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).
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    |
| Sakristan                  | 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      |
| Kumusta Bro?               | 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      |
| Quarantings: 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.

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