

COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF GUY DE MAUPASSANT'S *TWO FRIENDS* AND ARTURO ARIAS' *TOWARD PATZUN*

Kristiawan Indriyanto

Doctorate Program of American Studies
Faculty of Cultural Sciences, Universitas Gadjah Mada
kristiawan.i@mail.ugm.ac.id

Abstract

This paper compares and contrasts two short stories, Guy De Maupassant's *Two Friends* and Arturo Arias' *Toward Patzun*. Both stories have the same thematic structure as the harshness and brutality during wartime situation is a similar concern to the aforementioned writers. Although both writers foreground the savagery of war, the different cultural background, nationality, literary tradition cause differences in the way both writer narrate their short stories. While De Maupassant depicts the Franco-Prussian War (1870-1871), Arias squares his narration in the Guatemalan civil war (1960-1996). The differences of canonical status between De Maupassant and Arias is also scrutinized in this paper. While De Maupassant is a household name in Western literary tradition, the popularity of Arias remains obscure. This paper argues that the differences in canonization is linked also with the status of *Two Friends* in the *hyper-canon*, on the other hand *Toward Patzun* is located in the *counter-canon*. It is hoped that this paper can contribute toward questioning the privileged status of Western literary works compared to the non-Western author.

Keywords : Comparative literature, world literature, canonization

INTRODUCTION

Although the concept of world literature, or *Welt Literature* has been proposed by Goethe since the 1820's, this concept still privileged the Western canonical works. The disparity of status between Western and non-Western literature hinders the universality of literature as what Goethe theorized (Pizer, 2000:215). In recent era, writers coming from non-Western world has the chance to be accepted as part of world literature, as seen from Damrosch' statement. Damrosch's asserts that world literature encompasses all literary works that circulate beyond their culture of origin, either in translation or in their original language." (2000:9). Moreover, nowadays most literature circulates the world in translation. (Damrosch, 2009:65) which highlights the easier accessibility of literary production among the global community.

Concerning world literature, Damrosch differentiates between world literature and canonical world literature. His opinion is that any literature to be considered as canonical world literature has to be canonized, used into teaching material beyond their country of origin. In

Damrosch's idea, "work only has an *effective* life as world literature whenever, and wherever, it is actively present within a literary system beyond that of its original culture." (2003: 4) This often-overlooked statement by Damrosch delimit the scope of what can be categorized as World Literature into not just any literature but literature which is "presented within a literary system" or canonized. He further underlines the ever-changing nature of world literature, as what constitutes world literature is not a fixed definition or only accommodates certain canonical works but instead is a mode of circulation and of reading." (2003: 5)

On his essay, "World Literature in a Postcanonical, Hypercanonical Age" (2006), Damrosch charts the development of canonical world literature and stresses that there exist certain types of canon. Damrosch believes that the canonical World literature is differentiated by three layered models, *hyper-canon* at the very top, *counter-canon* at the middle, while *shadow canon* is the bottommost level. (2006: 45) *Hyper-canon* consists of older, major authors in Western literary conditions, *counter-canon* is composed of the language less commonly taught and in minor literatures within great-power

languages. Lastly, *shadow canon* is populated with the writers who are previously accepted as the *countercanon* but now fading into obscurity. This essay by Damrosch highlights the persisting divisions between the *hypercanon* and the *countercanon* of world literature. (2006: 53)

To contribute in the ongoing debate of canonical world literature, this paper compares and contrasts two short stories, *Two Friends* by Guy De Maupassant and *Toward Patzun* by Arturo Arian. Although both *Two Friends* and *Toward Patzun* are canonized and used as reading material, these two works actually do not have same position in the canon hierarchy. *Two Friends* as a literature written by Western author is considered as *hypercanon*, the top peak of canon hierarchy consisted of the major authors in Western tradition. This can be seen of how the works by Maupassant, not just *Two Friends* are included in many anthologies, such as *The Best Short Stories* (1999), *The Necklace and Other Short Stories* (1992), and *The Complete Works of Guy de Maupassant* (2006). In short, as a Western writer Maupassant has privileged position in which his works are still preferred to be used as teaching material in the West.

Compared to Maupassant, Arian can be categorized as *countercanon* writer. As a native Spanish user, Arian is not as popular compared to Garcia Marquez and Borges for example. According to Padilla, Central American writers such as Arian are disadvantages by several aspects. They do not have having a large publishing industry, suffering from high rates of illiteracy and a lack of economic funding for the arts. Padilla, 2015) These problems hinder the popularity of Central American writers. One example is that there is only one anthology entitled *Contemporary Short Stories from Central America* (1994) which is compiled by a Central American native Enrique Jaramillo Levi and translated by Leland H. Chambers. This anthology consists of the stories from Guatemala, Honduras, El Salvador, Nicaragua, and Costa Rica. The fact that Arian's work has been canonized by being anthologized

affirms *Toward Patzun* as one of the canonical world literature. Yet it must also be noted that the canonical status of Arian's work is still below Maupassant's literature.

The disparity of canonical status between Maupassant and Arian interests this paper to make a comparison between these two writers. Maupassant can be classified as major writer while Arian is relatively unknown and minor. The intention of this paper is to find out whether the different canonical position between Maupassant and Arian is due to the different intrinsic literary qualities embodied in their work. The focus is mainly on the analysis of the literature itself without considering extrinsic element such as the reception of the Western academia. The analysis will focus on several intrinsic elements such as setting, theme, characters, and plot.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

As previously stated, both Maupassant's *Two Friends* and Arian's *Toward Patzun* has thematic similarity. The similarity of theme is one subjects of investigation in comparative literature as stressed by Bassnett. Bassnett, on her book *Comparative Literature* (1993) draws upon the significance of thematic study is on attempting to unravel why that process might have taken place. (1993:116) Although warfare situation is a recurring theme for fiction writers (Ashe and Patterson, 2014), each writer has their own way of contextualizing the situation of armed struggle depends of the war being narrated and also their own background. Hence, the emphasis of this paper is both on analyzing the similarities in theme and also underlines the area in which Maupassant and Arian differs.

Both Maupassant and Arian write their short story in historical fiction genre, they are employing real conflict as the setting but with fictional characters. Yet as both writers have different background, ethnically and historically, they narrate different conflict. Maupassant who was born one century earlier than Arian focuses on the chaotic situation during the

late 19th century Europe, especially the war between France and Prussia. On the contrary Arian portrays the Guatemalan Civil War. Even though both writers describe different war, they have similar stance, they strongly disapprove of military force. War causes needless death, not just among soldiers but also the civilians caught as a bystander. Maupassant portrays his anti-war stance in a conversation between Morrisot and Sauvage in *Two Friends*.

Morrisot, who was anxiously watching his float bobbing up and down, was suddenly seized with the angry impatience of a peaceful man toward the madmen who were firing thus, and remarked indignantly:

"What fools they are to kill one another like that!"

"They're worse than animals," replied Monsieur Sauvage. (De Maupassant, 1882 [2007]:44)

Maupassant believes that "killing one another makes human worse than animal", this illustrate his disapproval toward warfare. Similar with Maupassant, Arian also criticizes the fact that war results in human casualties, this is shown in how the main character in *Toward Patzun* questions the slaughter of the Indian by the Guatemalan military.

Suddenly losing my balance, or my strength, or my mind, I fell to my knees with the knowledge that now there was not a single probable certainty in life, not a single rational confidence, not a single human surety. Why kill them? Why? Why did it have to be this way inevitably? (Arias, 1994:5)

As writers in historical fiction genre, both Maupassant's *Two Friends* and Arian's *Toward Patzun* is highly influenced by the rising conflicts in their particular time period. Europe during the 19th century was a continent in which open warfare inevitably occurs between the Great Powers. Howard believes that the defining characteristic of 19th century Europe is

[t]he emergence of the **nation-state** in place of the multi-national

dynastic empires of Europe. A nation-state was one, in which the majority of its citizens and not only its rulers, came to develop a sense of common identity and shared history or descent. This commonness was forged through struggles, through the actions of leaders and the common people. (Howard, 1990:21)

In *Two Friends*, Maupassant portrays the war between France and Prussia, a German state. Compared to the stable and unified political entity of France, Germany as a country does not exist back then. Germany were divided into many small states in which Prussia was the strongest state, both politically and militarily. Bassnett noted the disparity between France and Germany at that time.

While at that time France was a wealthy power with colonies throughout the world, a strong industrial base and a belief in the superiority of its language, institutions and culture, the modern Germany was not yet existed. Germany was an assortment of little states, united by language but striving towards a political center and in search of a soul. (1993:24)

In order to unite the splintering states of Germany into one political entity, nationalism is evoked by Prussia through the necessity of unity against an aggression of a foreign power. The prime minister of Prussia, Otto von Bismarck irritated the French Government through several diplomatic incidents. One example is how Bismarck created false news that a Hohenzollern (the ruling family of Prussia) was to be crowned as king of Spain, which will cause France to be surrounded by pro-German nation. Eventually France declared war on Prussia, but it was already calculated by Prussia. By making sure that France was considered as the invader, the small German states allied themselves with Prussia. Wawro asserts that, "once the lesser states allied with Berlin in a patriotic war, they would not revert to their separate government." (2003:22) Hence the unification of

Germany was achieved during the course of this war.

Nationalism is also shown as a central theme in Maupassant's *Two Friends*. As Maupassant is a Frenchman, he glorifies his French character and derogatively portrays the Prussian invaders. In *Two Friends*, the Prussian enemies are depicted as brutal and even barbaric. This can also be found in the depiction of the Prussian officer. He is described as "a shaggy looking giant." (1882)[2007]:45) Maupassant abides to the stereotypical portrayal of German soldier as barbaric and warlike. The officer is considered as "a giant", which imply the fortitude and the strength of the Germanic race. Another illustration is how he is considered as "shaggy", German men are portrayed as unkempt and untidy person because their main focus is on warfare and neglect the finer points in life.

Beside the physical stereotype of the Prussian, Maupassant also emphasized the brutality of the soldiers. Even though both Morissot and Sauvage as the titular "two friends" are just normal civilians, the Prussian officer consider them as spies. The brutality is depicted in how the officer gives order to execute the two friends sternly

The Prussian, perfectly calm went on, with hand outstretched toward the river:

"Just think that in five minutes you will be at the bottom of that water. In five minutes ! You have relations. I presume?"....

The officer cried :

"Fire!"

The twelve shots were as one. (De Maupassant, 1882 [2007]:45-46)

The Prussian officer is not hesitant in ordering the killing of innocent civilians. Further illustration of his brutality can be found in the ending of the story. The officer gives the order to his soldier to cook the dead men's fish. Later on he is depicted to resume smoking his pipe. This implies that the killing of two civilians is not a major concern for him. He is shown not to have any regret or remorse but he continues his activity like nothing had happened.

Suddenly he caught sight of the net full of gudgeons, lying forgotten in the grass. He picked it up, examined it, smiled, and called:

"Wilhelm!"

A white-aproned soldier responded to the summons, and the Prussian, tossing him the catch of the two murdered men, said:

"Have these fish fried for me at once, while they are still alive; they'll make a tasty dish." Then he resumed his pipe. (De Maupassant, 1882 [2007]:46)

While Maupassant portrays the war between France and Prussia in his *Two Friends*, the war depicted in Arian's *Toward Patzun* is the Guatemalan civil war. The civil war in Guatemala took place with inconstant intensity from the 1960s until the beginning of the 1990s. In 1994, the Oslo Accord brought both sides of the conflict, government and rebels, to talks ultimately ending the decades-long war. (Eckhardt, 2005: 30) The origin of the war was related with the global situation of the Cold War during the 1950-1990's. Under the pretense of fighting communism, the CIA installs an authoritarian government regime in Guatemala. According to Ibarra, the fear of communism was used to construct negative identities of 'subversives' that were of 'danger' to the country. (Ibarra, 2016:123) Any dissident or rebellious act will associate the target party with communism. Communist association was also used by the government to eradicate Mayan and Indian natives, as in their perspective the Indian people had sympathy toward the rebel.

Differently with Maupassant, Arian does not depict nationalism as his major theme. This is due to the fact that the Guatemalan people are divided, as some support the government while other segments of the population sympathized toward the rebel. There is also disparity in how the ethnic minority are treated by the Government. As mentioned above, Guatemalan government and their soldiers do not care about the native Indian people. The indigenous natives are portrayed as the 'Other', a threat toward

the democratic Christian society in Guatemala. Hence, there is still certain colonial attitude possessed by the Guatemalan government, as they believed that they are superior toward the native. In Arian's *Toward Patzun*, this derogative attitude can be found in how the government soldier views Indian as "turd-coloured." (Arias, 1994:6) This illustrates the condescending view Guatemalan government has toward the Indian, as the Indian are "colored" and not white like them. Hence, the Indian are treated unfairly by the government by this racial difference and the fact that the Indian are the "Other".

There is similar theme in both *Two Friends* and *Toward Patzun* which is brutality of war. While *Two Friends* portray the Prussian as barbaric and savage invader, the brutality in *Toward Patzun* can be seen in the action of the government troops. They have an order to arrest the main character in this story who is suspected as a rebel. In order to find him, they search into a Native Indian village. They demand information of his whereabouts from the native Indians. As the Indians know nothing about the location, the soldiers murder the resident of the village, even the women and the children.

A military patrol had stopped the women and the children. They were pointing their machine guns at them. And then I heard, with a knot in my stomach and an immediate weakening of my legs, a burst of machine gun fire. And following that came another scream, still stronger, more cutting, a thousand times more heartrending. And once again the screams, the silence, the new burst of gunfire. The only thing different was the intense whimpering of the children, whose number seemed fewer with each burst.¹ (Arias, 1994:5)

As the Indian are considered as inhuman savage or "Other", the military troops do not feel any remorse in killing them.

Hence, it is similar with the portrayal of the Prussian officer in *Two Friends*. Both Maupassant and Arian show the cruelty of war in how human lives are easily disregarded. Another issue depicted by both writers is that the casualties of war in either *Two Friends* or *Toward Patzun* are actually the civilians. It shows that in war even civilians can be categorized as legitimate target while actually they do not join the army and just as bystander in the conflict.

Another similar aspect between *Two Friends* and *Toward Patzun* can be seen in how the characters in both stories are shown to be dissatisfied toward the current situation caused by war. They wanted to return to the past where everything is still proper and the life is still serene. In *Toward Patzun*, the unnamed main character laments the changing situation in Guatemala. He believes that the condition in the past is more proper, as the environment is still unharmed, and there is harmony between human and nature. He reminisces that

I had spent my childhood happily far away in Antigua, that colonial city with cobbled streets. In those days everything was simpler. There were mountains, valleys, streams. I used to climb the mountains, wander through the valleys, and sit down on the riverbanks....The kindness, the beauty of my country at that moment seemed vast, infinite, and incapable of being matched. (Arias, 1994:4)

The beautiful scenery of Guatemala in the past is then contrasted with the current situation during the civil war.

Now we were in tormented times. The sky was unrelenting, gray, and clouded over. Cold bursts of wind beginning to descend in swirls from the sierra peaks seemed driven mad and were advancing blindly, crashing as often into the cornfields as into the slender cypresses, giving voice to howls like those of a wounded coyote. (Arias, 1994: 3)

The main character laments the fact that war causes disruption toward the environment. What he previously described as "kind and beautiful country" has now become "tormented". The change of environment he describes is due to the civil war which ravages the scenery. The main character holds a view that the condition in the past is better, which cause him to be dissatisfied with contemporary Guatemala which is wasted by the conflict. Hence, he had some sort of nostalgia in which he wants to return to the past, but he knows that it is impossible.

The same nostalgia is depicted also in Maupassant's *Two Friends*. The main characters are just ordinary citizens who enjoy fishing in Ile Marante. In fact, their close friendship is due to the fact that they often meet in Ile Marante. To quote Maupassant, "they often spent half the day side by side, rod in hand and feet dangling over the water, and a warm friendship had sprung up between the two." (1884 [2007]:43) The war between France and Prussia disrupt their routine to go fishing. Similar with the main character in *Toward Patzun*, Morisson and Sauvage also remember the old times where they can go fishing all the time.

As soon as they recognized each other they shook hands cordially, affected at the thought of meeting under such changed circumstances. Monsieur Sauvage, with a sigh, murmured: "These are sad times!"They walked along, side by side, reflective and sad. "And to think of the fishing!" said Morissot. "What good times we used to have!" "When shall we be able to fish again?" asked Monsieur Sauvage. (De Maupassant, 1884 [2007]:44)

It is tragic how their innocent hobby to go fishing lead themselves into their death when they are accused of being spies and

shot down. To restate, this paper states that the nostalgia toward the old condition before the war disrupt it is a concern by both Arian and Maupassant. Yet there is also difference, Arian focuses more on the detrimental impact war has toward the environment, on the other Maupassant does not emphasize on the environmental issue but the effect of war toward the ordinary citizens.

CONCLUSION

To conclude, this paper asserts the comparative status of Arian's *Toward Patzun* with the canonical short story *Two Friends* by De Maupassant. Thematically, both stories underlines the brutality and even savagery of wartime situation, as not only the soldiers but also the non-combatant citizens are massacred. Maupassant depicts the cruelty of Prussian troops towards the guiltless French peasants caught in the struggle while Arian foregrounds the massacre of the Indians by the Guatemalan soldiers. Both *Toward Patzun* and *Two Friends* advocates an anti-war stance, as seen by how the characters are questioning the futility of armed struggle and the needless loss of lives. Moreover, these two short stories reminiscence about the serene and tranquility before the war irrevocably alters the landscape. Although both works is comparable, they differ in canonical status, as while De Maupassant is a renowned writer in Western tradition, the popularity of Arian remains obscure. To restate, it can be stated that the writers coming from third-world countries as symbolizes by Arian suffers from lack of support from their government, few avenue for publication, and stigma that they remain the "lesser" works, not in the same standard with the Western canon.

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