

The Socially Constructed Stigma: Women as Lesser People, A Literary Research

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Abstract: *This literary research framed a comparative study between the stories "Footnote to Youth" by Jose Garcia Villa and "The Wedding Dance" by Amador Daguio, which aimed to determine how the female characters are portrayed in the different scenarios of both stories, specifically, focused on the different portrayal and treatment they have experienced on their marital status. The lens of the feminist approach was used to scrutinize and go beyond the true meaning of what they have in each story. Both stories showed how male characters receive special treatment from society and how women, especially in marriage, receive inequalities. Based on the findings, women can show others their weaknesses and strengths. Hence, even today, the culture of Filipinos' perceptions of their children when they are getting married has not changed. It is still an embedded issue that when the family's daughter decides to be married, parents are overprotective and often disagree. While, for the son, it was receiving favor. Furthermore, when a couple cannot bear and produce offspring, women get the most blame and are often deemed incapable, and men are spared. Upon consideration, in a society that is dominated and controlled by men, women are still receiving discrimination and stereotypes.*

Keywords: women; stereotypes; literary; criticism; feminism

1. SECTION

1.1 Introduction

Literature may be thought of as the basis of a country. It acts as the basis for the written narrative to prevent it from becoming dematerialized. In the same way, a country cannot exist without its history and its people's environment. It is the birthplace of customs and culture. It reflects the past and relates a tale that looks back to where our culture's beginnings were.

By doing so, People may thoroughly understand people and their World.

Azurin (2023) states, "Literature communicates people's thoughts toward society, the government, his surroundings, his fellowmen, and his Divine Creator." A person's sentiments can be expressed through love, grief, happiness, hatred, wrath, sympathy, contempt, or revenge.

Furthermore, literature is one means to express one's spirit. People may easily express their sentiments and emotions via literature. Because literature is the tale of man's varied emotions, such as sadness, love, sorrow, and happiness, it may reach others along the path to learn about the things they want to express in writing. Communicating one concept and altering views into something new will be simple. The fantastic thing about writing is that people can have the capacity to make the unthinkable conceivable. (Azurin, 2023)

Similarly, in Cruz (2018), the author emphasized that Philippine literature has weathered the test of time and has changed over the centuries.

Different genres emerged with each passing period, and these literary works stemmed from various places, expressing their culture, society, and way of life. Because other humans write it, literature may elicit strong emotions in

a person or group of people who read it. This is a tool for Filipino readers who appreciate and are proud of their origin, history, culture, and culture. The Importance of Filipino Literature Literacy benefits all Filipinos. (Cruz, 2018)

Literature helps people travel back in time and learn about life on Earth from those before them. People can have a deeper grasp of cultures and appreciate them more. People may know from the ways history is documented, such as manuscripts and oral history.

Philippine literature thrived during the Spanish period (19th century) and the first part of the 20th century. Poetry and metrical romances, prose, plays, religious dramas, and secular dramas are among the genres represented in Philippine literature. (Cruz, 2018)

In addition to oral traditions and folklore to modern literary works written in English or Filipino, Philippine literature is a rich and diverse corpus of literary works that spans various genres and styles. The colonial past of the Philippines and its cultural exchanges with numerous neighboring nations are reflected in the history of Philippine literature. The difficulties of a people that have been molded by centuries of colonization and globalization are embodied in Philippine literature, which Guillermo (2015) claims is a product of both local and global influences. (Sar, 2020)

The researcher scrutinized two literary pieces written by Filipino authors through the lens of Philippine literature. First is the "Footnote to Youth" by Jose Garcia Villa. The story talks about young people talking to their elders about their wishes and seeking permission and direction. This tradition is also under attack because everyone wants to follow their desires, which is valid for both Dodong and Blas.

The story's core theme is about the thrills of youth. Dodong, Teang, Tona, and Blas are all enthralled by such admiration and pushed by youthful vigor. They are unconcerned about the severe side of life, believing that marriage is all about finding and playing. The truth is that people often lack the wisdom and patience to think deeply about their decisions while young. Such haste frequently results in regrets that people must live with for the rest of their lives. In conclusion, the most important lesson is to be patient and ponder our decisions before making life-altering or long-term decisions such as marriage.

The second story is the "Wedding Dance" by Amador Daguio. The husband and wife in the short story "The Wedding Dance" had been wed for seven years. Despite being in love with his first wife, Awiyao feels compelled to remarry to have children with his second wife; otherwise, he will face shame from his tribe if he doesn't have a son to carry on his name. Awiyao knows Lumnay is distressed, so he checks on her at his and Lumnay's home during their second marriage wedding feast. Awiyao personally invites Lumnay to participate in the tribe's traditional wedding dance because he believes that will ease her grief. Lumnay was at his wedding, but she left. Because she could not have children, she could not take the thought of her husband divorcing her and marrying someone else.

1.2 Guide Questions

The researcher aims to answer the following questions:

- 1.1.1 How do women are portrayed in both literary texts?
- 1.1.2 How do women are being treated in the literary texts?
- 1.1.3 What are the different stereotypes against women are being shown?

2. METHODOLOGY

The researcher utilized the feminist approach in Literary Criticism to scrutinize the two literary pieces titled Footnote to Youth and Wedding Dance. Wherein Feminist literary criticism allows us to see literature in new ways. Feminist literary theory comes in a variety of forms. Some theorists investigate how language and symbols are utilized and how that language and usage of symbols are "gendered."

Others point out that men and women write differently and look at how the author's gender influences how literature is written. In addition, Feminist criticism focuses on how women and relationships between men and women are portrayed in literature. Bringing attention to how women have been excluded and denied a voice in much canonical literature and how literature reflects society's dominant ideological assumptions about gender and power. (Chakravorty, 2023)

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Portrayal on Women

The fact that Dodong wished to have a sister to have someone who would help his mother and not a brother to do

the house chores represents that women are portrayed as saying that the role of a girl or women is only meant to do the housework. This is evident in the lifted line from the text:

"He wished as he looked at her that he had a sister who could help his mother with the housework."

In the Philippines, women are viewed as would-be housewives and must serve their husbands. Women are always expected to do most household chores and should only stay home. Filipina daughters are always deemed to help their parents, especially their mother, in working in their home.

In addition, gender stereotypes, according to the social role theory, result from the unequal distribution of men and women in social roles at work and home (Eagly, 1987, 1997; Koenig and Eagly, 2014). A gendered division of labor has existed for a long time in both foraging and more socioeconomically advanced societies (Wood and Eagly, 2012). Women have traditionally handled most household chores and served as the primary caregivers.

In ancient times, women had no right to vote and education. They are stereotyped as servants to their husbands and provide care for children. In addition, women are expected to become mothers and to bear a child. This is evident from the lifted line from the Wedding Dance:

"You remember how angry you were once when you came home from your work on the terrace because I butchered one of our pigs without your permission? I did it to appease Kabunyan, because, like you, I wanted to have a child. But what could I do?"

Lumnay, in this line, is disappointed because her husband Awiyao disregards her effort to make their wish to have a child possible. Still, it turns out that Awiyao becomes angry as he does not allow butchering one of his pigs even if she was his wife.

Women sometimes get less property and rights, especially if they are underdogs to their husbands. Since most of the heads of the family are men, they become authoritarian to their wives, specifically when they cannot produce their offspring.

Hence, some housewives are abused by their husbands, especially when they cannot bear children and fulfill their husbands' needs.

On the one hand, women are also viewed as weak, especially when expressing their emotions. They are being called dramatic, especially when they cry. This is represented on the line lifted from Footnote to Youth:

"He began to wonder madly if the process of childbirth was really painful. Some women, when they gave birth, did not cry."

Dodong compared his wife to others because she cried when she gave birth to their child, Blas. In line with this, Teang was considered weak by her husband and was stripped

of the freedom to express her painful experience of giving birth.

Treatment on Women

Sometimes, during family decisions, the mother has less to say and mostly agrees only with their husband. This is evident in the lifted line from Footnote to Youth:

"Dodong said while his mother was out that he was going to marry Teang."

The mother was disregarded by her son. Dodong did not consider her about the big decision he wanted to make: to get married. Here, it shows that the woman in one home is powerless because she does not have the opportunity to give her opinions on the lives of her children.

As a result, men are perceived as more agentic than women, taking charge and exercising control, whereas women are perceived as more communal than men, being sensitive to others and fostering relationships (e.g., Broverman et al., 1972; Eagly and Steffen, 1984). Bakan (1966) initially established these two ideas as the primary drivers of behavior in people.

The treatment of women was also shown in the study The Wedding Dance through the lifted line:

Look at me," she cried. "Look at my body. Then it was full of promise. It could dance; it could work fast in the fields; it could climb the mountains fast. Even now it is firm and full. But, Awiyao, I am useless. I must die."

Lumnay was seen as less person because of not being capable of bearing a child, as she was begging her husband to stay by her side and their unwritten rule should not force him that if a man and woman in their tribe do not have the chance to be pregnant, then a man should marry another woman. She was capable of anything; it is just that she was being seen as the problem why they did not get any child, and that is why Awiyao decided to leave her.

When women are incapable of bearing a child, their husbands are most likely to look for other women or worse, they will look for their mistress—leaving their wives for other families.

Moreover, wives whose husbands leave tend to accept the situation and sometimes assume the blame on themselves. This was also shown in the story of the Wedding Dance:

"I will pray that Kabunyan will bless you and Madulimay."

When Lumnay is hopeless in convincing her husband to stay, she entrusts her husband to Madulimay. This only means that even if it breaks her heart, Lumnay still chooses to let go and sees the possibility that it will destroy their marriage. Sometimes, the greatest enemy is our society

itself because it dictates and influences us, which could lead to our relationship to fail.

The couple's expectations for one another and the marriage will determine how well they learn to adjust to married life. When passionate or irrational expectations are not met, disillusionment is frequently experienced. However, it is essential to have reasonable expectations going into marriage.

On the other hand, when women are being divorced or annulled, their children will stay with them and need to provide for their family. When women marry at a young age, they sometimes regret their decision, especially when the marriage fails. This was also shown in the story of The Footnote to Youth:

"Teang did not complain, but the bearing of children told on her. "

"Yet, she wished she had not married."

The female character, Taeang, influences their marriage by regretting the decision she made to marry at a young age, which reflects on her many children and the never-ending responsibilities she needs to fulfill every day.

While non-working women relied on their parents to meet their fundamental necessities, working women's salaries were their sole source of income. For women who had child custody, the issue was considerably worse. (Mattoo et al., 2017)

Teenagers who get early pregnancy are more inclined to go through poverty, housing instability, and reliance on social services. Teenage pregnancy follows an interrelated pattern, with pregnant teens being the offspring of young moms struggling with social, economic, academic health, and career issues.

4. CONCLUSIONS

Based on the analysis findings, the role of women in both stories, Footnote to Youth and The Wedding Dance, showed inequality.

The story Footnote to Youth focuses on the female character's dialogues—the mother of Dodong and his wife, Teang—was weak and degraded. It showed how men are highly favored, especially when the father does not disagree with the son's decision.

Whereas, in the story of The Wedding Dance, the female character, Lumnay, is weak and treated unequally because their tribe believes that when a woman cannot produce a child, it means that she is useless, and other people might interfere in their decisions about her life, specifically their marriage. Awiyao left her because, for a long time, they had wanted to have a child, but their wish did not come true. Therefore, he decides to marry another woman even if it is against his will, but due to the influence of their tribe, he cannot do anything but obey.

The comparison between the two stories is that the female characters are seen as lesser people, as they cannot

make decisions for themselves, while the male characters dominate them and are the ones who decide for them.

In conclusion, providing literary research on Philippine Literature opens the door to the past, where the reader and researcher can scrutinize the text and not only rely on surface reading. Being inclined to literature can make the readers more critical in understanding people. For this reason, literature research must also be taught to neophyte researchers to be able to dwell on the grandeur of the arts.

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