

Article

Beyond the Literal: An AI-Driven Connotative and Cultural Discourse Analysis of *Florante at Laura*

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Correspondence: rlacerna@southernleytestateu.edu.ph**Abstract**

Florante at Laura, the magnum opus of Francisco Balagtas, remains a cornerstone of Philippine literature, embodying the richness of language, values, and cultural heritage. Prescribed by the Department of Education as a Grade 8 core text, this 19th-century metrical romance continues to shape students' appreciation of classical works. This study aims to deepen learners' understanding of *Florante at Laura* by uncovering the connotative meanings within its verses. Beyond literal interpretation, it employs Artificial Intelligence (AI) tools to analyze selected chapters, stanzas, and lines, revealing symbolism, emotions, and cultural references often overlooked in traditional readings. Through AI-enhanced linguistic and semantic analysis, the research identifies nuanced interpretations such as implicit social commentaries, allegorical depictions of justice and morality, and subtle portrayals of love and patriotism, hallmarks of Balagtas' artistry. This approach not only supports teachers in delivering more engaging lessons but also enables students to recognize the historical and socio-political undertones that influenced the text. By merging classical literary study with modern technology, the study makes *Florante at Laura* more accessible and relevant to contemporary learners. Ultimately, findings highlight the potential of AI in enriching literature education, enhancing interpretive skills, and fostering cultural literacy. By unveiling hidden connotative layers, the study reaffirms the poem's enduring significance as a reflection of Filipino identity, struggles, and ideals, bridging the past with the present in meaningful ways.

Keywords: *Florante at Laura*, Connotative Analysis, Filipino, Poem, artificial intelligence

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Introduction

The Philippines' rich literary heritage reflects its historical, cultural, and linguistic identity. It is recognized in the 1987 Philippine Constitution, Article XIV, Section 15, which mandates preserving, enriching, and promoting the dynamic evolution of the country's historical and cultural heritage, including arts and literature. Among the most celebrated works is *Florante at Laura* by Francisco Balagtas, a cornerstone of Philippine literature and a required text in the Grade 8 Filipino curriculum under Republic Act No. 10533, the Enhanced Basic Education Act of 2013. This work strengthens language learning and fosters cultural appreciation by developing competencies such as interpreting figurative language, analyzing connotative and denotative meanings, and examining linguistic structures. Despite its importance, the teaching of *Florante at Laura* poses persistent challenges due to its archaic vocabulary, lengthy narrative, and dense metaphorical content. These difficulties are reflected in student performance, as evidenced by struggles in the National Achievement Test (NAT) and ongoing interpretation challenges even at the tertiary level.

Republic Act No. 10533 emphasizes a learner-oriented and culturally responsive approach, ensuring that education addresses diverse learners' cognitive, linguistic, and socio-cultural needs. However, the implementation of *Florante at Laura* often falls short of these ideals. The poem's complex style as a Tagalog *awit*, characterized by twelve-syllable lines and allegorical depth, demands careful guidance from teachers. In large classes or situations with limited time and instructional resources, achieving the intended learning outcomes becomes difficult. Furthermore, many students resort to literal interpretation, missing the work's deeper moral, socio-political, and cultural dimensions. In this context, integrating artificial intelligence (AI) into literature offers a promising avenue. AI-powered tools can provide real-time explanations, interactive discussion prompts, vocabulary assistance, and adaptive learning pathways that match students' reading levels. However, in the Philippine setting, the application of AI in literature instruction remains underexplored.

Scholarly literature underscores the significance of *Florante at Laura* as a literary and cultural artifact. A classical *awit* is imbued with florid metaphors and allegories that demand higher-order interpretative skills. Newmark (1988) and Venuti (2017) assert that highly stylized literary works require linguistic proficiency and an understanding of cultural context. Previous studies by De Vera (2019) and Hernandez (2020) identify the vocabulary gap and cognitive load as significant barriers to student comprehension. Research on literary pedagogy highlights the importance of stylistic

and socio-political readings in deepening student engagement, as seen in analyses of other works such as Amado V. Hernandez's *Ang Panday* and Lacorte's *Sandaang Hakbang Papuntang Malacañang*.

Additionally, early literacy research by Santos (2017) and Delos Reyes (2019) confirms that consistent exposure to literary analysis strengthens comprehension skills for complex texts. Globally, AI-powered educational platforms have been shown to improve comprehension and engagement (Holmes et al., 2019), offering personalized learning experiences and immediate feedback. However, Philippine research on AI in literature teaching, especially for canonical works like *Florante at Laura*, is scarce.

Given these considerations, a clear research gap emerges. While *Florante at Laura* remains an integral part of the high school curriculum, empirical studies on effective, technology-enhanced teaching strategies for its instruction are limited. Current literature focuses on traditional classroom methods, stylistic analysis, and thematic interpretation, but rarely incorporates innovative, technology-supported approaches. The potential of AI to bridge vocabulary gaps, enhance figurative language comprehension, and foster deeper engagement has yet to be systematically explored in the local context. Addressing this gap is essential to developing pedagogical models that align with RA 10533's mandate for learner-centered, culturally responsive education while meeting the cognitive and linguistic demands of 21st-century learners.

Methodology

This study employed a qualitative research method through content analysis, focusing on the connotative meanings embedded in the poem *Florante at Laura*. The research design is structured to objectively, systematically, and qualitatively analyze the selected content of the poem, aiming to uncover deeper meanings behind the figurative expressions used by the poet. By interpreting these connotative statements, the study provides insights into the underlying themes and messages conveyed in the text.

The primary source of data for this study is *Florante at Laura*, a significant Philippine literary work with the full title: *The Life of Florante and Laura in the Kingdom of Albania, Adapted from Various Historical Paintings Depicting Events from Ancient Times in the Greek Empire, Written in Tagalog Verse by a Skillful Poet*. First published in 1870, the poem is regarded as a cornerstone of 19th-century Philippine literature, as recognized by Fray Toribio Minguella. The version of the poem analyzed in this study is based on [2]'s interpretation, which consists of 399 lines

divided into 30 chapters. This research specifically focused on selected chapters containing connotative expressions, including *To Celia*, *The Kingdom of Albania*, *The Lamentations of the Unfortunate*, *The Savior*, and *A Grieving Heart*. By analyzing these chapters, the study highlights the intricate use of figurative language and symbolism throughout the text.

The analysis process involved selecting and categorizing stanzas that contain connotative expressions. Through this approach, the study aimed to reveal the deeper meanings within the text, providing students and educators with a clearer understanding of the poem's themes and literary significance. By decoding these figurative expressions, the study contributes to a richer appreciation of *Florante at Laura* and its role in Philippine literature.

399 lines that comprise the 30 chapters of the poem. Here is the list of the titles that this study focused on:

To Celia, To the Reader, The Melancholic Forest, The Kingdom of Albania, Unfortunate Fate, The Lamentations of Unfortunate, Come, My Laura, The Arrival of the Moorish Warrior, Duke Briceo, Loving Father, The Warrior's Cry, The Lions, The Savior, In the Arms of the Warrior, Blessing Hands, Florante's Youth, Raised in Luxury, Athens, Athens, Just a Play, Not a Reality, A Grieving Heart, The Voice of Experience, Crotona in Danger, Laura's Bitterness, Preparing for War, Tooth for Tooth, Defense of the City, The Traitor, The Warrior's Anguish, Run, Florida, Run, On the Brink of Life and Death, Happy Ending

This study focused on selected lines or stanzas from these 30 chapters with connotative meanings.

Findings and Interpretation

Here are the results. Table 1 consists of selected stanzas containing connotative statements and corresponding meanings.

Table 1

| Chapter | Selected line or stanza | Meaning |
|----------|--|---------------------------|
| To Celia | If I recall the days of love in my mind, Will I find any trace except for Celia, who | He loved Celia very much. |

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| | nested in my heart? | |
| To the Reader | Do not ask for your love, mock or despise me if you will, but do not alter the verse. | Asking the readers to respect his poem by not destroying the verses |
| The Melancholic Forest The Kingdom of Albany | <p>This forest is near the gates of Avernus, The realm of Pluto is grim and hostile. The River Cocytus nourishes its lands, Its waters are brimming with venom.</p> <p>14 “Out of my miserable town, confusion reigns, goodness and kindness are drowning, mocked in the pit of suffering and sorrow. Treachery</p> | <p>The lines evoke an intense and chilling picture of a forest deeply connected to the underworld, symbolizing death, despair, and peril. It showed the darkness of such a place.</p> <p>The author expressed deep sorrow over the moral and societal decay of the country. The line critiqued the loss of values like kindness and patriotism, painting an ugly picture of a community engulfed by confusion, suffering, and betrayal.</p> <p>The line shows a narrative of</p> |

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| | <p>to the country is rampant</p> | <p>jealousy and treason, where envy leads Count Adolfo to betray King Lineo and the speaker's father, harming the kingdom of Albany. It highlights the destructive power of greed and the personal and societal damage caused by betrayal.</p> |
| | <p>15 Because of King Linseo's crown and my father's wealth, Count Adolfo dared to poison the kingdom of Albany. Envious of the power and wealth of a leader, a man betrayed</p> | <p>This line portrays a bleak picture of a society where good values are lost, talent is wasted, and wickedness prevails. The author calls for a change or a warning.</p> |
| | <p>16 "Good manners are thrown into the sea of mockery and slander, the talented are buried without a coffin. People</p> | |

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| | have become wicked. | |
| Chapter | Selected line or stanza | Meaning |

Table 2: continuation of selected stanzas containing connotative statements and corresponding meanings.

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| Florante’s lament | 60 "Only you, Laura, only you remain, The one who can ease this suffering and pain; Let your hands touch my body in despair, Moreover, even in death, I shall live again!" | Laura's visit will heal the suffering Florante feels. |
| The Arrival of Aladdin | "77 And if it were another who took Florida, Not the one I must honor as my | kung hindi lamang ang ama ang umagaw ng kasintahan ay malamang |

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| | father, I cannot say if this is a furious blade. Would unleash a thousand deaths. | pinatay na niya ito |
| Duch Briceo, the Loving Father | 95 "Ay,abang ama ko!Kung magunamgunam Madla mong pag- irog at pagpapalayaw, Ipinapalaso ng kapighatian, Luha niring pusong sa mata'y nunukal. 95 "Oh, my poor father! When I remember Your boundless love and tender care, It poisons my heart with sorrow so deep, As tears from my eyes begin to weep." | namatay na ang ama at ikinalulungkot niya ito nang labis |
| The Arrival of Aladdin | 102 "Ngunit ang nanahang maralitang tubig sa mukha't dibdib ko'y laging dumidilig, kay ama nga galing datapwa't sa bangis, hindi sa andukha at pagtatangkilik | Umiyak siya dahil sa galit sa kanyang amang umagaw sa kanyang kasintahan |
| The savior | 128 Anyong pantay – mata ang lagay ng araw niyong pagkatungo sa kalulunuran, siyang pagkataos sa kinalalagyan, nitong nagagapos na kahambal – hambal | Malapit ng lumubog ang araw ngunit kaawa-awa pa rin si Florante na iginapos sa kahoy |

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| In Aladdin's lap | 148 "Kung nasusuklam ka sa aking kandungan, lason sa puso mo ang hindi binyagan, nakukutya akong di ka saklolohan, sa iyong nasapit na napakarawal | "Kung ayaw mo sa hindi Kristyano dahil moro ako ngunit makokonsensya akong hindi ka tulungan sa ganyang sitwasyon" |
| Mga mapagpalang kamay | 158 Doon sa naunang hinintuang dako nang masok sa gubat ang bayaning Moro, sa isang malapad, malinis na bato, kusang pinagyaman ang lugaming pangko | Buong pusong tinulungan si Florante |
| Ang kabataan ni Florante | 187 "Hanggang sa tingal-in ng sandaigdigan ang mukha ni Pebong hindi matitigan, ay sinasagap ko ang kaligayahang handog niyong hindi maramot na parang | Tanghali na ngunit aliw na aliw pa rin siya sa magandang bukirin |
| Laki sa Layaw | 197 "Pag-ibig anaki'y aking nakilala di dapat palakhin ang bata sa saya, at sa katuwaa'y kapag namihasa, kung lumaki'y walang hihinting ginhawa. | Ang pagpapalaki sa anak ay hindi dapat puro sa saya lamang dahil paglaki ay hindi marunong humarap sa mga pagsubok |
| | 203 "Ang laki sa layaw karaniwa'y hubad, sa bait at muni't sa hatol ay salat; masaklap na bunga ng maling paglingap, | Ang lumaki sa layaw ay kulang sa disiplina at ito'y maling pagmamahal |

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| | habag ng magulang sa irog na anak. | |
| Atenas, Atenas | 214 “Puso ko’y niniilag na siya’y giliw, aywan nga kung bakit at naririmarin, si Adolfo nama’y gayon din sa akin, nararamdaman ko kahit lubhang lihim | Ayaw niyang makipagkaibigan kay Adolfo at ramdam niyang ganun din si Adolfo sa kanya |
| Sa bingit ng buhay at kamatayan | 375 “Di lubhang naglaon noong pag-alis mo, O sintang Florante, sa Albanyang reyno, narinig sa baya’y isang piping gulo, sa umalingawngaw hanggang sa palasyo. | May bulung- bulungan o tsismis sa buong bayan |
| Masayang wakas | 397 Sa pamamahala nitong bagong hari sa kapayapaan ang reyno’y nauli dito nakabangon ang nalulugami, at napasatuwa ang namimighati | naging mapayapa na mulí ang bayan dahil sa mabuting lider |

The analysis highlights the richness of connotative expressions in selected literary stanzas, emphasizing themes of love, betrayal, morality, patriotism, and societal decay. It is an interpretative guide, making figurative language more accessible to students and educators. Love and devotion emerge as central themes, while betrayal and moral corruption, particularly in *The Kingdom of Albany*, showcase the consequences of envy and ambition. The text also critiques societal decay, portraying the erosion of values and the prevalence of deception.

Patriotism is deeply reflected, with stanzas expressing love for one’s country, the pain of oppression, and hope for renewal. Familial love and divine justice are

significant themes, reinforcing that righteousness prevails despite suffering. The study demonstrates the complexity of connotative language but, through guided analysis, helps foster critical thinking and literary appreciation. Beyond comprehension, the text imparts values such as love, integrity, and justice, serving as a moral guide for readers. The findings highlight Balagtas' mastery of figurative language and symbolism, reinforcing *Florante at Laura*'s significance in Philippine literature. The study underscores the importance of literary analysis in enhancing critical thinking, preserving Filipino heritage, and ensuring continued engagement with classic literary works for future generations.

Discussions

The findings of this study reveal the depth and complexity of *Florante at Laura*'s connotative expressions, illustrating Francisco Balagtas' mastery in embedding profound meanings within poetic lines. The selected stanzas analyzed in Tables 1 and 2 showcase various human emotions and moral reflections, from personal love and devotion to societal decay and patriotic longing. These results confirm that *Florante at Laura* is not merely a romantic narrative but also a socio-political commentary on moral values, governance, and the human condition.

Both romantic and filial love emerge as one of the most dominant themes. In *Celia and Florante's Lament*, the speaker's deep affection for Celia and Laura transcends physical presence, highlighting love's capacity to heal emotional suffering. Familial love is also poignantly expressed, as seen in *Duch Briceo, the Loving Father*, where Florante laments his father's passing, recalling his boundless affection and guidance. These expressions of love serve as moral anchors in the narrative, reinforcing virtues of loyalty, compassion, and gratitude.

Betrayal and moral corruption starkly contrast these virtues, particularly in *The Kingdom of Albany* and other politically charged stanzas. Here, Balagtas uses symbolic imagery, the forest near Avernus, poisoned waters, and societal chaos, to represent moral decay, treachery, and the destructive power of envy. Count Adolfo's betrayal, motivated by greed for power and wealth, exemplifies how ambition can corrode personal integrity and destabilize an entire kingdom. These connotative portrayals of betrayal echo the realities of political corruption, making the text relevant beyond its historical setting.

Patriotism is deeply embedded in the work's thematic fabric. Stanzas depict societal decay as moral critiques and acts of patriotic expression, as they call for preserving values such as justice, kindness, and unity. The *Masayang Wakas* symbolizes national renewal, with the rise of a just leader restoring peace and uplifting the

oppressed. Such imagery aligns with Balagtas' nationalist sentiment, subtly urging readers to reflect on governance and collective responsibility. The text also offers moral and philosophical insights on upbringing and character formation, as seen in the *Laki sa Layaw* stanzas. Balagtas warns against overindulgence in child-rearing, noting that comfort without discipline breeds entitlement and incapacity to face life's challenges. This moral stance remains culturally and socially relevant, linking family values to broader societal health.

Moreover, the stanzas highlight complex interpersonal dynamics, such as distrust and rivalry (Atenas, Atenas), social gossip (*Sa bingit ng buhay at kamatayan*), and moral dilemmas in helping those from different faiths (In Aladin's Lap). These themes underscore the narrative's engagement with diversity, prejudice, and moral decision-making, reflecting society's pluralistic and sometimes divided nature.

Therefore, the connotative richness of *Florante at Laura* invites deep interpretative engagement. Guided analysis, as undertaken in this study, makes such figurative language more accessible to students and educators, fostering literary appreciation and critical thinking. The interplay of love, betrayal, morality, and patriotism in the text serves not only to entertain but also to educate, imparting values of integrity, justice, and resilience. By unpacking the symbolic and connotative layers of the poem, this study reinforces *Florante at Laura*'s enduring significance in Philippine literature. It highlights the necessity of preserving such works as cultural heritage. These findings align with the view that classical literature remains a vital educational tool for moral formation and cultural continuity when taught with contextual sensitivity and analytical depth.

Conclusions

The study highlights the depth of connotative expressions in *Florante at Laura*, revealing its rich themes of love, betrayal, morality, patriotism, and societal decay. Literary analysis provides a clearer understanding of figurative language, making it more accessible to students and educators. The findings emphasize the poem's critique of moral corruption and the consequences of ambition while celebrating virtues such as devotion, righteousness, and justice.

Moreover, the study underscores the importance of literary analysis in fostering critical thinking, preserving Filipino heritage, and enhancing engagement with classic literature. Guiding students in interpreting figurative expressions contributes to a deeper appreciation of *Florante at Laura* and reinforces its enduring significance in Philippine literature.

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