back to Encantadia through Aquil and Muros' help	Finds out she is heir to the throne of Lireo Goes back to Encantadia escorted by Danaya
The hero gets into a fight	Fights with Pirena and Hagorn	Fights with Marge Fights Hagorn and his troops
The hero's fight lasts long.	Mission: Kill Hagorn and reclaim Lireo	Fights with her aunts to finally reconcile with each other
An enchanted being mediates in the fight and stops it	N/A	N/A
The enchanted being reveals to the hero that he is related to his archnemesis	N/A	N/A
The hero dies and journeys to the underworld	Threatened by Hagorn and Pirena Killed by Asval	Killed by Hagorn
The hero rises from the dead	Declares her own fate Defies death	Saved by Danaya through Mercurio's help
The hero returns triumphantly to his motherland	Reclaims Lireo; passes the crown to her daughter	Reintegrates in the world of mortals
The hero marries and lives a peaceful life	Remained single; married to the people even after her reign as queen	Marries Anthony

Table 2: Amihan and Lira's journey vis-à-vis Isagani Cruz' Anda ng Epiko

As shown in Table 2, Amihan and Lira were both estranged from Encantadia. In the first episode, Amihan's childhood was shown as she lived in the world of mortals together with her father Raquim, which made her think that she is a mortal being until it was disrupted when Hagorn and his forces killed Raquim and plotted to kill her. Amihan eluded death as she was rescued by Aquil and Muros and was brought to Encantadia. Lira's situation was different. It was Pirena who brought her to the world of mortals to have a horrific death since the infant was protected from Pirena's enchantments and powers because of Danaya's blessing. Lira grew up in the world of mortals and has always believed that she is a human being.

It was revealed to both Amihan and Lira that they were not human beings but *diwatas*. They were both heirs to the throne of Lireo which make them *sang'gres*. In addition to this, Amihan learned that her mother is still alive, something contradictory to what her deceased father used to say about her mother's identity. Lira also experienced the same. Upon knowing that she is a *diwata*, she also knew that she was the true heir to the throne of Lireo. Lastly, both heroines returned to *Encantadia* through the help of the realm's denizens; Muros and Aquil escorted Amihan as she was badly wounded; while, Danaya went in exile to the realm of mortals and accidentally discovered that the true Lira resides in the mortal world.

Amihan and Lira were both engaged in challenges, ordeals, and fights along their journey. Amihan had a sibling rivalry with her eldest sister, Pirena, since she came back from the world of mortals. This further heightened when their queen mother Minea had to choose her successor as the next queen of Lireo. In order to be fair in choosing the successor, Minea subjected her daughters to a test to challenge their capabilities as a ruler. At the end of the task, it was Amihan who emerged victorious which made her the heir to the throne, to which Pirena protested. To seek revenge after being cheated, Pirena plotted to destabilize Amihan's reign by switching Amihan's daughter with her daughter, fooling Amihan into thinking that Pirena's daughter was her flesh and blood. Amihan did not only have Pirena as archnemesis to the throne of Lireo. Hagorn of Hathoria also vied to take control of Lireo and the other three remaining gemstones to reign supreme in Encantadia. He and Amihan engaged in a long fight, which led to Amihan losing control over Lireo, but evil did not reign long, for Hagorn was defeated in the shores of Adamyra where the sang'gres and the forces of good united and fought for peace. Lira began to question her identity as a human being; she noticed she was different from other human beings as she had special abilities such as summoning the wind and sending bolts of lightning whenever in danger. Her first archnemesis was Marge, Anthony's friend, who was evidently attracted to the latter. Unfortunately, Anthony had a liking towards Lira which aggravated Marge. Because of this, Lira suffered physical assaults and harsh words from Marge, but Lira can only endure so much; thus, she sent gusts of wind and lightning to finally stop Marge's assault. Upon returning to Encantadia, her fight continued as she helped her mother in taking back Lireo from Pirena and Hagorn. As the promised savior of Encantadia, her mission was to unite all the four stewards of the gemstone so that once and for all, peace will return to the land.

Both heroines have sacred and magical objects that helped them in their journey. Amihan, on the one hand, was trained to be a warrior by her father since childhood. She inherited her father's sword which was her weapon in fighting Hagorn's forces and those that threaten the peace in Encantadia. To secure the remaining gemstones after the fire gemstone was taken by Pirena, Minea entrusted the remaining gemstones to her three other daughters. As the heir apparent to the throne, Amihan was given the stewardship of the air gemstone, the gemstone that was entrusted to the past queens of Lireo before Hathoria became greedy. The air gemstone can control air currents and lightning. It also has the power to track someone through the creature's breathing. Also, it can send messages through gusts of wind. Lira, on the other hand, was given the *Avatar*. It is a sword wielded from pure gold and wielded by the first queen of Lireo, Cassiopeia. This is Lira's weapon in protecting herself from Pirena and other forces who oppose her mother's reign in reclaiming Lireo.

Part of the hero's sojourn is the journey to the netherworld by dying and resurrecting from the dead. In the fantasy series, both Amihan and Lira suffered death which made them

journey to the netherworld. Amihan, on the one hand, encountered death numerous times, but it almost took her life when Asval stabbed her in an encounter in Sapiro. As her soul waits to enter Devas, the final resting place of Encantadia's denizens, she has a word with Avilan, the spirit guide of the air gemstone and her personal guardian. When Avilan told her that she is bound to die, Amihan defies by willpower that she will not die and it is not her time to go especially that they are still in the middle of a fight against Hagorn's forces. Lira, on the other hand, almost died when Hagorn stabbed her when Danaya did not give the earth gemstone in exchange for Lira's life. As her spirit waits to enter the gates of Devas, Avilan reveals her real identity and has subjected Lira to use her supernatural abilities by taming a dragon. After accomplishing the task, Lira went back to the world of the living.

After the journey to the underworld, the hero completes the journey and goes back home to marry or to settle down for good. In the case of Encantadia, Amihan and Lira observed this function. After the last battle, peace returned to Encantadia. Lireo's power was given back to its rightful and anointed ruler, Amihan and Sapiro rose from being a deserted kingdom and was ruled by its new king, Ybrahim. Amihan passed the crown to, Lira, her heir, but the latter abnegated it for she wanted to go back to the world of mortals and marry Anthony. Lira asked for her mother's blessing, and soon after Amihan bestowed her blessings, she entrusted the crown to her aunt Danaya. As for Amihan, she has remained single after her queenship and dedicated her entire life to maintaining the peace in Encantadia.

Amihan and Lira's characters are today's embodiment of epic heroes. Through their characters, they celebrate the essential Filipino characteristic: maternal love. This is quite ironic, however, as both characters missed the love and care of their mothers in their formative years, yet they were given the task to be the motherly figures of Encantadia. On the show's penultimate episode, Minea appeared to her daughters and delegated to them a mission: to be the mothers of each other and the entire realm. Contreras (2008) supports this that the fantasy soap is "undoubtedly female in character, with the male characters being defined concerning the female characters, and not the other way around" (7). Also, he continues that male characters become merely the love interests of the major female leads, or as soldiers and followers of strong matriarchal leaders (7). Amihan and Lira's characters as the epic heroes promote women empowerment, an issue that has been perennial today.

Also, some characters in the fantaserye were inspired by existing ancient folklore and classical tales. For example, Gurna's character is patterned after Manthara's character in the Indian epic "Ramayana". Dwivedi and Soni describes Manthara as the maid who "poisoned the mind of sweet-natured Kaikeyi, who was a step-mother of Lord Rama but still the most dotting one. The words of Manthara were so ensnaring that Kaikeyi lost all discrimination power. She was able to manipulate Queen Kaikeyi to believe that the throne of Ayodhya belonged to her son Bharata and that her step-son crown-prince Rama (the hero of the Ramayana), should be exiled from the kingdom" (430). In "Encantadia", it was Gurna who poisoned Pirena's mind that she is hated by her immediate family, which pushed the latter to do all horrendous and treacherous acts on her mother and sisters. The only difference is that Gurna, on the one hand, died at the hands of Pirena, cursing her to be in the form of stone after the latter discovered that she was manipulated all along by her handmaid to loathe her mother and sisters in Episode 141. It is also in this episode that Pirena reconciled with her three other sisters. Manthara, on the other hand, was about to be banished from the kingdom, but Kaikeyi saved her by begging King Bharata to spare her from banishment.

Another character that was inspired by other folklore is Imaw, whose character portrayal and depiction is inspired by Yoda of "Star Wars". Both characters share the same short stature and facial features. Yoda, on the one hand, is an experienced and legendary Jedi Master who helped Luke Skywalker in his ordeals (Pianka, 2013, 12), while Imaw's characterization in "Encantadia", helped Minea and Amihan in difficult situations. He will always give them sound advice in times of difficult situations. Imaw may not be an experienced warrior or Jedi unlike Yoda, but both share the qualities of a wizened being. Both provide counsel and sound advice to their leaders for the betterment of the realm. Imaw never resorted to violence and has always advised queens Minea and Amihan to always look on the good side of things and to never lose hope amidst the evil dominating the land. He always reminded these leaders to use not only their head in judging crucial situations but also their heart in discerning their actions. In Episode 2, Imaw guided Minea on how to properly choose her successor as queen of Lireo, since Minea was hesitant and worrisome on who will replace her as the leader of the *diwatas*. Another instance was in Episode 38 when Amihan was doubtful if the Lira that she knew was her true heir. To solve this riddle, Imaw proposed to the Queen to look for the golden dagger that the first queen of Lireo used to solve the dilemma of two mothers bickering over a child's custody. With these examples, Imaw's character was inspired by Yoda's physical attributes and attitudes.

And lastly, Prince Ybrahim's character, the long-lost prince of Sapiro, was patterned after an Ilokano folk epic hero, Lam-ang. In "Encantadia", Ybarro never got to know his real lineage in the royal bloodline of Sapiro until his foster father's reveals it on his dying breath. Similar to Lam-ang, both characters avenged their father's death by killing their parent's tormentors. Both characters were very showy of their manliness. Lam-ang, on the one hand, showed this by beating all his enemies in a single combat and his dauntless acceptance of capturing the *rarang* to prove his manhood (Eugenio 2). Ybarro, on the other hand, showed this by courting one of the heirs apparent to the Lireo throne, Sang'gre Alena. His manliness and machismo are only justified if he will have Alena as his special someone. He persevered in capturing her attention despite their social status that prohibits them from pursuing their relationship at a more, intimate level until Ybarro learned his true parentage. In Episode 3, he intruded Alena's study to ask for her hand in marriage, to which the sang'gre resented, but Ybarro was not discouraged. He exerted his efforts to earn Alena's attention which culminated in the first battle of Amihan against Hagorn's troops. In the long run, they became a couple and their love story ended happily as Ybrahim took the helm of leading the re-established kingdom of Sapiro.

DISCUSSION

Through Amihan and Lira's characters, the show was emulated selflessness. As queen of Lireo, Amihan ensured that the needs of the people around her were addressed. She is an epitome of a selfless leader. It even came to a point that she set aside her happiness for other people to be happy. This happened when she and Alena had fallen with the same man: Ybrahim. Since she is the incumbent leader of Lireo, Amihan set aside her feelings towards Ybrahim for her sister Alena to be happy. Lira, on the other hand, left her lover and her comfort zone, the mortal world, to fulfill her mission as the promised savior and heir to the throne of Lireo. These fantaserye heroes echo the traditional characteristics of the folk epic hero.

In previous teleseryes, feminine lead characters are victims of their circumstances (Contreras, 2013, 7). The *fantaserye* "Encantadia" countered this by establishing a new

construct which is the feminization of violence. Women garbed in armory and wage warfare against their opponents are depicted through the Sang'gre's characterization. This depiction has reversed the image of the male warrior which has long been used as a staple and frame of violence such as in other epics like the "Iliad" of the Greeks even up to Carlo J. Caparas' "Panday" (Contreras, 2013, 6). Some would say that shows and movies like "Kill Bill", "Charlie's Angels", and "Bionic Woman" would belong in this genre. It may be the case; however, but what distinguishes the Encantadia fantasy series is its mere adaptability to Filipino culture which makes it a staple viewing for Filipino viewers. Because of this narrative, the idea of war and violence has been deconstructed by not only presenting it as violent, bloody, and evil but also graceful and beautiful. By using the Sang'gres in the narrative, a balance was struck on the idea of feminization; it has both presented the feminine characteristics of grace and beauty and the masculine attributes of bravery and violence. For instance, Amihan's character as queen of Lireo is not only limited to being the mother figure of the realm; her responsibility extends in defending the queendom from all threats through warfare and combat: a trope usually reserved for the male character. Through these delineations, the show has empowered women that they can do roles similar to that of their male counterparts such as being warriors and rulers of a nation.

"Encantadia" is an example of a *fantaserye* in which real-life situations are included in its narrative, coupled with myth, enchantment, and magic. It conjures images that sanitize the lurid and obscure folkloric details which resulted in the projected image as more real and applicable; thus, enabling make-believe visual images and narratives destabilize established norms and institutions such as the machismo male. The Sang'gre's world of Encantadia became an accessible piece of popular culture, despite that it dwells in the world of fantasy, but managed to find social meaning which ordinary people can relate and associate themselves with (Contreras, 2013, 6). Through the character's portrayal, viewers can relate and identify their realities and experiences to these characters. It provided a means for the viewers to realize that they are not alone in whatever situation they are into; it is experienced by people even those from the highest members of society.

"Encantadia" exhibits traditional epic conventions as propounded by Damiana Eugenio and Isagani Cruz. Primarily, magical transportations, which can be part of the characters' powers and abilities or an aerial or land vehicle used to transport characters from one place to another, were evident. Fighting was also a convention in which the heart of the hero's adventures lies. Through these fight scenes, the character—the epic hero—transforms matures and projects heroic attributes that are valued by a group or a race. Most importantly, the *fantaserye* showcased two epic heroes, Amihan and Lira, who share the same character arc. Both were deprived of maternal love at a young age, yet their mission was to be mothers for the people under their care. Though their characters, the show underscored a valuable, Filipino attribute: selflessness. Furthermore, women empowerment was also given importance because the writers preferred to make use of female characters rather than the typical and staple male epic heroes found in the recorded pages of some regional epics. It also validates the pre-colonial principle of the leader who does not only function in the political affairs of the community, but also in the military and religious affairs.

CONCLUSION

By looking into the characters and their characterization, the researcher emerged with two epic heroes in the characters of Amihan and Lira. Their characters follow the typical plot structure of the hero's journey: being estranged from the native land, going on a set of adventures which will test their character as heroines of the land, and their triumph over these challenges and obstacles, which also manifests in their attitude transformation as the series progresses. Throughout the plot, one sees that the heroes get stronger not only physically, but also emotionally as they surpass challenges that will make them project attitudes that are valued in society such as being kind, gentle, firm, and motherly.

Also, their characters echo relevant issues and ideas that are still relevant in today's society: women empowerment and motherhood. Both characters' missions are to be stewards of the people around them. In the first episode up to the penultimate episode, motherhood has been emphasized several times. One of which is Minea's challenge to her four daughters. It was only Amihan who succeeded in the challenge because she was able to figure out that her alleged enemy is the queen. It was only Amihan who used her heart to see the good in the person like how mothers only see the good in their children. The idea of balance was also shown in the series when it was Lira's mission to unite her mother and her aunts to battle Hagorn's forces. It is through their unity that evil will be defeated and tranquility will reign so long as these elemental gemstones are in balance with each other. Through these justifications, it is safe to say that the Philippine fantasy series or the fantaserye finds its inspiration not only from mythology but also from the folk epics.

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