Adarna: Remediating Philippine Source Texts Through Video Games

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Abstract
This paper will explore the possibilities of using video games as a means of remediating Philippine source texts. This begins by defining Philippine source texts based on Dr. Joyce Arriola's book *Pelikulang Komiks: Toward a Theory of Filipino Film Adaptation* (2019) and understanding how remediation changes perception of the material through concepts defined in Jay Bolter and Richard Grusin's book, *Remediation* (2000). Video games will later be explored as a form of new media in the 21st century, and how media convergence and digital distribution has affected both video games and adaptations. This paper will then analyze *Adarna* (2015), a video game adaptation of the corrido *Ibong Adarna* created by Senshi.Labs, and how narrative design and video game conventions were used to remediate the source text and allow the game developers to further develop the world of the corrido and its main characters, making it a prime example of the possibilities of video game storytelling in Philippine source texts.

Keywords: Philippine source texts, video games, storytelling, remediation, media convergence

Philippine source texts, story material taken from preexisting Filipino materials (Arriola 324) have been adapted to film and television throughout the years through a process of *remediation*: where new media is refashioned from prior media forms (Bolter and Grusin 273), providing the opportunity to reimagine them and bring them to a new audience. Video games as a form of new media has grown to use narrative techniques borrowed from film and television and is a prime medium for Philippine source texts to be remediated to. However, video games are more than representations of narratives: they are simulations of worlds that work within their own rules and require the player to actively participate in the narrative for a more immersive experience. Because of this, adapting a source text into a video game requires different considerations.

This paper looks at the current media landscape and how it affects both media production and adaptations. The paper will also look at how different Philippine source texts have been remediated to film, television, and animation, and see how they are adapted to fit the conventions of the target medium while maintaining the source material. Lastly, this paper looks at *Adarna*

(2015): an indie game developed by Senshi.Labs that adapts the corrido *Ibong Adarna*, as a case study for how Philippine source texts can be remediated to video games. The differences between games and traditional narrative media, as well as the process of narrative design in games will be explored. The game serves as more than a direct adaptation, expanding the characterization of the main cast and adding more context to what the developers believe to be a problematic portrayal of sibling rivalry.

Remediation and Source Texts

In their book, *Remediation* (2000), Jay David Bolter and Richard Grusin define *remediation* as "the formal logic by which new media refashion prior media forms" (273). Traditional media, such as print books, often undergo remediation to produce films, television shows, graphic novels and video games. According to Bolter and Grusin, remediation has two strategies: *immediacy* and *hypermediacy*.

Immediacy is "a style of visual representation whose goal is to make the viewer forget the presence of the objects of representation" (Bolter and Grusin 259). A prime example can be found in virtual reality games and applications that seek to remove the gap between user and screen. Film adaptations achieve this by recreating time periods through set design and costumes (10) as well as creating tangible representations of text through acting and cinematography with the goal of making the perception of the medium disappear. Hypermediacy, on the other hand, is "a style of visual representation whose goal is to remind the viewer of the medium" (259). This is done by borrowing from multiple forms of media, such as websites and user interfaces for applications, both combining text with videos and images. New digital media oscillate between immediacy and hypermediacy (22). Comics, for example, are hypermediated through the combination of multiple images and text but the artwork promotes its immediacy by depicting events for the viewer without relying on text. Video games use an interface that's hypermediated but once the player acknowledges it, the player is given direct control over the game's characters, giving it immediacy (91).

Bolter and Grusin believe that new digital media are "not external agents that come to disrupt an unsuspecting culture" (22). They "emerge from within cultural contexts, and they refashion other media, which are embedded in the same or similar contexts" (22). In fact, the new media rely on prior media for their cultural significance (58). By building up on the cultural significance of the previous media, and bringing it to a state of immediacy and hypermediacy, the new media formed is brought to renewed cultural significance.

In the Philippines, stories have a tradition of remediation with new forms of media developed based on Filipino source texts. In her book *Pelikulang Komiks* (2019), Dr. Joyce L. Arriola aims to propose a theory of Filipino film adaptation by analyzing films adapted from komiks that date back to the 1950's. Here, she defines Filipino source text as a story material adapted to film that can be derived from preexisting materials such as comics, novels, and radio dramas. She also states that these sources may also draw from a cycle of texts that may be from foreign or pre-colonial materials that may no longer be in its "pure state" due to borrowing from other influences (324). This not only makes sense, given the Philippines's long history of colonization, but gives us the freedom to hybridize these texts with modern, recognizable materials to bring them to new immediacy.

Because Dr. Arriola's book focuses on film adaptation, it is important to bridge these theories of adaptation and remediation to other forms of Philippine media, namely video games. Doing so can offer value to Philippine literary and media studies as, with the current globalized media consumption of the average Filipino, it is important to identify the ways that these media forms combine Filipino source texts with both foreign, contemporary influences and the particulars of these media to bring it to new levels of immediacy and hypermediacy.

Video Games and Adaptations in the Age of Media Convergence

Resulting from the rise of new media is what Henry Jenkins calls "*media convergence*": "the flow of content across multiple media industries, and the migratory behavior of media audiences who will go almost anywhere in search of the kind of experiences they want" (2). Video game adaptations of other media allow players who do not enjoy the format of the original source text to experience the narrative

in a medium they prefer. Video games would also be remediated to older media with an assortment of film, television, and novel adaptations through the years.

The potential of video game adaptations lends itself well to licensed intellectual properties. As video games became more narrative-based, and started sharing elements and technology used in film, companies that own film and TV studios would invest in the development of games to tie-in to the release of their films. Some examples are *Spider-Man 3* (2007) and *The Lord of the Rings* (2001, 2002, 2003) trilogy of films, which both had video game adaptations made (Elkington 213). However, these adaptations are not well-received by critics and are often dismissed as attempts to cash-in on a film's popularity (214).

Jenkins states that a medium's content may shift, its audience may change, and its social status may rise or fall, but once it establishes itself as satisfying some core human demand, it continues to function within the larger system of communication options (14). For example, the storytelling of radio dramas were eventually remediated to television shows but television did not necessarily kill radio. Old mediums are forced to coexist with the new, emerging media. Convergence is a more plausible way to understand the shifts in media throughout the years (14). Jenkins also emphasizes the importance of "the cultural logic of convergence" stating that in addition to our entertainment, "our lives, relationships, memories, fantasies, desires also flow across media channels" (17).

Jenkin also highlights what he calls "participatory culture." He believes that "the circulation of media content—across different media systems, and national borders—depends heavily on consumer's participation" (3), arguing that convergence "represents a cultural shift as consumers are encouraged to seek out information and make connections among dispersed media content" (3). Jenkins differentiates this from "older notions of passive media spectatorship" (3), as both producers and consumers of media are no longer separated, and can now "interact with each other according to a new set of rules that none of us fully understands" (3).

In his book *Media Convergence* (2010), Tim Dwyer elaborates on the Internet's role in participatory culture:

> The internet offers the prototypical example of the changing way media are made, distributed, and consumed. However, we need to bear in mind that unlike traditional broadcast media, the Internet is *both* a point-to-point and point-to-multipoint (or mass) medium: it connects individuals but it also speaks to and interacts with vast numbers of people simultaneously. (26)

Digital media and distribution platforms replacing its analogue counterparts (26), such as *Netflix* replacing video stores or *Steam* replacing video game stores, allows for more seamless mass-consumption of media. Jenkins, et al. would later expand on participatory culture, stating that it has now evolved into allowing the audience to make "their presence felt by actively shaping the media flows" as groups are now able to deploy "media production and distribution to serve their collective interests" (2).

This is not without its downsides. Allowing people control over their own media production can yield creative results, but can also "be bad news for all involved" such as illegally recorded or altered footage (Jenkins 17). Additionally, not all participants are equal as corporations still have more power than consumers, and some consumers have "greater abilities to participate in this emerging culture than others" (Jenkins 3) possibly due to access to resources and technology.

Still, this creates a paradigm shift on both videogames and adaptations in general. Media convergence and participatory culture resulted in one of the biggest and most enduring paradigm shifts in the video game landscape: indie games. Indie games are games produced by a single designer or by a very small team of people (Suvilay 9) that can be financially independent, creatively independent, and/or self-published (Garda and Grabarczyk), and are often conceptualized as "a marriage of the popular and entrepreneurial aspects of the mainstream video game industry, with more individually crafted or artistic characteristics originating from indie's smaller production scale (Reed 99). Some indie games are developed for fun, with some being fan-made content based on existing properties, while some are made for profit. The indie market also allows veterans to establish their own studios and create new work with original ideas (Suvilay 30). Indie game developers were able to exploit "the affordances and constraints of new technologies in order to reinvent and twist game

genres" by taking advantage of their budget limitations to create distinct looking games that do not have to conform to their high-budget, realistic, cinematic counterparts, as well as the new digital distribution channels that helped connect indie studios to their clients in a more direct way (Suvilay 17).

With indie games, adaptations can go further beyond that of licensed intellectual properties. A notable example is USC Innovation Labs's *Walden, a game* (2017), a video game adapting the life of American philosopher Henry David Thoreau during an experiment where he lived self-reliantly at Walden Pond in 1845, as an example. Here the player plays as Thoreau as the game turns activities documented in his memoir into tasks for the player to complete as they relive his days of exploring the natural world. Another is The Secret Game Co.'s *Kim* (2016), an adaptation of Rudyard Kipling's novel of the same name that turns the source text into a roleplaying game that features a constantly changing, painted world. Player's play as the titular hero Kim as they try to live out his youth.

The earliest example of an indie game from the Philippines is 2003's *Anito: Defend a Land Enraged*, a roleplaying game by Anino Entertainment. The game takes place on the island of Maroka, which is in danger of both internal conflicts and colonization akin to the Philippine's real-life history. Based heavily on Filipino folklore, the game *Anito: Defend a Land Enraged* can be seen as an adaptation of a source text. Since then, the indie game scene has grown and, in recent years, there has been "a tendency to develop games explicitly for a Filipino audience (Grieve, et al. 108)." One such game is *Adarna* (2015): a game developed by Senshi.Labs that adapts the corrido *Ibong Adarna*.

As game developers primarily focused on edutainment (entertainment with educational aspects), Senshi.Labs created *Adarna* as a part of a series of projects that "questions the educational material that schools expose children to, especially when it comes to developing values that enable children and teenagers to manage conflict" (Lapa 172). Because of this, Senshi.Labs made the game as accessible as possible, allowing players to download the entire game for free, something made possible by the changes in media production and digital distribution brought by media convergence.

Adapting Source Texts

Arriola posits that "the process and cultural contexts of adapting komiks into film are not as linear as the idea of a source text mutating into a target text" (60). She cites the 1951 film *Bernardo Carpio*, adapted from komiks published in *Liwayway* magazine, which itself is an adaptation of a Spanish corrido. In the process, Arriola notes that the static scenes recreated in the film version were made to take advantage of cinema's multitrack, rendering them with musical and increased spectacle (64), particularly with the addition of musical and dance numbers and other film conventions (73). She elaborates:

> Overall, Galauran's *komiks* version has served as a storyboard and a structural guide to the film, but the film also invokes certain conventions particular to the epic and action film genres such as run-and-pursuit scenes, single combat and battle scenes. The invocation of said genres is evidenced by a number of

Fig. 1 Adarna's title logo. Senshi.Labs, *Adarna*, 2015

battle scenes that show large-scale production designs, choreographed fight scenes, several experiments in cinematography to show breadth and scope of the scene, and other details that can only be imagined in the komiks rendition. (69)

The film also employed "numerous long shots, long takes, high-angle shots and low-angle shots in the battle, pursuit and court assembly scenes" to cinematically capture these conventions (73).

We can see here that transforming a source text requires that it adapts to the conventions of the target text as the story elements of the source are "transposed in filmic mode using basic and technical properties of the medium" (Arriola 336). However, adaptations must still repeat "the genre, conventions, and tropes of its source text in an attempt to recycle a former experience pertaining to the text or to replicate its popular success" (341). While not a completely identical recreation, the komiks source of a film can "serve as a storyboard, as a structural guide, as an essential story, or as a co-storyteller" (333). As the "essential story" or the "nuclear story," the source text must undergo "a number of additions and deletions or expansions and condensations" to preserve the nuclear story in its new form (341). A source text can also become a "co-storyteller" when "the film enhances both the essence and the spirit of the prior text in a reverential manner" (335). Both can serve to bring immediacy and hypermediacy to the target text as shown in two examples of Filipino source text adaptations: *Trese* (2021), and *Maria Clara at Ibarra* (2022).

Netflix's *Trese* (2021) is an animated series adapted from the Trese series of graphic novels written by Budjette Tan and illustrated by KaJo Baldisimo. Set in Manila, viewers watch as Alexandra Trese, a paranormal investigator, solves cases that involve the supernatural. She is joined by the Kambal, twins that possess the blood of a war god and serve as her bodyguards. Each case often finds her fighting, or teaming-up, with various creatures from Filipino folklore such as *aswangs*, *manananggals*, *duwendes*, and *tikbalangs*.

The animated series adapts the first three volumes of the source text: *Trese: Murder on Balete Drive* (2008), *Trese: Unreported Murders* (2008), and *Trese: Mass Murders* (2009). The first two volumes are composed of individual cases that Trese has to solve with each chapter being a complete, standalone story. The third

volume's chapters are all connected, telling the story of their battle with the Talagbusao, war god and the father of the Kambal, as well as the origins of both Alexandra and the Kambal.

Being in comic form, the individual cases in the source text serve as storyboards and structural guides to the episodes. The target text brings immediacy by transforming the source to animated form, but makes some changes to make the story suit the medium. Visually, characters are drawn with solid outlines and flat colors, as this style lends better to 2D animation than the sketchy, black and white ink style of the source. The story adapts only selected cases from volumes 1 and 2, but alters them to make them connected to the Talagbusao's story. Flashback scenes from the third volume are also split and scattered throughout the different episodes. The result is a more cohesive version that differs from, but is still guided by, the source text.

Another example is GMA 7's *Maria Clara at Ibarra* (2022), a television drama based on Dr. Jose Rizal's novels, *Noli Me Tangere* and *El Filibusterismo*. Rather than being a direct adaptation however, the series tells the story of Maria Clara "Klay" Infantes, a struggling college student who finds herself transported in the book. She wakes up in the bedroom of one of the novel's main characters, Maria Clara, and must now find a way to get back home.

Maria Clara at Ibarra is different in that it does not directly adapt the source text, but reimagines what it would be like if someone from the present was inserted into the original narrative. Klay's modern upbringing, as well as her life experiences, informs how she reacts to the societal norms of the Philippines in the 1800's, as evidenced by her shocked reaction when she sees a woman being publicly chastised by Padre Damaso, the town's former curate, who accuses her of being a *mujer libre* or sex worker. The priest cuts the woman's hair before leaving her to suffer a beating from the *guardia civil* while onlookers comment with glee that such an extreme punishment was deserved. Klay, whose mother is a victim of domestic abuse at the hands of her stepfather, sympathizes with the woman. Later, she helps free the woman from imprisonment; an act that comes full circle when the woman reappears to help them when she and Crisostomo Ibarra encounter bandits on the road. The woman tells the bandit leader, who turned out to be her brother, how she was saved, and the bandits left them in peace.

Klay's presence in this world affects the narrative because she becomes an active participant. By interacting with the novel's characters, certain events are changed. Notable among these is when she finds young brothers Crispin and Basilio, who were wounded by the curate Padre Salvi in a fit of anger. Knowing the fate of the two brothers and their mother, Sisa, in the novels, she treats their wounds and takes them back to their mother. She then warns Sisa of the abuse the curate subjects her children to that, in the novel, would later cause the death of one of her children and her descent into madness. This proves futile, as the children lie to their mother for fear of their mother suffering the friar's wrath, claiming that it was Klay who hurt them, leading Sisa to chase Klay away. Still, Klay is determined to change the grim fates of the novel's characters.

Maria Clara at Ibarra deviates from the source text by becoming an entirely new story as viewers follow Klay's narrative and perspective. However, the source still remains the essential story, as the characters, settings, and key events are still taken from Rizal's novels. The target text achieves both immediacy and hypermediacy this way: immediacy is brought by the live action performances of the actors but the show makes it a point to remind the audience of the source text through Klay.

Similarly, adaptations of video games can use source texts in the same way and, like films, must submit to the conventions of the target text's medium and genre. However, video games require other considerations. In his paper "Video Game Adaptation" (2017), Kevin Flanagan states:

> In general, videogame adaptation presents a unique set of design and discursive challenges, since when a novel or film is adapted into a videogame, adapters such as programmers, creative producers, and game designers must translate linear narratives or stable fictitious properties into quasi-ludic, player-controlled experiences. Moreover, as with other intermedial exchanges, the videogame adaptation process must pay particular attention to the affordances and constraints of different media. What is gained or lost in the movement of the rules, characters, and story from the outward realm of physical game world to the relative mystery of a digital space? Can a game faithfully recreate the physical experience or canonical text it is based upon? Should it try to? (442–443)

He elaborates by saying that in adapting a source text, game designers "must do more than just move story information, characters, and approximations of visual descriptions" (445).

Video games also have "a tradition of interactive genre types that differ immensely from those of books and movies" (Flanagan 445) that largely deal more with how they are played than its narrative:

> Genres that have developed over the past forty years in the commercial games marketplace include side-scrolling platformers (a character avatar is controlled in relation to a two-dimensional, scrolling screen, usually in avoidance of enemies and pitfalls), single-screen puzzle games (a game board is laid out, usually from a top-down perspective), first-person shooters (usually three-dimensional games that align player vision with an in-game avatar, most often with the goal of shooting targets and navigating maze-like spaces), and text-only adventure games (interactive fictions based on typed commands, perhaps the videogame genre closest to literary hypertext) (445).

A video game adaptation will take one of these genres and work with the source text's content, creating "a compromise between two different traditions" (445). This means that in addition to writing the narrative, it must also be deliberately designed to work with the chosen genre.

Narrative Design

Video games differ from traditional narrative media, such as novels and film, in terms of how narrative structure is handled. Traditional media are representational, which means they must represent a specific sequence of events (Frasca 223). Video games require a player's participation and must incorporate behavioral rules through the game's mechanics.

Because of this, it is fairer to consider video games as simulations. Frasca elaborates:

> Therefore: "to simulate is to model a (source) system through a different system which maintains (for somebody) some of the behaviors of the original system." The key term here is

"behavior." Simulation does not simply retain the—generally audiovisual—characteristics of the object but it also includes a model of its behaviors. This model reacts to certain stimuli (input data, pushing buttons, joystick movements), according to a set of conditions. (223)

This means that video games have to utilize narrative elements differently. Espen Aarseth states that while video games, like traditional narratives, such as agents, worlds, and events, they must be adapted differently in a simulated space. Characters vary in depth, ranging from shallow "bots" that only provide information, to fully fleshed-out agents that interact with the player and affect the plot (130). The world, which relies on the reader's imagination, must this time be measurable and explorable (130). Objects can be interacted with, created, or destroyed (132).

These are largely due to the half-real nature of video games. Video game theorist Jesper Juul posits that video games are "half-real," stating:

> …video games are real in that they consist of real rules with which players actually interact, and in that winning or losing a game is a real event. However, when winning a game by slaying a dragon, the dragon is not a real dragon but a fictional one. To play a video game is therefore to interact with real rules while imagining a fictional world, and a video game is a set of rules as well as a fictional world. (1)

Juul also states that video game narratives are made up of *rules* and *fiction*, with *rules* pertaining to the behavioral rules and mechanics created by the game designers and *fiction* pertaining to not just the narrative, but the presentation of the world itself, and all its audiovisual aspects (121). By combining rules and fiction, what is simulated is a world, albeit with limitations, that the player can communicate with.

In his book U*nified Discourse Analysis: Reality, Virtual Worlds, and Video Games* (2015), James Paul Gee posits that humans have "consequential conversations with the world" (3). He elaborates:

> We form a goal. Then we act. Our action can be looked at as a probe of the world, a sort of question we put to the world. The world responds to our action. The world's response

might indicate that our action was effective as a way to our goal or it might indicate that it was not. We reflect on the world's response and then we either reconsider our goal or act again in an attempt to elicit further responses from the world that will allow us eventually to accomplish our goal.

> This cycle is simple: form goal—act/probe— get response from world—reflect—act again with due regard for the world's response. We and the world take turns. We repeat the cycle until we succeed or until we see we cannot succeed, in which case we get another goal. (8)

This conversation is simulated in video games. Players can form a goal based on a game's rules, then probe the world to see if their choices can meet the goal. In Nintendo's *Super Mario Bros.* (1985) for example, the player's goal in each stage is to run and jump their way to the end while facing various enemies and obstacles. When a player attempts a stage, they are probing the world. If successful, the world responds with the player's victory. If not, the player must rethink their strategy, take note of what they did wrong, formulate a new plan, and probe again. The fiction then provides context to the rules, giving players an in-story rationale for why they should undergo the tasks the rules ask of them. If a player reaches the end of all the stages in *Super Mario Bros.* then, as per the rules, they have completed the game, which the fiction translates as having saved the captured princess.

This interplay between rules and fiction highlights how video game worlds are experienced differently from both the real world and traditional narratives. Gee posits that humans experience the world in two different ways: "aesthetically-driven," where we "revel in details without pushing ourselves to accomplish any very specific goal beyond enjoyment or appreciation" (16), and "goal-driven," where we find ways to accomplish our own specific goals (17). The former is how we experience films and novels while the latter is how we experience maps, textbooks, and manuals. Video games allow for both as the fiction allows for an aesthetically-driven experience while still placing emphasis on accomplishing goals.

In adapting the corrido, Senshi.Labs took the Kingdom of Berbanya, and other settings from the source text and created a virtual, explorable world populated by other characters and monsters that

the player can communicate with. For example, at the beginning of the game, Don Juan delivers some exposition, stating that he must find his ailing father and tell him that he will find the Adarna bird himself after his older brothers failed to return. The player is now given control of Don Juan, who must now probe the world by exploring the castle and finding his bedridden father. Upon finding the king, Don Juan expresses his desire to leave. The game responds: unable to stop his determined son, the king implores Don Juan to seek out Alamid, captain of the king's army, so that he may be trained in combat and be better prepared for the perils that await him. The player must now leave the castle and find Alamid, who is in the middle of training his soldiers. Alamid accepts the request to train the boy, and the game's first battle commences.

The conventions specific to a game's genre can be found in its rules. *Adarna* is a turn-based roleplaying game, which means that actions during battle are done by selecting from a menu during a player's turn. Options such as "*Sumugod*," which lets players attack with their weapon, or "*Kakayahan*," which allows players to use special abilities on enemies, are present among others. During this battle, Alamid tells Don Juan what each option does during the battle and, by the end, the fiction shows that Don Juan is now prepared to fight monsters while the player will have fully understood the game's combat rules. The game continues this trend by turning key moments of the story, such as meeting the hermit that helps Don Juan and capturing the Adarna bird, into goals that must be reached by exploring the world, defeating monsters, and solving puzzles, as these also follow the genre's conventions.

As with most narrative-driven video games, *Adarna* requires players to complete tasks to advance the plot. However, it is still the player who makes the decisions that ultimately progress the plot, giving an illusion of agency despite the story being already predetermined. This agency is key to a player's immersion in the narrative and is done through narrative design.

Narrative design combines game design and writing. It is through this that games can tell a story using the game's fiction to create an engaging player experience (Heussner et al. 17). This responsibility falls onto the narrative designer: a combination of a game designer and writer who must also work with other departments involved, such as programming, level design, art, and sound design, to be able to integrate the story into the game using the available resources (17).

Before discussing narrative design further, however, it is important to look at how game design works and how it affects, or is affected, by the game's narrative.

Game designers "envision how a game will work during play," creating all of the objectives and rules and planning everything "to create a compelling player experience" (Fullerton 3). The game designer creates the framework on which both rules and fiction will operate. Fullerton states that game designers' goal is to look at the game's world through the eyes of the player and focus on the gameplay experience.

Juul's definition of "fiction" in video games serves as a translation of the game designer's rules:

> In the game design process, the game designer must select which aspects of the fictional world to actually implement in the game rules. The player then experiences the game as a two-way process where the fiction of the game cues him or her into understanding the rules of the game, and, again, the rules can cue the player to imagine the fictional world of the game. (163)

This includes visuals such as character and environment graphics, music, and the dialogue that falls into the writer.

While different from both game designer and writer, the narrative designer must have a good understanding of the principles followed by both roles. Narrative designers need to know how to integrate a game's features into the story. A narrative designer will have to make narrative elements that you see both in traditional narratives and video games functional within the simulated space and decide how to utilize them in the ways Aarseth mentioned.

Heussner summarizes the narrative designer as such:

> Here is a short example: Developer A, an expert writer, writes a wonderful script for an amazing cutscene. But without anyone bringing it into the game, it will be nothing more than a collection of words in a document. This is where Developer B, the narrative designer, enters the scene. B takes the script, just in a similar way as a 3D artist takes the concept from a 2D artist, and plans all the elements that need to be developed to bring this script into the game. B will look for assets that are needed and plan their production with the different

departments, talk with programmers to get the features needed into the game, and evaluate the script against the overall story and story experience presented in the game to the player. B would also rewrite the script if necessary and could be fully involved in the writing process. One cannot really live without the other, unless both roles are combined in one person. Just as the 2D and 3D artists have different roles, both are needed. So, writers and narrative designers are developers with different responsibilities. (23)

The most important responsibility of a narrative designer, however, is to plan the story in such a way that gives players an illusion of agency. Players must feel that they are in control of the story's progress (Heussner, et al. 18). To do so, players must feel as if they are one with the protagonist.

The Player's Don Juan

An important element of a video game adaptation is the use of the main character, in this case, Don Juan, as the player's avatar, where he also serves as both a surrogate body for the player within the game world as well as an identity for the player to adopt (Gee 17–18). This is the character the player controls and through whose point of view the player sees the narrative unfold. The avatar serves both the game's fiction and rules.

Game designer Tracy Fullerton elaborates:

Game characters also have some unique considerations. The most important of these is the balance between "agency" and "empathy." Agency is the practical function of a character to serve as a representation of the player in the game. Agency can be completely utilitarian, or it can include aspects of creativity, role-playing, and identification. Empathy is the potential for players to develop an emotional attachment to the character, to identify with their goals and, consequentially, the game objectives. (109)

Video game rules are designed with the avatar's agency in mind. A game that requires running and jumping, such as *Super Mario Bros.*, will have levels that require the player to run and jump to complete.

Narrative design must then provide context to why Mario has to run and jump in the first place, by making it so that he's on a mission to save the princess.

Running and jumping in *Super Mario Bros.* is what is referred to as affordances: "the relationship between the properties of an object and the capabilities of the agent that determine just how the object could possibly be used" (Norman 11). In the same way a hammer can only be used properly if the user knows how to use it, players can run and jump as Mario but will only progress if they know when to do these actions. With an avatar, perception extends to the virtual world. As an extension of the senses, the player character becomes a tool akin to the hammer. When someone is hammering a nail, the hammer becomes an extension of the sense of touch and tactile feedback is received when the hammer goes deeper (Swink 25). This analogy supports Gee's theory of conversing with the world, as the game also responds to the player's intent when doing these actions. He also states that when experiencing the world in a "goal-driven" way, we find affordances that we can use to accomplish our goals; a process he calls "aligning with the world" (16).

As the senses extend to the game world, the identity follows (28). Through this combination, the player is able to determine the actions, successes and failures of the avatar as their own. However, for these to work, the remediation of the source text's narrative must be done in service to these "extensions." The player must also be able to connect with the avatar from a narrative perspective.

According to video game writer Evan Skolnick:

The Hero is the person we follow, the character whose eyes we see through, and in whose shoes we walk. The better we as the audience can relate to him, the more sympathetic we are to his situation, the stronger the emotions the story can potentially elicit from us. The Hero is, for all intents and purposes, us. And in a properly constructed story, we very strongly *identify* with him. (Skolnick 38)

In video games, this identification becomes more crucial than any other storytelling media because we are inhabiting the character we are playing as (38).

While the avatar serves as a representation of the player in the game's world, it is important to note that the character being controlled has their own opinions,

motivations and desires within the narrative. If these do not match with the desires and intentions of the player, then this can lead to *ludonarrative dissonance*: "an uncomfortable contradiction or disconnect between the player, the game design, and/or the narrative elements" (Skolnick, 39). If the narrative depiction of the character is not consistent with what the character does during gameplay (i.e., a shooting game where the main character does not want to shoot anyone), then this can lead to ludonarrative dissonance. The goal of a game's narrative is to achieve the opposite, *ludonarrative harmony* (39), by keeping Juan's personality as the kind and heroic brother true to the original corrido while keeping the player's goals aligned with his desire to save his family. However, the game must also allow the player to inject their own identity into the character. Lapa refers to this as identity construction and co-creation through gameplay (15).

In his book *What Video Games Have to Teach Us About Learning and Literacy* (2003), Gee posits that there are three identities at work in video games. The first two are *virtual identity*, which is the avatar character, and *real identity,* which is the player's real-life identity (54–55). The third is the *projective identity*, which plays on two senses of the word "project": "to project one's values and desires onto the virtual character," and "seeing the virtual character as one's own project in the making" (55) meaning to create an ideal self within the world.

Video game avatars differ from traditional narrative protagonists because they are also incomplete identities, meaning that to complete them, the player is encouraged to bring their own selves into the avatar. In adapting a source text into a video game, players are able to create meaning for themselves within the world. *Adarna* does not simply allow the player to become Don Juan but instead to create what they believe to be the ideal Don Juan within the confines of the virtual world.

Like most role-playing games, *Adarna* does this by incorporating side quests: events outside the game's main narrative that when accessed can yield additional rewards to the player. These include finding the queen's missing pendant, gathering tiger fangs to create an amulet, and delivering a young man's letter to the woman he loves, among many others (Lapa 152–153). Players can either focus on the main story, or spend extra time on side quests and earn rewards. Players find these quests by exploring the kingdom and interacting

with its people. Doing so will also help provide players with a more "complete" version of the game world, as interacting with non-player characters help provide players context on their lives and their places within the world, making the kingdom feel more "alive." As a simulation, *Adarna* gives the player enough agency to experience the story and world of the corrido in a way traditional narrative media cannot.

This also allows the player to create their own stories within the world. Gee posits that when playing narrative-driven video games, two stories are taking place: the "top-down, author-written story" which essentially describes the game's fiction, and the player's story that has the "player's moves, decisions, strategies, successes and failures, and what the player has learned and accomplished in the game" (12). If the narrative design successfully creates an illusion of agency the player can project their identity and create what they believe to be the "ideal" Don Juan. This allows the remediation to achieve a higher level of immediacy, as the player feels that their choices are directly affecting the world. This also extends to other characters, as players can now directly interact with them through the avatar. This means other characters must also be taken into consideration in the narrative design.

Remediating Brotherhood

In the original corrido, the King of Berbanya becomes ill, and must send two of his sons, Don Pedro and Don Diego, to find the Adarna bird said to have the power to cure him. When the two brothers did not return, the king's third son, Don Juan, must go on the same journey to find both the bird and his two missing brothers. The brothers eventually return with the bird and successfully cure their father.

The story portrays an extreme form of sibling rivalry. After being rescued, the two elder brothers decide to beat Don Juan up so that they can present the bird to the king themselves and claim credit. Don Pedro even goes so far as to attempt murdering his younger brother, only to be stopped by Don Diego who believes a beating would suffice. It was also hinted at the beginning of the story that Don Juan was they're father's favorite, possibly leading to this reaction from his brothers. Considering that *Ibong Adarna* is required reading for most high schools, Dr. Beatrice M. V. Lapa,

the founder of Senshi.Labs, found this portrayal of family dynamics problematic, and developed the game with the goal of reimagining the Filipino sibling rivalry "from intense competition to brotherly coopetition" (Lapa 135).

The result is a roleplaying game that recontextualizes the three brothers' relationship within the context of the source text and a remediation with immediacy in mind. Designed to augment what students learn in Filipino literature subjects, Senshi.Labs kept the language of the game as Tagalog (Lapa 52). However, unlike the corrido where events are narrated lyrically, the game makes use of dialogue.

Senshi.Labs identifies possible issues in Don Juan's portrayal in the source text:

> The lesson of making Juan seem like the epitome of Christian kindness is a double-edged sword. While the story teaches kindness and forgiveness as desirable virtues, it also gives the impression that being kind could lead to being taken advantage of by your own blood. This also leaves very little room for Juan's brothers to develop their own characters, with their own motivations and values, because they are two-dimensionally portrayed as inexplicably evil to an overly nice, but naive, protagonist. (138)

To this end, Senshi.Labs has made alterations to their portrayal of Don Juan's brothers.

The game initially follows the events as they were presented in the source text up until the point where Don Juan captures the bird and saves his brothers. From here, the story diverges and the characterization of the two brothers are given more depth. Don Pedro, who is portrayed in the original corrido as a villain because of his jealousy, is portrayed here as a protective and responsible older brother whose villainy is brought by a spell that enhances his insecurities as a child who was not favored by his parents (Lapa 151). Later in the story, he grows into "the caring and responsible eldest brother that children and teenagers can look up to as a role model" (149). Don Diego, originally portrayed as the other "evil" brother, is depicted as a sensitive brother (150). In the corrido, he expresses hesitation when Don Pedro suggests that they kill Don Juan. The game uses this hesitation to show that he notices Don Pedro's irrational actions and later urges Don Juan to investigate them with him (150).

Lapa explains the changes made to the brothers:

> We tweaked the older brothers' personalities. Diego's personality was reworked to portray the image of a smart brother, a mediator of sorts. We also worked to give Pedro a motive that better explains his personality. Juan retains his simplicity and soft-hearted nature. This way, the three brothers are given a strong dynamic and provide the story with a more diverse set of personalities beyond just good and evil. We wanted to impart family values and brotherhood bond (while helping all of us be more comfortable with Tagalog). "Good versus evil just doesn't cut it." (51)

Fig. 2 Don Juan encounters his brothers. Senshi.Labs, *Adarna*, 2015

Fig. 3 The brothers fight together. Senshi.Labs, *Adarna,* 2015

Being the avatar, Don Juan facilitates interactions between the player and the two brothers. Game designers are able to use the players "dynamic and reactive engagement" with non-player characters to "add to the emotional palette of games as a medium" (Isbister 20).

In her book *How Games Move Us: Emotion by Design* (2016), Katherine Isbister states how the portrayal of non-player characters can also affect the portrayal of the protagonist:

> In a film, the viewer learns about the protagonist through his or her interactions with other people in the narrative world of the film. In a game, players can themselves interact with those others—spending hours journeying alongside them, struggling to rescue them, sometimes experiencing betrayal by them and losing hard-won ground as a result. In a game, a nonplayer character can make a joke that lightens the mood during a slog, provide assistance in the nick of time, even sacrifice himself so that the player can carry on and win the day. (20)

Isbister also states that it is this "dynamic engagement with a virtual other" that lies at the root of feelings that the player goes through during gameplay, stating that "interactions with NPCs move players beyond "para-social" feelings into consequential social experiences with accompanying social emotions and behaviors" (20). By adding depth to the two older brothers' relationship to Don Juan, it becomes easier

for the player to empathize with their struggles. Don Juan's kindness is also seen as not just a heroic trait, but also as a result of a devotion to his brothers because they are his family. The actions of both Don Juan and his brothers feel more rationalized, helping bring ludonarrative harmony to the experience. These changes are made possible by the source text's function as both "essential story" and "co-storyteller" as the corrido is able to provide enough material for the game to build upon, and the game is able to provide new context to existing events in the source.

The game is also able to take this a step further by having the two brothers eventually join Don Juan as digital companions. In her paper "Digital Companions: Analysing the Emotive Connection Between Players and NPC Companions in Video Game Space" (2013), Julienne Greer defines a *digital companion* in games as "an object, creature, or some type of computational being which is dedicated to forming a relational bond with the game player" and that can elicit emotional responses from the player, though the degree of which depends on both the player's experience and the developer's intent (135).

These types of characters are often found as a convention of role-playing games where they serve as party members: characters who join the players party and can be used during battle. These characters function as secondary avatars, with the player given control over the abilities they learn, the equipment they wield, and what they do in battle. In *Adarna*, the three brothers eventually join forces to fight a common threat, allowing the game's fiction to reconcile the

brothers and make the player more attached to them as allies. The strength of their bond is also felt during gameplay as the player now has more fighters to use in battle. By updating the characterization of the two older brothers through the game's fiction, and turning them into party members through the rules, the game is able to bridge the source text and the genre of the target text to create a new work.

Stylized Simulations: Completing Berbanya

Juul posits that a fictional world is always incomplete because "no fiction exists that completely specifies all aspects of a fictional world" (122). Fictional worlds will always have missing pieces of information that must be filled in by the user (122). One possible way to imagine the gaps in a world is *the principle of minimum departure* (123). Proposed by Marie-Laure Ryan, it states that information that we don't know about a fictional world will be filled in by our knowledge of the real world. She elaborates:

> We will project upon these worlds everything we know about reality, and we will make only the adjustments dictated by the text. When someone says "If horses had wings they would be able to fly," we reconstrue animal presenting all the properties of real horses, except for the presence of wings and the ability to fly. (51)

This happens in two ways in *Adarna*: the gaps filled in by the game developers and the gaps filled in by players.

Both rely on knowledge based on both reality and on what we know from the source text. To address the gaps in the brothers' relationship, Senshi.Labs drew inspiration from portrayals of sibling rivalry in fiction and pop culture, both within and outside the Philippines. One of these is the role-playing game *Final Fantasy IV* (1991), in which antagonist Golbez, who is the older brother of protagonist Cecil, whose hatred of his brother is later revealed to be influenced by an entity known as Zemus. The story ends with the conflict between the brothers resolved.

Also a notable source of inspiration was the Filipino television series *Encantadia* (2016). A retelling of the 2005 original, *Encantadia*'s director, Mark Reyes, described the series as a show that deals with family problems, particularly a dysfunctional sisterhood

(Villano). Lapa notes that while *Encantadia* is similar to *Ibong Adarna*, as both dealt with fantasy and magical realism, the difference is in how characters are fleshed out. Lapa highlights the character Pirena, who is pitted against her younger, more favored sister Amihan, as an inspiration to the changes in Don Pedro and Don Diego, stating:

> Pirena's motivations for competing with her younger sister is transparent. She is not inexplicably evil, a characteristic that made it easy for the writers to resolve the family conflict, and thus the second part of the series begins with her as a member of the protagonist team. Pedro and Diego, on the other hand, have been portrayed as nothing but schemers for no logical reason, unless one could argue that they did not feel favored by their parents. (141)

This comparison helped the developers imagine both a motive behind Don Pedro's acts against Don Juan, as well Don Diego's sympathetic nature, which was only hinted at in the original corrido (141).

In addition to projective identities, players also fill in the gaps in the world by contributing their time and effort. Juul states:

> Since a player uses time and effort to play a game, that time and effort acquire a dual meaning in a game with a fictional world. The actions that the player performs also influence events in the fictional world, and the time taken to play is projected onto the fictional time of the game world. (136–138)

The remaining gaps can be filled by the representation of the source text's world as a simulated space.

Similar to how *Netflix*'s *Trese* uses a visual style in line with the conventions of 2D animation, *Adarna* uses a visual style reminiscent of Japanese role-playing games of the 1990's and early 2000's; the world is explored in a top down perspective with vibrant colors and characters drawn in a style inspired by Japanese anime. Enemies encountered are depicted using static illustrations similar to those used in *Final Fantasy IV*. This visual style increases the hypermediacy of the target text because it reminds the player that they are playing a game. However, while the visuals are a far cry from being realistic and cinematic, it still creates immediacy through abstraction.

In his book *Understanding Comics* (1994), Scott McCloud discusses the concept of an icon: "any image used to represent a person, place, thing, or idea" (27). Different icons can mean different things: flags can represent ideas while letters can represent words. Pictures can represent their subjects (27) but, unlike letters that retain the same meaning regardless of appearance, both the meaning and the level of resemblance to real life of a picture can vary (28).

When most of the detail is removed from a realistic picture, what remains is a cartoon. McCloud sees cartooning as "a form of amplification through simplification" (30). This process is called *abstraction* and it does not necessarily remove details, but focuses on specific ones, stripping an image to its essential meaning. Doing so brings the imagery further away from the real world and closer to the world of concepts (41). By removing details, games can focus on "a specific idea of what the game is about" (Juul 171). What games try to create are stylized concepts of the real world (172).

Stylization is in itself a form of adaptation:

> Even though the actual design and development of a game are also subject to financial and time constraints, this goes to show how games are often *stylized simulations*; developed not just for fidelity to their source domain, but for aesthetic purposes. These are *adaptations* of elements of the real world. (Juul 172)

Through stylization, *Adarna* is able to emphasize the elements that matter within the game, the characters and their goals in the narrative, thus amplifying the meaning of the game's fiction.

By amplifying the fiction, it is easier to cue the player to the game's rules. Characters with prominent roles in the story, for example, are easily identifiable compared to regular NPCs that have more generic designs. The change Don Juan's older brothers undergo, from antagonists to protagonists, also cues the player that they are now digital companions.

Moving Forward

Lapa sums up remediating source texts as video games:

> The retelling of a classic narrative into a video game opens up opportunities in storytelling that also empowers its audience. An interactive medium allows consumers to react in ways that have not been given much consideration by the narrative in that players have the ability to interrupt and even change the direction of an otherwise absolute flow. (155)

A video game adaptation requires rules, fiction, stylization, narrative design and the player's projected identity. The result, however, is more than the sum of its parts.

There is more to be discussed about game development, remediation, source texts, and the Philippine game development industry as a whole. There are also many other Philippine-made video games that incorporate Filipino imagery, culture, and source texts into the medium. A notable mention is Senshi.Labs's *Adarna: Ang Alamat ni Maria Blanca* (2016), a sequel to *Adarna* that stars Maria Blanca, Juana, and Leonora, who were all love interests of Don Juan in the original corrido, with the latter two ending up as wives to Don Pedro and Don Diego. This game reimagines the three women as capable, independent characters whose lives do not revolve around the three brothers and are on their own adventure.

All of these are beyond the scope of this paper. However, the goal of this paper is to start a conversation. It is my hope that through this research, I am able to simultaneously bring independent game development, as a means of exploring possibilities to Filipino narratives, to the attention of the Philippine literary community, while also bringing projects like *Adarna*, that make use of Philippine source texts in ingenious ways, to a larger audience. Combine this with the large numbers of video game genres and subgenres, future advancements in game development technology and increasing accessibility of tools, and remediation can open source texts to more possibilities. This research hopes to bring attention to this opportunity.

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