

Gameboys the Series: The Rise of *Pinoy* Boys' Love Series in Times of Lockdown

Darren Rey C. Javier, Ramier P. Jubay Jr.
Baras-Pinugay Integrated High School, Baras, Philippines
Philippine Normal University, Manila, Philippines

In the Philippines, a very conservative country where homosexuality is still not accepted but only tolerated, *Pinoy* Boys' Love (BL henceforth) Series is not usually seen in the mainstream media. However, *Pinoy* BL genre has become increasingly popular in 2020 because of the lockdown that happened in the Philippines. This paper aims to indicate that these kinds of Series can be integrated into the literature classroom as a tool in English language teaching and learning. This paper hoped to advocate for *Pinoy* BL stories to be used as a literary material in the classroom which will hone students' creativity and critical thinking.

Keywords: Philippine literature, *Pinoy* Boys' Love genre

The coronavirus hardly hits the Philippines, with confirmed cases of 265,888 (Department of Health, 2020) as of September 14. The government issued a community quarantine in the country to contain the further spread of the virus among its citizens. This quarantine lasts for several months and still enduring. To fight tediousness during the quarantine period, they often watch films on Netflix or YouTube. One of these is the Boys' Love (BL henceforth) Series from Thailand.

In the Philippines, a very conservative country where homosexuality is still not accepted but only tolerated, this kind of series is not usually seen in the mainstream media. Nonetheless, in 2013, a TV network released the first gay-themed drama series on television titled "My Husband's Lover" with 50 episodes. In 2015 in the same network, this gay drama was followed by the lesbian series titled "The Richman's Daughter" with only 35 episodes. An exhaustive survey in Philippine media networks found no programs that followed after these two successful LGBT-themed programs.

Filipinos discovered this Thai BL story, "2gether the Series", a massive hit in Thailand and the Philippines. The series has 13 episodes which ended on May 15 when the quarantine was extended. With the success of this Thai BL series, Filipinos attempted to create their own BL series during the quarantine. *Pinoy* BL Series was born to represent a love that is not normalized in the mainstream media (CNN Philippines Life, 2020). Also, with the help of "YouTube" as the reservoir of the BL Series, Filipinos were able to produce their own.

One of the successful BL Series from the list is Gameboys the Series, produced by Filipino-owned The Idea First Company and directed by Ivan Andrew Payawal and written by Ash Malanum (Manila Quentin, 2020).

Darren Rey C. Javier, MAEd ELT candidates, Baras-Pinugay Integrated High School, Baras; Philippine Normal University, Manila, Philippines.

Ramier P. Jubay Jr., MAEd ELT candidates, Baras-Pinugay Integrated High School, Baras; Philippine Normal University, Manila, Philippines.

This series has reached millions of views on YouTube and still counting. This increasing number of views can be seen in the table below:

Table 1

Gameboys' Number of Views

Episode number	Episode title	Date premiered	Number of views
1	Pass or Play?	May 22, 2020	1,399,934
2	Game of Love	June 3, 2020	1,071,500
3	Strangers Online	June 12, 2020	955,902
4	One Who Is Victorious	June 19, 2020	846,519
5	Thrill of the Chase	June 26, 2020	817,152
6	Secret Party	July 3, 2020	768,052
7	Elephant in the Room	July 10, 2020	778,714
8	No Matter What	July 17, 2020	774,661
9	Say It With Love	July 24, 2020	771,951
10	Pass Or Play 2	July 31, 2020	882,641
11	Stay Strong Forever	August 23, 2020	572,098
12	Jealousy in the Air	August 30, 2020	518,976
13	Crossing the Line	September 13, 2020	394,107
Total views			10,552,207

Note. The number of views is only as of September 15, 2020, at 03:08 PM.

Gameboys the Series already has more than 10 million views, and these views are rapidly increasing every day, just like the COVID-19 cases in the country. These figures prove that Filipinos are truthfully patronizing the series, and several *Pinoy BL* Series are also produced during and after Gameboys. Below are some of the BL stories that popped out during lockdown.

Table 2

List of Filipino BL Stories

Title of the series	Producers	Date premiered	Number of episodes	Status
Gameboys	The Idea First Company	May 22, 2020	13 episodes	Completed
<i>Sakristan</i>	VinCentiments	May 31, 2020	8 episodes	Completed
Truly Very Yours	Jace TV	June 8, 2020	5 episodes	Completed
Hello Strangers	Black Sheep	June 24, 2020	8 episodes	Completed
In Between	USPHTV	July 11, 2020	10 episodes	Ongoing
<i>Kumusta Bro?</i>	Firststarters Studios	July 26, 2020	8 episodes	Ongoing
Hook Up: A Homemade Series	Jace TV	August 1, 2020	7 episodes	Ongoing
Amore	Star Image Digital Network	August 7, 2020	6 episodes	Ongoing
My Day the Series	Oxin Films	August 8, 2020	6 episodes	Ongoing
Quaranthings: The Series	Ride or Die	September 4, 2020	2 episodes	Ongoing

Gameboys the Series talks about an online friendship that blossomed into an intimate relationship between a popular gamer Cairo Lazaro (Elijah Canlas) and the flirtatious Gavreel Alarcon (Kokoy de Santos). Aside from the theme of coming out of one's sexuality, Gameboys also addresses the barriers in developing relationships in the time of coronavirus, when physical contact is impossible (Macasero, 2020).

The creation of Gameboys has brought the direction of the Philippine media program into its new trajectory since it is unique because interactions were done over Zoom, given the limitations on production due to the

COVID-19 pandemic (Guno, 2020). However, it has already been proven that a show can be successfully mainstreamed because the actors' prowess was powerful in delivering onscreen interactions.

Moreover, since *Gameboys the Series* has become a part of a *Teleserye* elective course in Ateneo of AB literature (English) majors, it has found its place in 21st century teaching and learning. It can be one of the topics of interest in 21st century literature from the Philippines and the world because it is one of the few series that provides a narrative during a pandemic (Dizon, 2020). In addition, the series has many facets of culture that are worthy of attention and exploration as well. Anne-Marie Mills (2020) commented in one of the Facebook posts that *Gameboys* allows students to analyze stereotypes, tropes, and reflections in the current society.

As literature teachers, this series may be used for viewing by the senior high students. It is about time to use this kind of material in the teaching and learning process because learners nowadays are interested in this type of series. Likewise, teachers may use BL Series like *Gameboys* to develop critical thinking among the students. This will also teach them techniques in storytelling and understand symbolism and representations (Marquez, 2020) in analyzing literary texts. Finally, literature teachers and students should conduct further studies on the *Pinoy* BL Series, highlighting not only sexuality but also the significant aspects of a literary text.

References

- CNN Philippines Life. (2020, July 30). CNN Philippines life interviews "Gameboys" star Elijah Canlas. *YouTube*. Retrieved from <https://bit.ly/3yz40fx>
- Department of Health. (2020). COVID-19 case tracker. Retrieved from <https://doh.gov.ph/2019-nCoV>
- Dizon, R. (2020). *Gameboys* as a narrative during the pandemic. Facebook comment.
- Guno, N. V. (2020, September 14). "Gameboys": The triumphant Filipino BL series gets season 2. Retrieved from <https://bit.ly/3AH7EFV>
- Macasero, R. (2020, August 3). Filipino BL: How "Gameboys" gets it right. Retrieved from <https://bit.ly/32wR8JI>
- Manila Quentin. (2020, September 14). *Gameboys*: Redefining queer love in time of pandemic. Retrieved from <https://bit.ly/3wpY4UL>
- Marquez, R. F. (2020). Literary techniques in *Gameboys*. Facebook comment.
- Mills, A. (2020). *Gameboys* as an elective in Ateneo. Facebook comment.