

## The Socio-Political Issues in the Light of Kit Robinson's A Mental Finding

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**Abstract:** *The representation of the socio-political issues has become the central focus of the postmodern poetry. Being chaotic and fragmented in nature, this Leftist poetry highly implicated the issues of the contemporary world. Macrocosmic in nature, these issues are focused in this content-relational investigation. This study delved on the socio-political issues in the light of Kit Robinson's "A Mental Finding". Specifically, it looked into the following: the postmodernist features, socio-political issues revelation through these features; and their implications to the present world, more so in the Philippine context. It made use of qualitative descriptive method employing content and relational analysis through matrices, textual format and thematic analysis. The findings revealed that A Mental Finding's twenty-eight idealized syntactic units employ postmodernist characteristics of poetry, such as iconoclasm, groundlessness, formlessness and populism that entail socio-political issues which are the plight of the poor, commonalities of the marginalized class, fragmented and multiple ideologies, fractured societies, information and media-democracy, negligence, leadership; and political denial and irresponsibility concurrent to the world and most specifically to the Philippines. As proven by analytical, verbal data, it is concluded that Kit Robinson's "A Mental Finding" employs postmodernist characteristics of poetry to reveal the socio-political issues cooccurring in the modern world and in the Philippines. This investigation is significant to both teachers and learners of the English language, particularly in the teaching and learning of literature as they will be exposed on how to analyze postmodernist poems to capture the realities of modern life particularly the social and political aspects of not only the Philippines but of the whole world.*

**Keywords:** Kit Robinson, Postmodernism, Relational Analysis, Socio-Political Issues

### I. Introduction

The socio-political issues the world faces kindle the interests of many writers to create masterpiece entirely different from the so-called literary conventions. These existing socio-economic and cultural system of the time have widely influenced them in shifting from a subjective writing to a decentered one. With the aftermath of the World War II, most writers have moved away from these conventions and expressed themselves through a form of writing called *Postmodernism*. This is their way of expressing their newly found freedom (Hamilton, n.d.) of which poetry itself reflects chaos. C. John Holcombe, in his *Postmodernism in Poetry*, mentioned that postmodernism began in the sixties, when there developed a feeling that poetry had become too ossified, backward-looking and restrained and that writers write, but mindful of literary conventions (Holcombe, 2014). Though poems made from these conventions are indeed appealing, it did not stop the Leftist to push for postmodern poetry.

Believing this as an avant-garde in literature, this style is often called "poetic diary or journal" (Norton 2646), which mainly tackles on the apprehension of the invisible world full of fragmentation particularly the pressing issues in the society. Hamilton (n.d.) cited that the focus of this movement is how the art captures the sense of chaos and fragmentation with the written word. It embodies individual's emotion that is difficult to give voice to.

What is meant by this chaos is the fragmented world writers have seen in the postmodern era, though the world has transformed so much when it comes to technological advancement, the ill effects are its counterparts including both socio-economic and political issues. These societal issues such as hunger and poverty, increasing gap between the rich and the poor, politicians' insensitivity to commoners, individual

confusion, divided ideologies and beliefs, and many others have become the main themes of a postmodern poetry.

This is corroborated by Norton (2649) singling out that postmodern poetry is known to have no single dominant style, being chaotic and fragmented in nature. He further reiterates that this is a mix of image with narrative, discursive, precise observation, open-ended juxtaposition, philosophical reflection with no coherence or closure as well as disjunctive thinking and unexpected jumps (Norton 2647) which all are means in representing the most dominant features and characteristics of the modern society.

The Leftist believed that postmodernism in poetry is characterized by four major features such as *iconoclasm*, *groundlessness*, *formlessness* and populism (Holcombe, 2014). Specifically, irony, playfulness, black humor, pastiche, intertextuality, metafiction, historiographic metafiction, temporal distortion, paranoia, maximalism, faction, magical realism and participation are its characteristics, to name a few. These postmodern texts are those that parodically refer to traditions, genres and conventions that employ pastiche, irony and parody. It is indeed a collage of diversified styles and themes that do not only confuse the teachers but also the learners.

With these complex features stated, postmodernist poem is hard to understand. Yet, there is indeed a need to determine these features so as to figure out societal issues that may directly or indirectly affect not just the readers and the teachers but everyone in general.

At present time even if others believed that postmodernism in poetry is dead, it is still in the process of resurgence. Currently, there are only few studies that deal on postmodern poetry and little less study done in the Philippines. Thus, this study is conceived in order examine verbal data of a postmodernism poetry and explore how society, economics and politics are artistically presented in this form of poetry.

In particular, this study delves on the socio-political issues in the light of Kit Robinson's "A Mental Finding". Specifically, it looks into the following: What postmodern features are present in the poem? What socio-economic and political issues are found in the poem? How are these socio-economic and political issues revealed through postmodernists features of poetry and what are their implications to the present world, particularly the Philippines?

This postmodernist poem is written by Kit Robinson who was known to be an early member of the San Francisco language poets and a West Coast writing scene active member. During the early years of his career, he was a postal clerk, cab driver, legal reporter and a teacher's aide, which could have influenced the themes of his works being part of the working class. Most of his works, to name *Raising Collateral*, themes are not from a sole idea or plot, but directly from disparate, daily experience (Hejinian & Watten, 2013).

Furthermore, Robinson frequently uses sound to explore the process of creating meaning from daily life and thought ("Kit Robinson," 2018) as reflected in one of his select poems, *The Messianic Tress* (2009). He is mainly focused on relentlessly poking at the membrane between form and chaos and sense and senselessness which is the main impetus of this investigation. This poem is a perfect choice for an in-depth content and relational analysis presenting the socio-political issues of the modern society through the use of postmodernist characteristics of poetry which will be laid down in this paper.

Determining these socio-political issues helps the teachers and students alike to acquire knowledge as to how poetry became a vehicle of representing a fragmented world in a written word including societal, economic, cultural and political issues since postmodern poetry deals on these matters. By exposing these socio-economic and political issues, teachers, students and all forms of readers gain knowledge and awareness on pressing issues that directly and indirectly affect every individual around the world, in the Philippines in particular, the unheard voices and plight of the marginalized and the pretentiousness and insensitivity of those in position. These then are cleared in this investigation.

## II. Related Literature

Postmodernism literature has long been considered an avenue for exposing human conditions, may it be historical, cultural, socio-economic and political. Hutcheon (2002) pointed out works of art which are considered inescapably political because of their nature of being parodic. These include historiographic metafiction such as Salman's Rushdie's *Midnight Children* and metafilmic historical movies like Peter Greenaway's *The Draughtman's Contract* which generally expose the social class and politics of the modern society. Being postmodernism initial concern to de-naturalize some of the dominant features of our way of life, most postmodernist works point out that entities being experienced are cultural, which means made by us, not given to us (ibid.) With that said, the societal issues faced by the modern society are product of human activities are often reflected and represented through literary works, in this sense, poetry of postmodernism.

These socio-political issues are widely represented through Nigel William's *Star Turn* inscribing and de-toxifying both the bourgeois and Marxist notion of social class. The most prominent form of social class is represented by the bourgeois who are people being the property-owning class and exploitive of the working class. This issue is generally social, economic and political by which postmodern poetry labelled the society as chaotic and fragmented.

This chaos and fragmentation of the world is also basically connected with the politics of the modern society. Padgett (2016) mentioned that poetry in the postmodern era implies the politics of the time, directly or indirectly. Further, Padgett (2016) mentioned that poetry in postmodernism is "cannot be but political". Thus, there is no question as to the presence of the socio-political issues in this leftist form of poetry.

Chaos and fragmentation are both lamented and celebrated in postmodern poetry as reflected in T.S. Elliot's poem "The Wasteland". Being chaotic and fragmented, the poem captures the very nature of modern society where societal and political issues are macrocosmic. These two major facets of postmodern poetry, so to say, chaos and fragmentation, heavily expose the world careened out of **control, fractured societies, multiple religions, sense of loss, complex ideologies** (Elliot, 1998), which is opined by Brooks (2003) through showcasing themes of **alienation and insanity, anger and indifference and class distinctions as well pretentious individuals**. It is with T.S. Elliot's and Gwendolyn Brooks's poems that chaos and fragmentation of the rapidly changing world, specifically the modern culture are artistically captured.

Sponsler (1992) mentioned that postmodernism is not a new era but a reaction to Modernism (the wake of Second World War) about its disrespect for human rights confirmed in Bataan Death March, Geneva Convention, the holocaust, the bombings, Civil Rights Movement, Cold War and many others which are product of the contemporary society which confirms the world as chaotic and fragmented.

Crawford, et al. (1990) mentioned that postmodern poems are called in such manner because the just and unjust, the trivial and the consequential are being cast upon. This means that poetry of this time portrays mainly the very nature of the modern society.

As cited in Goišová (2014), *The Routledge Companion to Postmodernism* claims that, postmodernism in general is a movement to reject most of the cultural certainties and Western life being structured over the last couple of centuries. It questions the commitment to cultural progress and political systems. Thus, postmodernism is a call to enlighten people about liberal humanist ideology in order to free humankind from political oppression and bring them to emancipation from economic want destroying what has been the dominating Western culture since the eighteenth century.

In the findings of Goišová (2014), it is revealed that postmodern features are used in *The Pythons* to ridicule stereotypical attitudes of British society or any society in general, and they employ the

postmodern features for achieving it. Furthermore, in the same study, *The Pythons* use postmodern techniques to assault the society and to perform the criticism of the same society.

To fully comprehend what does postmodern poem is, the characteristics and features will be laid down. Holcombe (2014) points out four fundamental features of postmodernism. These include iconoclasm, formlessness, groundless and populism as mentioned earlier. These postmodernist aspects are revealed in Shaikh Ayaz poesy revealing formless, iconoclasm, and groundlessness compounded by Gary Soto's inclusion of the above elements with the emphasis on populism (Lahara, n.d.).

Iconoclasm decanonizes authorities, previous artworks and cultural standards, subverts its sources by irony, pastiche and parody, denounces gender, cultural and repression, strips context, reducing content to an austere minimum and broods on the human condition disclosed by radical literary theory. As defined in *wordweb*, iconoclasm refers to the idea of attacking the cherished traditions and traditional ideas. Needless to say, this leftist form of poetry focuses on attacking the established traditional social and political conventions of the modern society.

On the same end, groundless employs flat, media-like images that have no reference beyond themselves, champions the primary, unmediated but not sensuous, regards both art and life as fictions, sometimes mixing the two in magic realism or multiple endings, argues that meaning is indeterminate, denying a final or preferred interpretation. This is simply understood as having no quality, substance or value for people who are used to Modernism but the main focus of postmodern poems being groundless is to let the reader directly understand that there is no distinction between art and life and that trends in the society are well represented in art, particularly in literature. Meaningless or lack of reality themes as well as existential point of view are frequently demonstrated in this form of poetry ("wiseGEEK: What is Postmodern Poetry", 2018)

Formlessness is another feature of postmodern poem which stresses a poem having no form. It employs erratic line breaks and structures to indicate the chaotic shapelessness of the world (*ibid.*). World, being chaotic and fragmented, is well-demonstrated in this form of poetry by breaking conventional format in poetry. Holcombe (2014) discusses that the essence of art is the deviation from the expected, foregrounding and departures from the conventions. As Ramon Jacobson and Russian formalists affirm in unison, art will become much stronger when it is incoherent, indefinite and shapelessness. Thus, there is a need not to stick rigidly to genres and refrain from parody and pastiche. Breaking the conventions is breaking the status quo of the contemporary world.

Lastly is populism. Among all those four fundamentals of postmodernism, this one most clearly demonstrates the quest for supports to the rights and powers of the common people in their struggle with the privilege elite. Poems that employ populism encourage audience participation. It is just like a call for the masses to be awakened from what is known to be conventional and traditional which need to be changed particularly the society's trends on human conditions. Populism focuses on illustrating social causes by employing what is well-known and easily accessible in vivid montages. It advocates nihilism which is a revolutionary doctrine that advocates destruction of the social system and completely denies all established institutions and authorities as defined in *wordweb*.

All those aforementioned postmodernist features have one thing in common. They are used to represent the chaotic and fragmented world which is out of control, with fractured societies, multiple religions, sense of loss, complex ideologies, alienation, insanity and delusion, anger and indifference, information-drenched and class distinctions as well pretentious individuals of which will be the focus of this investigation. Within these features across the related readings presented, expounded and reviewed, this content and relational exploration is conceived of.

### III. Research Methodology

This research employs a qualitative descriptive method using matrices and systematized textual format. It utilizes content and relational analysis which mainly delves on a) the postmodern features found in the poem, b) the socio-political issues present in the poem and c) the implications of these issues in the world and in the Philippine setting.

In doing the content and relational analysis, the poem is evaluated as to its content and its relation to the real world. Since it is a poem, it undergoes retrieval of syntactic units especially this is a postmodern one. Then, based from the idealized syntactic units, the poem undergoes coding analysis of words, phrases, concepts, and sentences used for thematic analysis. After which, the themes revealed are utilized in making inferences about the presence of the socio-political issues and its implications in the Philippine context.

The author of the poem Kit Robinson is known to write works that frequently explore the process of creating meaning from daily life and thought (“Kit Robinson”, 2018). Thus, the aforementioned poem is a text that contains issues and concepts related to daily life, in this study, socio-political and others. This paper also utilizes other sources from online articles, electronic books and documents, research papers and books for further related readings to establish strong grounds for postmodernist features representing the socio-political issues.

#### IV. Results and Discussion

Table 1 presents the postmodernist features found in the poem and the corresponding sentences they are employed. (See Appendix B for the complete list of Idealized Syntactic Units)

Table 1: Postmodernist Features in Idealized Syntactic Units

Postmodernist Features	Sentences
Iconoclasm (16)	1,2,3,5,6,7,9,13,18,20,22,23,24,26,27,28
Groundlessness (9)	4,7,10,11,12,15,16,19,27
Formlessness (9)	1,12,15,16,18,21,22,24,28
Populism (4)	8,14,17,25

#### Iconoclasm

Among the 28 idealized syntactic units from the poem, the most commonly appearing postmodernist feature is iconoclasm particularly in minimalism, irony, playfulness and black humor while brooding on human conditions. This involves sentences 1,2,3,5,6,7,9,13,18,20,22,23,24,26,27 and 28. Minimalism is employed in sentences that directly present what needs to be laid down and that it only represents the most basic and the most necessary elements of which adverbs and adjectives are often devoid. There is an economy with words because the main purpose is for the readers to see and relate what is demonstrated to them. This is an appropriate means to exemplify the current conditions of the modern society. Sentence 1 for example, “*The world and all its burden of traps, dishes, forget-me-nots, wheels, ampules, laughter, freight, comets, deals parentheses, batches, cloisters, fair havens, place settings, ground cloths, pollsters, minions, theories, lecterns, rings, criteria, sorts, and all manner of blistering palms was found by the side of the road lacking only a local node.*” The poem opens by presenting the status quo of the world almost stating everything, enumerating almost all its aspects and its attributes only to be negated at the end by stating “*was found by the side of the road lacking only a local node.*” Sentence 7, “*The strand, the bullet-proof vest, the carbon copy, and all attitudes of a world, I can only connect the dots,*” 9, “*The missing element recedes from the point of view,*” 27, “*This world comprises an assemblage of brief sessions,*” and 28, “*There is no other, but it is incomplete,*” affirm sentence 1. These sentences illustrate the world having all the attributes but with missing element only the mind can conceive and is hard to comprehend. These sentences do not only employ minimalism but also irony, playfulness, parody and black humor. Along with other listed sentences, serious subjects are treated lightly and humorously. Most sentences

playfully and directly present what is seen in the society as an entity having almost everything from industrialization, technological advancement down to information and media-democracy, but still is lacking and incomplete as revealed. Irony, playfulness, and black humor are well-worded in sentences which mostly are ironic and satirical remarks on leadership and political irresponsibility. Sentence 3, *“The personalities, the ambience, the montage, and the sound all (these) graced his mind in a trice but what happened - this escaped him,”* 20, *“The president never explicitly authorizes covert action but signals his approval by means of a mental finding and the public never officially acknowledges this betrayal but indicates its mortification by way of a spiritual loss as the person never actually notices the repetitious layering of experience but circles the planet with a red pencil to convey “error,”* and 26 *“Building the body out of effort takes the mind off the hook”* are all comic style that make light of subject matters which are serious and painful (“Black humor,” 2018). In sentence 3, it is clear that the president or any leader is conscious about the current conditions, but this consciousness is often neglected as shown, *“this escaped him.”* Furthermore, sentence 20 lightly but playfully discusses the political irresponsibility of the leader presenting it as a bitter joke (Perelman, 1996) stating that there are actions that the public do not officially recognize as being approved by the president since most of these actions are covertly done. This is opined in sentence 26 which talks about the act of polishing the aspects of one’s personality to the masses while harboring an untamed, wild personality on the inside (Brooks, 2003). It is when a leader tries to build his or her outside physical appearance at the expense of disregarding his logical reasoning. Those are ironic, playful and humorous ways of presenting the world that in spite of almost having everything, i.e., industrialization, technological advancement, and media and information democracy, it still lacks a *node*, a connecting point at which several lines come together. Apropos, the missing element resides on the resolution of complex ideologies, divided sects and class distinction between the rich and the poor, borderline between the powerful and the powerless, and political and social hegemony which are even stressed connect on the sub-feature of iconoclasm: broods on human conditions. These iconoclast sub-feature is present in sentences that brood on human conditions as revealed in sentence 2, *“Efforts to resuscitate the dead have ended often in a backwards representation of the day,”* 5, *“Bearing in mind and reversing the immediate past has long since become second nature, a habit built up to the status of I.D.,”* 18, *“You have a hat on but the world barely fits under the polar ice cap,”* 22, *“The way the world has of reversal of the power of absorption and the power of brutal repression (rewrite this later) where scared teenagers with automatic weapons and (the) jagged edges are smoothed over to proffer a picture when rhetoric fills the news,”* 23, *“The world picture source has fashioned another banter and the forgotten palaver of indigents creases the air as lines roll down the cathode ray cheek of the party chairman who pictures a less complicated version of this unwitting career like those in the weather station, the golf cart and the maze,”* and 24, *“A man sings what he has been singing for 20 years.”* These sentences are iconoclast because these reflect common conditions of the marginalized individual. Say for example sentence number 18 which mentions about *“hat”*. The *“hat”* there symbolizes freedom, but this freedom is not fully practiced because of the current ruling social and political system. *Hat or cap* is associated with liberty, as in *“liberty cap”* that traced its roots in ancient Romans and Greeks and is worn as a manumission of slaves (Cooper W.J., & McCardell, 1995). Thus, when the word *“hat”* is mentioned, it can be deduced that freedom is relative to everyone, but the phrase *“but the world barely fits under the polar ice cap”* means the world has understood this freedom coolly and nonchalantly as ice symbolizes coolness (“The meaning of,” 2015). Sentence 23 clearly states about how the world takes lightly the disregarded *“palaver”* or the loud, confused and incessant talks of the commoners which are often enticed with the embellishing words of the party chairman who often talk what is good but hides what is bad. This is supported by sentence 24 stating *“a man sings what he has been singing for 20 years”* which clearly talks about the static music of the marginalized individual viz-a-vis their unchanged plight.

Iconoclasm, as a postmodernist feature of poetry is well-supported by Hutcheon (2004) stating that postmodern fiction is characterized by the use of ironic quote marks along with black humor and

playfulness being the most recognizable concepts of postmodernism. These are often employed by postmodernist writers in order to treat serious subjects i.e. socio-political issues in a humorous and playful manner. Furthermore, Lashari (n.d.) stresses iconoclasm as an urge to subvert past sources by irony, pastiches and parody denouncing all the factors that may repress gender versions, culture potentialities and ethnic tendency. Furthermore, as said by Joe Rose (cited in Barry, 2002) iconoclasm is employed when there is dipping of content to strict minimums believing that “less is more,” to stress on the representation and exploration of human conditions.

### Groundlessness

Another feature is groundlessness found in sentences 4, 7, 10, 11, 12,15,16,19 and 27. These sentences present trends in society. There is also the utilization of a frame story and an unreliable author because the persona/narrator shifts from one text/story to another. There is intertextuality which Waugh (1984) and Imhof (1986) discusses as another postmodern technique which is frequently used as a form of parody or a tool to undermine literary conventions and explore the relationship between literature and reality, life and art of which meaningless or lack of reality themes are presented in literature even those existential ones. Groundlessness is related to iconoclasm because the former focuses on the trends in the society while the latter broods on human conditions. Sentence 12 for example, “*Going away from (it) the weight program, I have broken into it, broken it into pieces about the size and shape of blows, about the head, not about but away from anything that fits this loose place while skimming the surface of dreams that is set up during the day and collapsed at night that is distanced, positioned, reduced a May weight and removed to let June have its way with it a delimiter totaling none of schedules drawn into the scheme of delicate things, nodding, half diminished and there in the milk of a syllable the perfect fret caught in the forgotten sentence.*” This is a very clear indication of an unreliable narrator and a frame story in the poem which employs intertextuality. The narrator opens up the story by stating the word “program”. This program is something that is supposed to serve the greater public, but as the narrator tells, he tries to understand it piece by piece only to figure out that this program is part of the dream. The mentioning of the months “May” and “June” is connected to the Emancipation Day or the abolition of serfdom or other forms of involuntary servitude (“Emancipation,” n.d.). *The National Archives* discusses on the passing of the Abolition of the Slave Trade Act but even if it is banned, there is nothing done to free the existing enslaved workforce (ibid.). Even if it has been century since the passing of this act and even if the aftermath of the World War II has given people their newly-found freedom, this freedom is not totally exercised as there is a covert action of suppression of these rights by the current ruling social and political system. This is another form of playfulness that is why it is also related with iconoclasm. Waugh (1984) discusses the rejection of realism challenging some traditional notions of literature such as traditional structure of novel or poem as a well as the conventional role of the narrator. This is also opined by Witzel (1987) mentioning on frame story that gives the reader the chance to understand the main story by being presented with different stories that share common theme to intensify the subject. This is confirmed in Sentence 10, “*Light drains from the day and that is the nature of evening,*” 15, “*A spoon stirs shadows "I'm over here" up on the time zone,*” and 16, “*The cymbidium tends toward the grey light of the other side of the wall.*” The word “light” represents the freedom, but this is suppressed by the “evening” as represented by the ruling class or those people in power. Furthermore, this is opined by the words “spoon” which stands for pride, class and lifestyle (“The meaning of,” 2015) and “cymbidium” which is a sign of luxury and strength (“Meaning & Symbolism of the Orchid,” n.d.). Trends in the society are well-represented in these sentences which are also agreed in sentence 7 and 27 as discussed previously in iconoclasm. Hope is still conceived as mentioned in sentence 4”*The sky opened on a possible life and the senses set in relief,*” 11, “*The first one of summer is a metaphor for freehand, a writing written in script,*” and 19, “*I have more plans rolled up in an attic locker than you can shake, rattle and stick to the subject: a speech that wavers, and a language that takes hold.*” Phrases such as “*opened on a possible life,*” “*a writing written in script,*” and “*more plans rolled up in an attic locker*” tells one thing: hope amidst the

difficulties being faced by marginalized people, their unheard voices. The meaning is intensified through “*speech that wavers*” and “*language that takes hold*” which can be associated to the voices and plight of the poor including their plans, dreams and aspirations sung with hesitation and doubt for the fear of being held. These are multitude of plans but putting them into action becomes now the question.

### Formlessness

The next postmodernist feature is formlessness that includes sentences: **1,12,15,16,18,21,22,24,28**. These sentences utilize erratic line, irregular breaks and structures to indicate the chaotic shapelessness of the world. This is in conjunction with Holcombe’s (2014) discussion on the essence of art as the deviation from the expected, foregrounding and as departures from the conventions. This is a means for the art to become much stronger when it is incoherent, indefinite and shapeless as Ramon Jacobson and Russian formalists affirm in unison. Thus, there is a need not to stick rigidly to genres and not to refrain from parody and pastiche. Breaking the conventions is breaking the status quo of the contemporary world. Most of these lines employ pastiche through mimicking E.E Cummings’ style with erratic lines, breaks and structures of which by their forms, establish the idea of the society being chaotic and fragmented. As revealed in sentences 1,15,16,18,21,22,24 and 28, the use of these techniques deepens the revelation of the society as fragmented, unbalanced and unjust. Furthermore, along with sentence 1, and being sprawling in nature, sentence 12 supports the idea of this fragmentation and fractured societies since this sentence is structured like a story told within a poem, thus employing intertextuality and grammar and syntax disruption where conjunctions and commas are often devoid. These are other sub-features of postmodernism to mock the aftereffects of modernity. As its support and as previously discussed, the “*spoon*” and the “*cymbidium*” in sentences 15 and 16 are two insignias of luxury, class, lifestyle and pride which are both linked to the more privileged individuals. Sentence 21, “*The date June 4, 1989 remember the Beijing Massacre and calls for, “Long Live the Students,”*” reiterate the specific details of how those in power suppress those who are weak. Without the idealized syntactic units, sentence 21 gives emphasis on “*June 4, 1989*”, “*Remember the Beijing Massacre,*” and “*Long live the students*” as these are being flushed to the right side and are found in separate lines. Sentence 22 which states, “*The way the world has of reversal of the power of absorption and the power of brutal repression (rewrite this later) scared teenagers with automatic weapons and (the) jagged edges are smoothed over to proffer a picture when rhetoric fills the news*” affirms the political repression in which those who have something to say against are often intimidated. The term “*jagged jeans*” is a satirical remark on how the government tries to iron out its image for its own benefit in order “to proffer” an image when news is often censored and strained and is always beneficial to those in authority. This statement is concluded with sentence 24, as discussed earlier, talks about the unchanged plight and unheard voices of the common people through this phrase, “*A man sings what he has been singing for 20 years.*” These sentences are not just structured out of nothing but are made out of the observation of the contemporary world, shapeless. Most of the formlessness features of this postmodernist poem rely on the use of pastiche as in the use of the style of the prominent writer E.E. Cummings. It has been noted that Cummings himself served as a volunteer for the Norton-Harjes Ambulance Service and was known to be an active pacifist, a person who strongly opposes war (“E.E. Cummings,”2018). Thus, with his form of writing, it can be deduced that Cummings wrote poems in erratic lines and breaks to present the world during the raging of the world war where no benefit is taken out from the aftermath of it but only chaos and destruction. Formlessness is a sign of the departure and deviation of what is known as conventions as it advocates the breaking of conventional format in poetry which is also a call for breaking the ruling social class and political conventions of that time and even today.

### Populism

The last postmodern feature which is evident in the text is populism which is established in sentences 8,14,17, and 25. Most of these sentences entice the reader or the audience to participate by asking them to



commonly share with the author or the narrator in supporting their quests for the rights and powers of the common people amidst their struggle with the privilege elite. Sentence 8 says, “*That’s what I was trying to tell you,*” which means the narrator has shared the same thing with others as part of the working class, compounded by in Sentence 14 “*Flatten the letter*” which is a direct call for everybody to flatten and review the “*letter*” which stands for the emancipation declaration document and Sentence 17, “*The other side of my head is your head*” which is an emphatic statement of telling the reader or audience that they share the same thing with what the narrator observed or felt. As concluded in Sentence 25, “*What have you been dreaming lately?*” it is presumed that this rhetoric question is not made for an answer but as a wake-up call for people not just to dream but to make this dream a reality, a full-fledged freedom and fairness. Spread throughout the entire four-page poem, the text calls the mass to be awakened from social and political conventions as well as advocates nihilism (destruction of the social system) while denying the established institution and authorities. These are the major concerns of populism being a postmodernist characteristic.

It is with all these four major postmodernist features that Kit Robinson’s “A Mental Finding” is a textuality that exemplifies, represents, banter on, mocks, laments and celebrates the socio-political issues of the contemporary world.

Based from the idealized syntactic units and the revealed postmodernist features, Table 2 presents the themes found in the poem, the corresponding sentences they are exposed and the equating macrocosmic socio-political issues in the world and in the Philippine context in particular.

**Table 2: Themes and Socio-Political Issues**

Themes	Sentences	Socio-Political Issues
Apathy, Indifference, Mortification, Satire and Mockery (11) Vs. Relativeness, Empathy, Hope and Urgency (8)	2,3,5,9,10,18,19,20,22,23, 24 8,17,21,25, 4,11,13,14	Plight of the Poor, Leadership Negligence and Political Denial Irresponsibility
Alienation, Chaos, Class Distinction and Fragmentation	1,6, 7,12,27,15,16,20, 26, 28	Fractured Societies, Multiple Ideologies Information Democracy and Media-Dependency

### Thematic Analysis

There are several themes retrieved from the text, but they are categorized accordingly in Table 2. The themes, listed for the thematic analysis, are not solely specific to the sentences listed but could also be found in other sentences.

#### Theme 1: *Apathy, Indifference, Mortification, Satire and Mockery vs. Relativeness, Empathy, Hope and Urgency*

As revealed in the poem, apathy, indifference and mortification are induced all throughout the poem particularly in the sentences found listed in the table above. These themes are mostly revealed through postmodernist features such as *iconoclasm*, *groundlessness* and *formlessness*. Sentence 2 mentions on the backward resuscitation, 5 on the reversal of the past, 9 about the missing element, 10 on the draining of the light, 18 about the misfit cap or hat, 19 on plans conceived but wavered, 20 on public toleration and mortification, 22 on the power reversal, and sentence 24 about the unheard voices. These idealized syntactic units reveal sense of apathy, indifference and mortification since these plainly talk about the mood of the generation where most of the people seem to have become used to what are currently happening in their surrounding making them insensitive, unenthusiastic and disinterested especially in sentence 24 that says, “*A man sings what he has been singing for 20 years.*” This monotonous unheard voice of those unprivileged is deduced to be the *plight of those marginalized*. What could be the thing the

Filipino have been singing for several years? It is poverty. This remains the number one social issue in the Philippines and its roots can be traced back from the unemployment and underemployment rate in the Philippines. As cited in *Trading Economics*, there is a rise in unemployment in the last quarter of 2018, 5.1 percent. This is translated into 2 million jobless individuals (“Philippines Unemployment Rate,” 2018). An average of 8.38 percent from 1994 to 2018 is quite a number to ponder. This has become the same voice of the Filipino for at least 24 years. Flynn (2014) mentioned that the band, like Murakami, seems to have captured the mood of a generation, which is one of apathy, loneliness and a wish to escape with their lyrics, and has captured the mood of postmodernity, one of apathy, isolation and a wish to escape, sense of apathy is a theme in postmodernity.

In relation to the abovementioned themes, satire and mockery can also be found in the text as exemplified in Sentences 3,20,22,23 and 26 which are actually related to the unchanging plight of the poor and the marginalized as discussed earlier. For example, sentence 22, “*The way the world has of reversal of the power of absorption and the power of brutal repression (rewrite this later) scared teenagers with automatic weapons and (the) jagged edges are smoothed over to proffer a picture when rhetoric fills the news,*” reflects the simple mockery of the common people which is a common sight every time there are protests made by the Filipino. There are numerous numbers of political protests done, some of these are bloody. Remember the 1987 Mendiola Massacre, 2004 Hacienda Luisita Massacre, 2016 Kidapawan protest and 2016 US Embassy Protest (“Look Back”, 2018). Political protest and demonstrations have become another usual sight in the Philippines for the Filipino to speak for their plight. The “*jagged jeans are smoothed*” happens when there are state-sponsored fake news (“What are the political issues,” n.d.) that would try to cover ill incidents and to herald those beneficial to them which is another form of mockery and mortification. This is an action of *leadership negligence and political irresponsibility*.

This is compounded with sentence 20, “*The president never explicitly authorizes covert action but signals his approval by means of a mental finding and the public never officially acknowledges this betrayal but indicates its mortification by way of a spiritual loss as the person never actually notices the repetitious layering of experience but circles the planet with a red pencil to convey "error."*” It is noted that a leader often does commendable activities in public but is actually doing something privately, or what is term as under the table motive. This happens when a leader utilizes the funds of the public in initiating public programs, but their real intention is contested. Questions arise as to “Are they really doing it for the benefit of the masses or just for public display and advertisement of themselves especially during election period?” Construction of roads, infrastructures and others seem too abrupt during election time. Covert actions are made by political leaders who as much as possible, when revealed in the public, tend to deny as long as they could. Recently, there were several leaders who were convicted of crimes, to mention the well-known PDAF scam or the so-called Pork Barrel Scam. Some were convicted, others were acquitted. Nevertheless, it says that corruption is still a recipe in Philippine context. Common as it is, political leaders have become so rhetoric during the campaign period. They often embellish their speeches with words enough to convince the commoners to vote for them. As what the Filipino term, “*Epa!*” tells, most political candidates place their political names or political colors to any means they can think of to sell their names to the public just to make sure that they will make it.

Political denial and irresponsibility can also be associated with previous administration’s SAF44 or Mamasapano clash and current administration’s war on drug. Just recently, even if the top layer has asked the Supreme Court to order the indictment of the former President Benigno “Noynoy” Aquino for reckless imprudence resulting in multiple homicide of the SAF 44 (“SolGen asks SC,” 2018), the former president has highly denied involvement (Bacungan, 2017). On the same end, it is noted in Reyes (2016) argued that Duterte’s state power on war on drugs is exercised through the body in a spectacle of violence and humiliation stating that Duterte has politicized life through the so-called state prosecution which one

way or another, he admits and at the same time denies. These two socio-political issues add Filipinos' skepticism on politics (as revealed in sentence 6 'I doubt it.')

Yet, it is not always about the government; mortification and mockery are also for those who made demise out of their own reckless decisions. These are common sights in the Philippine context. Filipino citizens are conscious about their conditions but are easily convinced when politicians promise them greener future as they received election funds as bribe for their votes for politician's benefits. As cited in J-PAL, a global research center, in an article "Measuring Vote-Selling: Field Evidence from the Philippines", Hicken, A. et al (2015) mentioned that vote-buying and vote-selling remain pervasive in many developing countries including the Philippines. This can never be solve if there is still a "party chairman" who makes election period a living as revealed in sentence 23, "*The world picture source has fashioned another banter and the forgotten palaver of indigents creases the air as lines roll down the cathode ray cheek of the party chairman who pictures a less complicated version of this unwitting career like those in the weather station, the golf cart and the maze.*" Rappler, in an article, also cited that there is a hierarchy of vote buying and this is often participated by those individuals who are called "leaders". This is a clear indication of the indirect connection between the mortification of the public to the government which was actually caused by the former's own illogical decision. Public mortification is related to the never-ending satire and mockery towards the administration which is also a satire and mockery of their own's unending quest to escape from crippling issues. These are revealed in sentences 8, 17, 21, 25, 4, 11, 13 and 14 on their relativeness, empathy, hope and urgency to evade from these persistent issues. Specifically, sentence 1, "*These heady plans chase sound into a bush,*" and sentence 14, "*Flatten the letter!*" employ iconoclasm and populism which supports the themes relativeness, hope and urgency. "Bush" represents something not of the highest quality or sophistication which could be associated with the marginalized class and that "letter", as discussed earlier, represents the emancipation declaration, the constitution or any laws and policies of which the narrator tries to make a call towards the public in order to review its merits for the greater public. Sense of urgency is revealed in this sentence. Another article in *Rappler* mentions about the support for a federal system of government which is highest in Mindanao and in Muslims regions which are commonly labelled marginalized. Though not the majority, the support of this shift to federal government are more pronounced in Mindanao, with +18 points, while least pronounced in Metro Manila, with -19 points ("June 2018 Nationwide," 2016) which clearly states how people in Mindanao want to federal government to bring change from the neglect brought by the central government.

Furthermore, the tedious passing of Bangsamoro Organic Law is a concrete example of how marginalized people call quest for something they think beneficial. It underwent proposal and deliberation in 16<sup>th</sup> congress but failed to pass into law though was ratified in succeeding congress ("Duterte signs,"2018). It has been noted that this BOL traces from the 2014 peace agreement signed by the government and the Moro Islamic Liberation Front and is a result of decades-long peace talks, institutionalizes provisions of the Comprehensive Agreement on Bangsamoro (ibid.) which is four years in the making.

### **Theme 2: Alienation, Chaos, Class Distinction and Fragmentation**

With regard to the themes on alienation, chaos, class distinction and fragmentation, sentences 1,6, 7,12,27,15,16,26, 28 revealed socio-political issues such as *fractured societies multiple ideologies, and information democracy and media-dependency*. The Philippines is indeed a *fractured society* especially on the issue about charter change, a shift to federal government. Only those who are not living in Metro Manila have strongly supported the shift in the government, but those who are enjoying the benefits of the central government, strongly disagree on this matter, though there are some 23 percent in NCR who back on this change ("June 2018 Nationwide," 2016). As discussed earlier, *fractured societies* are vivacious in the Philippine context seen through the divided ideologies and belief as to Martial Law Declaration and Extension, Build3 Project, TRAIN Law, War on Drugs, and Federalism.

On the same end, class distinction, alienation and skepticism are clear in sentences 1, 6, 15 and 16. As previously discussed, sentences 5 and 6 made mention on “*spoon*” and “*cymbidium*” which are symbols of luxury, pride and class. As to its implication to the Philippine setting, the administration’s ‘Build, Build, Build Project’ comes into picture. This ambitious mega-wide plan is to bring the Philippines into its “Golden Age of Infrastructure” raises question as to “Who really stands to gain (and lose) from it”. Cruz (2017) laid down possible beneficiaries of this program which may also support the idea found in sentences 20 on *leadership negligence* and *political irresponsibility*. Driven by its positive purpose as it can be, it can never be taken aside that the program will still greatly affect the marginalized and unprivileged individual. It will be the foreign lenders, the powerful elites and oligarchs who will definitely and greatly benefit from the program. Cruz (2017) reiterates the social and economic gains the foreign lenders such as Japan and China can get from the Philippines since they just don’t do it for debt’s interest but also the profit they can get as the prime provider of the infrastructure materials as well as to further their business interests. In addition, the PPP (Public-Private Partnerships) will also stand to benefit from this economic venture. The financings made by San Miguel Corporation, Manny V. Pangilinan and Ayala Corporation as powerful oligarchs in the Philippines would give them opportunity to further their self-interests and business embarkation. Jeffrey Winters (as cited in “Beyond Oligarchy,”2014) argues that because of its wealth, oligarchy has always been and continues to be a dominant factor of economic and political life.

This question puts Filipino citizen into a state of alienation and skepticism towards the government (*in conjunction with sentence 6, ‘I doubt it’*) especially in the advent of the TRAIN (Tax Reform and Inclusion Law) that greatly affects 86 percent of PH citizen. With this law, the Department of Finance projects 786 billion in revenues from this tax reform to support the 8-trillion infrastructure program (“TRAIN explained,” 2018). There is an 83.6 percent disapproval among the Filipinos on this matter (“Majority not in favor,” 2017) which means that there is still a great number of Filipinos who do not agree on this, but the administration has still pushed it for the needed revenues of this trillion peso-project.

Apart from that, *information democracy* and *media-dependency* are vibrant through fake news. Philippines, being part of the Southeast Asian nations, has been alarmed by the politician’s eager uptake on cultural memes and means to dismiss various allegations of state-sanctioned violence as observed from drug-related killings in the abuses against minority groups (“The Fake News,”2017). The Thank Southeast Asian countries rank uniformly low on the World Press Freedom Index (*ibid.*) where Philippines comes second after Indonesia, being 127<sup>th</sup> making the Philippines one of the countries where fake news is a trend. This does not only baffle the Philippines but also makes them alienated of their own homeland as to whom and what to believe.

With all the themes mentioned above and their implications on socio-political issues happening in the Philippines, Kit Robinson’s “A Mental Finding” is a postmodernist textuality that reveals socio-political issues in the society.

## V. Findings and Conclusion

The findings revealed that *A Mental Finding’s* twenty-eight idealized syntactic units employ postmodernist characteristics of poetry, e.g., *iconoclasm*, *groundlessness*, *formlessness* and *populism* that entail socio-political issues, e.g. *plight of the poor*, *leadership negligence* and *political denial and irresponsibility*; and *fractured societies*, *multiple ideologies*, *information democracy* and *media-dependency* concurrent to the world and the Philippines. As proven by analytical, verbal data, it is concluded that Kit Robinson’s “A Mental Finding” employs postmodernist characteristics of poetry to reveal the socio-political issues co-occurring in the modern society and in the Philippines. With this investigation, it is recommended that further studies be done on postmodernist texts written by Filipino

authors for it to be more contextualized thus promoting public participation and awareness on the pressing issues in the Philippines in particular.

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