Journal of Language and Literature
Vol. 25 No. 2, October 2025, pp. 355 - 367
DOI: 10.24071/joll.v25i2.11106
Available at https://e-journal.usd.ac.id/index.php/JOLL/index
This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-ShareAlike 4.0 International License.

The Baylan in Modern Detective Fiction: The Rise of a Precolonial Character in Postcolonial Time

Ruth Clare Garde Torres
rgtorres@ust.edu.ph
University of Santo Tomas & De La Salle University, PHILIPPINES

Abstract

This research combines the conventions set by Jeremy Black and Francisco Demetrio on detective fiction and the Philippine shaman, setting them against Ana Micaela Chua's ideas on Alternative epistemologies. Using these conventions as a means to analyze selected stories in Jonathan A. Baldisimo and Ferdinand Benedict G. Tan's graphic novel series Trese to establish the characteristics of the baylan, a new, purely Filipino type of detective. The study will use Francisco Demetrio's study on the baylan to set the conventions on this pre-colonial character. Jeremy Black's study on Sherlock Holmes will be used to establish the traditional detective model. This model uses logic and reasoning and rejects the supernatural as a solution to the case. Both conventions will be challenged using Ana Micaela Chua's study on alternative epistemologies which argues that the investigative methods in Trese are not a rejection of logic, but rather an expansion of it. These studies were chosen through close reading to establish the existence of a purely Filipino detective in the character of Alexandra Trese, a babaylan madirigma and protagonist detective of the series. The study aims to differentiate the Filipino protagonist detective from the Western Holmes model by analyzing Alexandra Trese and her role as babaylan mandirigma not only as a new form of protagonist detective but as a postcolonial version of the baylan. The results of the study have shown that by defying the Western model of investigation and being grounded in Filipino culture, the babaylan madirigma is a new form of protagonist detective unique to the Philippines.

Keywords: *Babaylan mandirigma; alternative epistemology, protagonist detective;Trese*

Article information

Received: January 1, 2025

Revised: April 29, 2025

Accepted: June 2, 2025

Introduction

The detective fiction genre recalls authors such as Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, Dashiel Hammet, Agatha Christie and characters like Hercule Poirot, Miss Marple, and Sherlock Holmes among others. The first ever recognized as a detective story was by Edgar Allan Poe with his "Murder in the Rue Morgue" which was published in 1841. The

genre did not truly take off in terms of popularity until decades later in 1887 with Sir Arthur Conan Doyle's "A Study in Scarlet" solidifying Doyle's position as one of the main proponents of the genre that has since thrived in popularity.

Unfortunately, it is that very popularity that has caused detective fiction to be referenced as lowbrow literature and hence inappropriate for aesthetic consideration. (Worthington, 2009). Something that is further established in the study of Tony Medawar who analyzed the role of the amateur detective in modern detective fiction:

> *The idea of an amateur investigator helping the police is much harder to accept than it was in the Golden Age, especially at a time when the truly ingenious murders involve nerve agents and Russian spies and serial killers are more likely to be radicalised terrorists*.
> (Medawar, 2019, p. 2)

This example can be seen in the *Trese series* where most suspects and victims tend to take issue with the fact that they are speaking to a consultant as opposed to the police.

In Judy Suh,the study shows how Agatha Christie's works were able to recover in modern time.

> *In these recoveries, Christie has entered new contexts, including feminism, interwar trauma, and critical representations of Empire. Regarding the last, recent critics have juxtaposed Christie's novels set in the Middle East with Orientalism and European women's travel writing to illuminate her critiques of pre-World War I imperial jingoism.* (Suh, 2016, p. 61)

Early studies are also in the anthology edited by Howard Haycraft titled *The Art of the Mystery story* contains analyses, as well as rules in the creation of a detective story by various authors. The genre is generally divided into the:

a. Classic detective fiction: a highly conventionalized form that is essentially bourgeois and conservative at its premises conjuring a world that is rational, comprehensible, and moral. Crime is an anomaly, an aberration that disturbs a social equilibrium, which the detective solves through the exercise of his or her rational powers, thus restoring an order crime had disrupted. (Mojares, 2017)

b. The Hard Boiled, which views society from a much darker lens. Crime is viewed not as an anomaly but the norm; the protagonist detective is not viewed as a rational, logical being but as an antihero who is cynical in nature.

> *A product of the changing times, hardboiled detective fiction came out of a particular environment: the United States in the early twentieth century, the time of Prohibition and the Depression that saw the rise of organized crime, corruption in the police, government, and big business, economic inequalities (most starkly visible in big cities, like Chandler's Los Angeles), widespread cynicism and deep disillusion with the promise of democracy and progress.* (Mojares, 2017, p. 114)

The Modern era is set in a perennially chaotic world. Crime and violence do not disrupt the status quo, rather, it *is* the status quo. He works under the impression that society can never be fixed, the role of the detective is not to fix his dysfunctional society but rather to solve cases as they come to him. (Felicilda, 2022).

Unfortunately, there is still a significant research gap when it comes to detective fiction in the Philippines. The genre only truly gained popularity in 2002 with the publication of F.H. Batacan's "Smaller and Smaller Circles". In fact the existence of such a genre is questioned by Resil Mojares in his *Is there a Philippine Noir?* According to him detective fiction can only thrive in societies with an organized police force or system or system of law enforcement. (Mojares, 2017) Posing a problem as the Philippines did not have a modern police force in place until 1901. He criticizes the dependence of Philippine literature on the Western cultural environment.

> *The Philippines scene has become too much a client of the American cultural*

> *establishment in those years before World War II; the Filipino intellectual was thus deprived of the instruction that cultures close by, in Southeast Asia and South Asia could offer. (Mojares, 2020, para. 3)*

An analysis is contradicted in the abstract of Erlinda Kintanar – Alburo's study titled *Playing Sherlock Holmes: The Pre-War detective Novel in Cebuano* who states that:

> *While the crime or detective novel in English emerged late in the Philippines, the vernacular literatures already had several works serialized in pre-war periodicals.* (Kintanar – Alburo, 2017, p. 1)

This shows that while detective novels do exist in the Philippines, the gap lies within the research itself and not in the material.

Ana Micaela Chua also disputes Mojares' analysis in her study titled *Alternative epistemologies in Budjette Tan and Kajo Baldisimo's Trese* where she argues that

> *Third World writers do not necessarily imagine their cultures as other when they use non-linear time or when they construct fantastic imagery. Though the strategies that surface may indeed be influenced by Western forms, we must not dismiss the possibility that they are grounded in local culture and systems of knowing; likewise, we should not so quickly dismiss their tendencies to aspire for unities and truths that, postmodernism informs us, are no longer possible to attain.* (Chua, 2016, p. 105)

Showing that Filipino writers still make their own detective fiction by choosing to ground everything in local cultures and beliefs they are in fact resisting Western convention. The *Trese* series is an example of this, by showcasing characters from Philippine folklore as well as having a *baylan* as the detective of the story, it has already resisted convention by incorporating illogical characters to the logical process of investigation.

It is acknowledged that the country does have a vital ingredient that is needed in detective fiction: criminality. Nick Joaquin's *Reportage on Crime: Thirteen horror stories that hit the headlines,* for instance is a series of true crime stories but does not include the investigative process. Also Joaquin's *Reportage on Lovers* with "The mystery of the murdered bigamist" which tells the tragic story of Antonio Manapul, a bigamist who was found with his throat slashed and stabbed eight times. In this study, Mojares writes that while there has yet to be a history or even a study on Philippine detective fiction, the country's literature does have the necessary elements given that crime and criminality are both ever present in Philippine literature. What is absent in the stories to make them true examples of detective fiction is the process of investigation.

This work combines Jeremy Black's critical cultural analysis of Sherlock Holmes as well as Francisco Demetrio's study on Philippine Shamanism with Ana Micaela Chua's study on *Trese* and its alternative epistemologies applying it to selected stories in Jonathan A. Baldisimo and Ferdinand Benedict G. Tan's *Trese* graphic novel series in order to establish a new, purely Filipino type of detective, that of the *baylan*.

While being a precolonial figure the *babaylan* has returned to modern literature in the character of Alexandra Trese as a new protagonist detective. Thereby setting Philippine detective fiction as separate from its Western counterpart.

This paper will analyze pre-colonial characters in history which have made their way back into literature in a more modern adaptation this is the *baylan* or *babaylan.* A healer, a spiritual leader and conduit between the natural and the supernatural world, but who has since adapted to become a detective who would aid the police in solving cases that have clear links to the supernatural realm. The series takes the idea of the *babaylan* character and takes her even further in the person of Alexandra Trese.

Overall the purpose of this research is to address a gap in the study of Philippine detective fiction. Aiming to prove that not only are there more examples of detective fiction that exist in Philippine literature, it defies the

existing conventions of the genre by using the *baylan* character as an investigator instead of professional detectives.

Methodology

In addressing the research gap in Philippine detective fiction the author used the close reading method in order to isolate which theories and research material to use in the study. The theories of the author explored various studies on detective fiction such as Howard Haycraft's anthology, Agatha Christie's biography, and studies by Jeremy Black before finally settling on his study on Sherlock Holmes being the most appropriate to use.

The intention of choosing Jeremy Black is to introduce contrasting ideas in Ana Micaela Chua's defense of the supernatural as an investigative tool. For the *baylan* the researcher found that of all the scholars who studied this character, it was Francisco Demetrio who was able to provide clear definitions on the character and his parallels to global equivalents. He stated that on a global scale the shaman is the closest term to the *baylan.*

For the research material the author combed through a variety of detective stories including F.H. Batacan's *Smaller and Smaller Circles* and Mabek Kawsek's *Good Dog* before settling on the *Trese* graphic novel series. Since *Trese* not only clearly identifies the main character as being a *babaylan mandirigma* but also shows her as taking her destined role and adapting it to the modern realm as a consulting detective for the police.

This paper only uses selected stories in the *Trese* series. Using a) the English issues of the graphic novels b) stories from the original eight issues excluding the hardcover *Trese: Book of Murders*, *Trese: Stories from the "Diabolical"*, *Trese presents: Verdugo* as well as all stories from the *Trese* blog, c) stories which focus on the investigations of *Alexandra* Trese who is the protagonist of most of the stories in the series as well as the detective d) stories which establish the character of the *babaylan* and finally e) stories which contain actual investigation excluding the stories wherein Alexandra Trese is already aware of who the criminal or criminals are.

Results and Discussion

The first study included will be Jeremy Black's *The Game is Afoot: The Enduring world of Sherlock Holmes.* It discusses the evolution of the Sherlock Holmes story from short magazine articles to novels to movies, including how the work has been changed to fit various cultural settings. Detective fiction will also be discussed, specifically with the conventions and criticisms of the genre which the researcher must uncover.

Following this will be a discussion on the character of the *babaylan* which must also be given full context since it is this precolonial being which is beginning to emerge in modern forms of literature. The researcher will be using the analyses of Francisco Demetrio to discuss the evolution of the *babaylan* and how this character has adapted with the passage of time.

Finally, this study will incorporate Ana Micaela Chua and her study *Alternative Epistemologies in Budjette Tan and Kajo Baldisimo's Trese* to show how Alexandra Trese as the *babaylan mandirigma* is a new protagonist detective unique to the Philippines and different from typical Western detective models. Chua's study argues for *Trese* showing an alternative form of logic and science without devaluing it. She applies a postmodern approach to *Trese* which focuses on the decentralizing of the grand narrative.

1. Trese

The *Trese* series tells the story of a family with paranormal ties and their efforts to maintain the balance between the human and the supernatural world. Alexandra, the youngest, maintains a human job by running the "Diabolical" bar and aids the police in their investigations whenever the crime crosses over into the supernatural.

Trese also incorporates elements of marvelous realism, which according to Alejo Carpentier in his "On the Marvelous Real in America":

> *The marvelous, manufactured by tricks of prestidigitation, by juxtaposing objects unlikely ever to be found together: that old deceitful story of the fortuitous encounter of the umbrella and the sewing machine on the dissecting table that lead to ermine spoons, the snail in a rainy taxi, the lion's head on the pelvis of a window, the Surrealist exhibitions.* (Carpentier, 1995, p. 85)

While Carpentier's study seeks to embrace the existence of the fantastic in the natural world, *Trese* treads the line between acceptance and rejection of the fantastic. In the entire series, the supernatural world is kept secret from the humans; however, the knowledge of it is readily accessible. In "At the intersection of Balete and 13th street" the woman who killed the white lady did not really believe in the supernatural, but when she wanted to find a way to kill one, she was able to attain the information.

Alexandra's adventures are told in a graphic novel allowing the reader to visualize the elements involved in the investigation. The narrative in *Trese* is purely monochromatic, according to the study by Denise Angela De Vera and Marie Rose Arong in their "Cracking the Filipino sequence: two factors that shaped contemporary Philippine komiks"

> *Without the varying hues, the characters' personalities would not be appropriately rendered. The characters' emotions would be lacking as they would only come across as abstract shapes.* (De Vera and Arong, 2018, p. 112)

Since everything is monochromatic the personalities are not rendered in the images. Given that Alexandra Trese does not show herself as an emotional person except for the events leading up to and the aftermath of her baptism. Being shown in black and white emphasized the business-like attitude she takes when she is called to investigate a case. The research will concentrate on the methods used by Alexandra Trese and how she uses her methods as the *babaylan mandirigma* to solve the cases at hand.

Her investigative methods are like that of other detectives in Philippine literature such as Fathers Saenz and Lucero in F.H. Batacan's *Smaller and Smaller Circles* who use pure logic and reasoning in solving the case. However, she also employs spiritual methods like that of Marlene Ong from Mabek Kawsek's *Good Dog*. a psychic who uses visions to help the police. What makes Alexandra different from these protagonist detectives is that not only does her character twist the ideas of traditional logic, but she is also very much in control of her abilities. She also proves herself more capable than male protagonist detectives since she possesses better knowledge of the otherworld compared to the professionals.

The study will show that Alexandra Trese's investigative methods prove like that of Sherlock Holmes but involving the supernatural realm which the method frowns upon. Alexandra Trese's character takes the methods of Holmes and expands them into a world where he may prove to be out of place.

2. *Trese* as an Alternate Detective Fiction

The Holmes method and character is one of the primary models in the shaping of the 'detective fiction" genre. In his work titled "Sherlock Holmes: Father of Scientific Crime Detection", Stanton O. Berg:

> *The Sherlock Holmes stories have presented a phenomenon of universal appeal. The master detective employing observation, deductive reasoning, and scientific knowledge has fascinated the young and the old, the rich and the poor*. (Berg, 1970, p. 446)

However, logic and deductive reasoning can only go so far in the modern world. Criticism of Holmes' methods would rise with the appearance of the Modern detective. The detective models of Holmes and Dupin were created in a society where everything was known and logic and deductive reasoning were trusted to be the solutions to society's

problems, something which would change with the passage of time.

> *One of the most notable results of the general upheaval in society was a loss of confidence in reason as the solution to all man's problems. If the world was no longer perceived as rational but arbitrary and capricious, then man's intellect, no matter how fully developed, could not be depended upon to puzzle out all the answers. (*Geherin, 1943, p. 4)

Fortunately, Holmes was able to evolve and adapt with modern society. In his book titled *The Game is Afoot: the Enduring world of Sherlock Holmes*, Black discusses not only traces of the beginnings of the Holmes character as written by Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, but also how the character of Sherlock Holmes has evolved with the times. His stories have been adapted into various mediums all over the globe, including television and film and with each country he touches choosing to make suit their cultural tastes. In 2018 Mario Mendez wrote *Sherlock en Buenos Aires* which covered Holmes' arrival to the country to solve the disappearance of the daughter of a British diplomat. In this story Watson is replaced by Manuel Vallejoz, an embassy employee (Black, 2022). Conan Doyle's characters also evolve through history to suit the social context at the time. An example was in 1942 Rathbone Universal films showed *Sherlock Holmes and the Secret Weapon* as Moriarty working with the Germans at the height of World War II (Black, 2022). And while his methods are still prevalent in his adaptations, the "Holmes "character has incorporated illogical norms along the way, with detectives referring to them relying on instincts and intuition, with the emphasis still being on logic and reasoning.

This reflects the ever-changing landscape that is detective fiction, in particular what will be the two subjects of dispute in Jeremy Black's study. The idea that detective fiction must follow the "Holmes" method of being centered around logic and reason, and his mockery of the spiritual and unscientific in solving a mystery.

In his chapter titled "The legacy" Black mentions that there is a tension between the belief in the supernatural and Holmes's approach (Black, 2022) in that what is supernatural does not follow his method of being based in logic and deductive reasoning. As the book progresses, he provides further examples of this tension as in that very same chapter he mentions how the Holmes character would express doubt about the existence of the Sussex Vampire, citing the following quote:

> *Belief in Spiritualism did not extend to Holmes crediting vampires, and he expresses a more general skepticism in 'The Sussex Vampire':*
> *'What have we to do with walking corpses who can only be held in their grave by stakes driven through their hearts? It's pure lunacy'.* (Black, 2022, "The Legacy", para. 49)

There is a certain irony that Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, himself a spiritualist, would create a character who openly dismisses the very concept of the supernatural. The world, according to Holmes with all its problems, was vast enough without adding the otherworld into the mix.

This mockery of the spiritual element in detection is further shown in Howard Haycraft's anthology titled *The Art of the Mystery Story: A Collection of Critical essays*, specifically the works of S.S. Van Dine with his "Twenty Rules for writing detective stories" and Ronal A. Knox's "detective story decalogue". While both have different takes on what should and should not be in a detective story, they do have similar rules when it comes to the existence of the supernatural in that it simply should not exist. For Van Dine and his twenty rules, his idea of the supernatural can be found in rule number 8.

> *8. The problem of crime must be solved by strictly naturalistic means. Such methods for learning the truth as slate - writing, ouija boards, mind reading, spiritualistic seances, crystal gazing, and the like are taboo. A reader has a chance when matching his wits with a rationalistic detective, but if he must compete with the world of spirits and go chasing about the*

> *fourth dimension of metaphysics, he is defeated ab initio.* (Van Dine, 1974, p. 190)

For Knox, in his "detective story decalogue" he places his rule in his second rule:

> *II. All supernatural or preternatural agencies are ruled out as a matter of course. To solve a detective problem by such means would be like winning a race on the river using a concealed motor engine.* (Knox, 1974, p. 194)

In the Philippine setting we see an example of this mockery in analyzing the short stories in *Trese* specifically from Issue 2 *Unreported Murders*, the chapter called "Embrace of the unwanted" and from Issue 4 *Last seen at Midnight* the story titled "Wanted: Bed Spacer". Both of which show Alexandra interacting with those who actively doubt the existence of the supernatural.

In "Embrace of the Unwanted" Alexandra Trese is tasked with finding the supernatural perpetrator behind the violent and gruesome deaths at the basement of Magna mall, both victims having been bitten and clawed to death, the woman having her abdomen ripped open. With the help of her informants and a reluctant *segben* Alexandra would uncover an afterhours abortion clinic being conducted by a doctor in the mall. This would lead to the discovery that the murders were being committed not by one suspect, but by many forms of the same species, the *tiyanak.* We see the doctor making a mockery of the possibility that not only is she the cause of the murders being committed, but that the deaths were related to the supernatural.

Trese: *Tiyanak* are the unwanted children, they used to be left in the middle of the forest because they were illegitimate or because they were deformed. They would be found by those who dwell underground and would be fed with anger and hate. This made them stronger, made them hungry for blood, but most of all they would seek the comfort of a mother's womb. How many aborted souls have you left in the darkness of the mall's basement? Now they hunger and kill.

> *Dr. Gallaga: Nonsense! Get out of here now! I can't believe you interrupted work with children's stories.* (Baldisimo and Tan, 2008, p. 64 - 65)

In "Wanted: Bedspacer" Trese is called in to solve an epidemic of students falling into sudden fits of despair. We see the mockery of the unscientific in the image of the doctor attempting to treat the students who have been forced to call Trese to consult at the behest of his grandfather.

> *Trese: Dr. Tuason, you're familiar with a bangungot, yes?*
> *Dr. Tuason: You mean sudden death syndrome? That's a medical myth, Ms. Trese, the most probable cause of which is pancreatitis or do you expect me to believe that an invisible obese creature that sits on people's chests when they sleep is the cause of my patients' conditions?*
>
> *Trese: What you just described is the batibat. They are creatures who live in trees and when these trees are cut down and used for a house they remain in the wood. Sometimes when someone sleeps near their wooden post, they are angered. That's when they come out and lie down on their victims, giving them nightmares, suffocating them while they sleep. On the other hand, the bangungot doesn't bring about death by stealing a person's breath, that is far from the truth.*
> *Dr. Tuason: "I don't think the truth can be found in a scary story you will tell children!"*
> (Baldisimo and Tan, 2011, p. 57 - 58)

On the part of the "professionals' ' both examples directly support the idea that mysteries should only be solved by means of logic and reasoning. However, as the investigation progresses Trese was correct in the assumption that the perpetrators for both incidents were the supernatural beings she mentioned. In "Embrace of the Unwanted'' not only is she forced to fight off multiple *tiyanaks* with bodyguards the *kambal* but the doctor herself would later be seen looking over her shoulder to see teeth and claws, implying that in spite of Trese and the *kambal*'s best efforts in "pest control" a *tiyanak* managed to get away. The doctor's fate is never shown in the

story. In "Wanted Bedspacer'' she is also proven correct when she can perform a *babaylan* healing ritual which saves the patients from the *bangungot* when all the doctor's scientific medical practices could not.

While Black argues for the "Holmesian model" of using only logic and reasoning in the creation of detective fiction it is not only what solves the mystery. There is also knowledge of a country's culture. In the Philippines the supernatural can be considered logical. As demonstrated in *Trese* the world of the otherworld and the human world can coexist as long as there is a balance between the two. In the series, all of the issues have at some point referenced a "treaty" forged between the family and the otherworld. While the specifics have yet to be mentioned it indicates the rules in interactions between other beings and the humans.

Trese's methods of investigation are not a rejection of the Holmes model but rather an expansion of it into another world. She still applies the logical and deductive method of investigation but to the otherworld, a world which is inherently illogical.

In issue 1: Murder on Balete Drive, she demonstrates her ability to follow the clues logically in "At the Intersection of Balete and 13th street", when a white lady is captured and murdered in such a way that renders her visible for all the world to see, Trese would follow the clues gleaned from her informant a *dwende* named Amang Paso about the ritual circle to the pier. She would discover that the circle used to capture the ghost used powdered mermaid bones procured from an *aswang* in exchange for a child that it would eat. Using rituals, she had learned in her training as a *baylan* she would be able to deduce the identity of the woman who sold her child in exchange for a spell to trap and kill the white lady.

The same logic and reasoning are applied to "The tragic case of Dr. Burgos" where women are burned from the inside out right down to their souls. Trese consults with her informants including one Manang Muning, a woman with the ability to communicate with and see through the eyes of cats, and the ghost of the *Santelmo, a* fire spirit who tell her that what happened was a sacrifice meant to extract women's souls to give to the enchantress Oriol.

The story from issue 3: titled "An act of War", has Trese investigating a series of demonic possessions resulting in suicide bombings throughout Manila. What she discovers from her allies is that the father of the *kambal,* the War God Talagbusao, is attempting to rise up once again. But while it was logic and reasoning that led her to discover who she was looking for, it would be magic which would trap Talagbusao into his greatest desire, a never-ending battle only it would be within the confines of a video game.

Finally, "Private collection" from Issue number 4 follows the case of otherworld creatures being tortured, mutilated and murdered. Following the lead of Amang Paso she would discover the private collection of body parts taken by a hunter who got tired of killing animals from the human world and wanted stronger, more exotic prey.

Doyle and by extension Black may have scoffed at the idea of applying spiritualism to the adventures of Sherlock Holmes, but in the case of *Trese* Holmes' method of using logic and reasoning still applies.

The term "logic" does take on a different meaning when it comes to the world of *Trese*. While in the world of Sherlock Holmes it is not normal to consider a supernatural perpetrator, in Trese's world it is perfectly normal, in all stories the police know to consult the Trese family whenever the case involves anything that could be seen as strange. In Trese's world what is considered strange and illogical to the rest of humanity is perfectly normal.

This is where Ana Micaela Chua's study on alternative epistemologies come into play. According to her study:

> *.... different ways of accessing knowledge are allowed to play vital roles in detection without totally devaluing rational analyses. These alternatives to logic and science may themselves vary: from superstitions to the properly arcane, from*

> *"common sense" to emotional and sociological understanding of human interaction.* (Chua, 2016, p. 102)

The series does not reject the Holmesian model by using spirituality as Black indicates. It simply uses the spiritual element to expand the Holmesian model by using it as an alternate form of truth.

3. Alexandra Trese as a Philippine Shaman and Detective

The *Baylan* is a pre-colonial character that is resurfacing in Philippine literature. She must first be given social and cultural context before being analyzed as a literary character. According to Francisco Demetrio in his "Shamans, Witches and Philippine society" the closest term he found in the English language that could describe the *baylan* is "shaman". The term shamanism has been used in a variety of traditions sharing the common characteristic of a practice in which the shaman's mind detaches from his body. This practice described the soul's journey during which the practitioner attained journeys to the so-called 'lower world' and 'upperworld' where the shaman seeks information to help the individual or the community. The shaman himself is considered as a medium who is able to communicate with the supranormal and between the different levels of the universe (Hytönen-Ng, 2016).

In 2023 Grace Nono wrote and published a book titled *Babaylan sing back: Philippine Shamans and voice, gender and place*. In this book she discusses her travels to various regions in the Philippines and the United States to study the *baylan* and their culture. Starting with the Manobo tribe where she discovered that in the tribe there is a ritual specialist they call the *baylan* according to the tribe's culture the *baylan* is accompanied, borderline possessed by a spirit companion called the *abyan*. She also notes that within the tribe's culture the *baylan* may have different roles in society, for example while some may be blessed with the gift of healing, others may turn out to be gifted musicians. (Nono, 2023).

She would also encounter ritual specialists among the T'boli tribes known as the *kem libun* or *libun,* the resulting interview would lead her to learn that the *libun* are not only ritual specialists but also protectors of women, showing the *baylan* as symbols of female empowerment. Her she would first encounter transgender ritual specialists amongst the Blaan tribe, this tribe would call their specialists the *nungaru* translated as "someone who knows" or the "spirited one" who are believed to have spirit familiars known as *magin*. The *nungaru* she would interview would introduce themselves as the *nungaru - ambaling lagi,* the latter being the term used for female to male transgender persons. She discovers that amongst the Blaan there are *nungaru* both male and female as well as transgender persons who could either be the *ambaling lagi* or the *ambaling libun* which is the term for males who become female (Nono, 2023).

In Wallingford, Connecticut she would find herself interviewing her first male ritual specialist; a member of the Ifugao tribe named Mamerto "Lagitan" Tindongan who would be introduced as a *mumbaki* of Ifugao ritual specialist. What she would discover is that contrary to the other forms of ritual specialists she had seen wherein they are permitted to have other roles besides, healer and spiritual leader, the *mumbaki* are strictly conductors of their tribes' rituals.

In the work Francisco Demetrio's study published in 1973 he refers to the *baylan* as the Filipino version of the western Shaman, in his work "Philippine Shamanism and Southeast Asian Parallels" he states:

> *Like most primitive peoples, the early Bisayans, Tagalogs, Bikolanos and Cagayanos as well as the modern survivals of the proto Malayans and other now dwelling in the hills of Luzon, Bisayas and Mindanao– all have their religious functionaries. These functionaries roughly may be grouped under three categories: 1) The shaman variously called catalonan or anitera (Tagalog and northern Luzon), bailan, daetan, cartooran, bailan, mamumuhat, diwatero (Bisayas, especially Samar, Leyte, Cebu, Bohol and northern Mindanao, dorarakit or antinowan (Isnegs), alopogan (Tinguians), balian*

> *(Pygmies of Palawan), babalian (Negros and elsewhere) and ballyan among the Mandayans of Mindanao. The shaman is at once priest - sacrificer, healer, intermediary with the spirit world, prophet and seer; 2) the magician or sorcerer who can be either a white magician or medicine - man, mananambal, mamumuhat, diwatero, arbolaryo, herbolaryo, makinaadmanon whose actions are generally for the good of others, or the black magician or witch doctors who can either do good or harm to people, but mostly harm for a fee. Then they are generally called mamalarang, barangan, usikan, paktolan, sigbinan, etc… And 3) the witch or balbal or aswang; men and women who, in the mind of the folk, are people with a "particular kind of sickness" which in turn they can give to others.* (Demetrio, 1973, p. 130 - 131)

The shaman is shown as being both a heroine and a villain in literature, also as a direct reflection of Philippine society. Alexandra Trese in her role as the *baylan* not only shows the shaman in a modern light showing her significance in a post colonial world; in being a voice for both the human and the supernatural world, her character also lends a new facet to the study of Philippine detective fiction by including elements of Philippine folklore.

Demetrio would revisit this idea and discuss it further in his article titled "Shamans, Witches and Philippine society" he provides a clear definition of what a shaman is:

> *The shaman is a human being, man or woman, whom the spirits call (in a manner that cannot be refused without very tragic results) to become their intermediary with the world of human beings. Through his initiation the shaman is thereby introduced to the world of spirits,and is gradually familiarized with it so that he can enter into it and get out of it with ease. He becomes endowed with special powers, magical, moral, physical and spiritual…* (Demetrio, 1988, p. 374)

He also mentions the initiation, the shaman goes through a trial that is like death to attain unity with the nonhuman forces of reality.

While his conventions can be found in the *Trese* series, the graphic novel deviates in that the shaman is not so much called by the spirits, but rather raised within both the spirit world and the human world with the full knowledge of what she would become in the future.

Alexandra Trese's initiation as the *babaylan madirigma* is covered in *Issue 3: Mass murders* with the story "The Baptism of Alexandra Trese ''. Here she prepares to take the twelve trials at the great *balete* tree where she will be required to climb into the nexus or the place where all realms meet to secure her place as the *babaylan mandirigma.* This is a rare calling since it is often women who are destined for the *babaylan* and not the *mandirigma.* She then learns of a prophecy that "the sixth child of the sixth child will be a child of paradox and possibilities", either ushering a new age of the underworld or sealing the path between the human world and the supernatural world. It is moments before her trials that her father also informs her that Miranda also predicted that on that very day, the day of the trials at the *balete* tree "the blood of Trese will soak the roots of the great tree". The *aswang* were not willing to gamble on whether the *babaylan mandirigma* would be the salvation or destruction of the species and were willing to do anything to make sure she did not come out of the trials alive. Alexandra's mother had predicted that because of this battle a member of the family would be lost. Alexandra initially refuses to take the test after discovering her fate, but her father and grandfather would both dissuade her saying that whether she took the test the *aswang* would never stop coming for her.

What the tests are exactly and what happened in the tree are never revealed save for some images scattered throughout the issues. "Wanted: Bedspacer" mentions her being taught a song that is sung by tribes to bring their people home from a long journey, and finally "The Judges' verdict" from *Issue 5: Midnight tribunal*, has her briefly thinking about how she learned to recognize sigils of power during her time in the tree.

Journal of Language and Literature
ISSN: 1410-5691 (print); 2580-5878 (online)

While Alexandra fulfills Demetrio's conventions of the shaman being healer, leader and spiritual conduit, she is not called by the spirits at least in the traditional sense. Since her entire family has always been deeply immersed in the supernatural world, her destiny was not so much a calling as it was her birthright. She has not been trained to prepare her for her own path in life, rather to become part of the family business of maintaining the balance between the otherworld and the human world.

Demetrio also talks about the shaman going through a "death", a simulation of loneliness to keep him in touch with the supernatural reality. Alexandra has no need to be put in touch with this reality since she has been born into it, she does still go through a kind of death; finding out that she has been destined to either be the savior or the end of the underworld and that because of her she will lose a member of her family on the day of her trials, results an isolating recognition of the burdens she must carry alone. At the end of her trials, she comes out of the *balete* tree with the knowledge that the Trese that was destined to spill blood at the tree's roots was none other than her father Anton.

By Demetrio's conventions, Alexandra Trese is the image of *baylan* in that she is a healer and a spiritual leader, but she is also a *mandirigma* or warrior, a protector. Intersecting with Ana Micaela Chua study on alternative epistemologies. She is not disputing the existing definitions in the narrative, rather she is expanding the definitions. Just like she does not dispute the scientific methods indicated in the Holmesian model by Jeremy Black, she is simply expanding and providing alternatives to the existing system of logic by introducing a world that the humans are not all privy to.

Demetrio mentions that the shaman can cause harm to others, this is shown in the latest issue of Trese titled *Shadow Agents*. While this book is still divided into stories, in the end the adversaries that Trese has faced in her investigations was from the machinations of a rival *baylan* who is willing to shed blood for a cause that he and Alexandra believe in. The manipulations of Mr. Talis who Alexandra calls "the Astronomer" include providing *agimat* to civilians whom he views would make good soldiers in the fight against the Madame who is also waging her own private war with the country by making deals with *aswang*.

Demetrio's ideas of the *baylan,* Black's study on Holmes and Chua's study on alternative epistemologies all tie in with Alexandra Trese's character as a Filipino detective. Her methods still follow the Holmesian model of following the clues that are grounded in logic and reasoning but bends the rules by applying spiritual means which are grounded in Filipino culture. Again supporting the idea of Chua's alternative epistemologies, calling for the existence of myth as an expanded version of logic. By being a *babaylan mandirigma,*Trese also expands the ideas of Demetrio in the concept of the Philippine shaman. She does not go through the typical levels of being called by the spirits and going through initiation, neither is she isolated in the role of healer and spiritualist, she is also a protector.

Conclusion

Francisco Demetrio and Jeremy Black both establish conventions which the character of Alexandra Trese bends to fit the modern era for the protagonist detective that is purely Filipino. Demetrio sets the conventions of the *baylan* which is circumvented in Trese since she is a Philippine shaman but also a warrior. Alexandra Trese further expands her role for the modern era by taking her abilities as spiritualist - protector becoming a detective whenever called upon by the police. She applies the reasoning of Holmes as defined by Jeremy Black but expands this notion of what is "logical" by diving into the supernatural realm. This supernatural realm is based on Filipino culture supporting Ana Micaela Chua's arguments about genres being influenced by Western models being grounded in cultural truths.

However, this study only focuses on facets of Philippine detective fiction, the idea that folklore and the supernatural can be included in a genre that relies on logic. Suggested studies for the future could be to analyze detective fiction as a reflection of the country's

culture to see how it is different from Western detective fiction.

References

Baldisimo, J.& Tan, F. (2008a) *Trese 1: Murder on Balete Drive.* Visprint Inc.,

Baldisimo, J.& Tan, F. (2008b) *Trese 2: Unreported Murders.* Visprint Inc.

Baldisimo, J.& Tan, F. (2009)*Trese 3: Mass Murders.* Visprint Inc.

Berg, S. O. (1970). Sherlock holmes: Father of scientific crime detection. *The Journal of Criminal Law, Criminology, and Police Science*, *61*(3), 446. https://doi.org/10.2307/1141973

Black, J. (2022) *The Game is Afoot: the Enduring World of Sherlock Holmes*, Rowman & Littlefield.

Carpentier, A. (1995) On the Marvelous Real in America. In L. Parkinson Zamora & W. B. Faris (Eds.), *Magical Realism: Theory, History, Community* (pp. 75 – 88). https://www.graduateschools.uni-wuerzburg.de/fileadmin/43030300/Heise-Materialien/carpentier-marvelous_real.pdf

Chua, A.M. (2016) Alternative epistemologies in Budjette Tan and Kajo Baldisimo's *Trese*. In R. Ramas Cañete (ed.) *Humanities Diliman: A Philippine journal of Humanities.* Volume 13(2) (102 – 126.) https://journals.upd.edu.ph/index.php/humanitiesdiliman/article/view/5189/4661

Demetrio, F. (1973) "Philippine Shamanism and Southeast Asian Parallels", *Asian Studies: Journal of Critical Perspectives on Asia vol. 11* (2) 128 – 15. https://www.asj.upd.edu.ph/mediabox/archive/ASJ-11-02-1973/demetrio-philippine%20shamanism%20southeast%20asian%20parallels%20.pdf

Demetrio, F. (1988) "Shamans, Witches and Philippine society", *Philippine Studies vol. 36* (3) 372 – 380. https://www.jstor.org/stable/42633102

De Vera, D. & Arong M.(2017). "Cracking the Filipino Sequence: Two Factors That Shaped Contemporary Philippine Komiks." *Journal of Graphic Novels and Comics* 10 (1) https://doi.org/10.1080/21504857.2017.1419981

Felicilda, J.M. (2022). *The city as place: An urban analysis of three Philippine detective fiction books*, (Master's theses) De La Salle University, Manila, Philippines

Geherin, D. (1985) *The American Private Eye: The image in fiction*. Frederick Ungar Publishing Co. Inc..

Haycraft, H. (1974) "Foreword" In H. Haycraft (Ed.) *The Art of the Mystery story: A collection of critical essays*. Carroll & Graf publishers Inc.,

Hytönen-Ng, Elina (2016). "The Role of Anthropological Literature in Contemporary Shamanic Practices" *Anthropological Journal of European Cultures* , 2016, *Vol. 25* (1), pp. 47-63. https://www.jstor.org/stable/26379551

Kintanar – Alburo, Erlinda (2017). "Playing Sherlock Holmes: The Pre-War detective Novel in Cebuano" *Philippine Quarterly of Culture and Society* , 2017, *Vol. 45* (½) pp.1-19. https://www.jstor.org/stable/26788418

Knox, R. (1974)The Detective Story Decalogue. In H. Haycraft (Ed.) *The Art of the Mystery story: A Collection of Critical essays* . (194 – 196). Howard Haycraft.Carroll and Graf Publishers Inc.,

Medawar, Tony (June 2019). The Good, the Bad and the Ugly: An A to Z of the Golden Age of Crime and Detective Fiction. *Sidelights on Sayers*, *Vol. 66,* 2-15. https://www.jstor.org/stable/48609853

Mojares, R. (2017). "Is there a Philippine Noir?" in *Interrogations in Philippine Cultural History: The Ateneo de Manila Lectures.* (113 - 126). Ateneo University Press,

Mojares, R. (2020, September 2) *The Haunting of the Filipino writer*, Buglas Writers' project. https://buglas-writers.medium.com/the-haunting-of-the-filipino-writer-b6ef0a71b088

Nono, G. (2023). *Babaylan sing back: Philippine Shamans and voice, gender, and place*. Ateneo de Manila.

Suh, J. (2016) "Agatha Christie in the American Century" *Studies in Popular Culture* , Vol. 39, No. 1.pp. 61-80. Retrieved from: https://www.jstor.org/stable/26644402

Van Dine, S.S. (1974) Twenty Rules for Writing detective Stories. In H. Haycraft (Ed.) *The Art of the Mystery story: A Collection of Critical Essays* (189 - 193) Haycraft. Carroll and Graf Publishers Inc.

Worthington, H. (2009) "Formal Investigations: Aesthetic style in Late Victorian and Edwardian detective fiction (review)" *Victorian Review, Volume 35* (1) 267 – 269. http://www.jstor.org/stable/27793720