

# Women and Cultural Identity in Select Philippine Literature in English Short Stories: A Feminist-Structuralist Study

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**Abstract**— This qualitative study employed a structuralist-feminist critical lens to analyze five (5) Philippine short stories in English written by Filipino authors— “Footnote to Youth” by Jose Garcia Villa, “How my Brother Leon Brought Home a Wife” by Manuel Arguilla, “Magnificence” by Estrella Alfon, “The Wedding Dance” by Amador Daguio, and “Dead Stars” by Paz Marquez Benitez to develop a literary toolkit validated by the experts that will aid readers and teachers in understanding and using literature from these perspectives. A literary analysis was typically performed to understand the specific ideas, word choices, or writing structures an author has made use of in his works. In the conduct of the analysis, several objectives which are of paramount importance when performing a feminist criticism were considered. In the analysis performed, the following portrayals and phenomena were observed: (1) women as wives, (2) women as doers of household chores, (3) women as subjects of objectification and sexualization, (4) women as ‘others’, and women as strong individuals. The cultural identities of Filipinos as portrayed are the key elements investigated in this study in the lens of structuralism. Specifically, this study focused on viewing culture as structure. This study revealed certain cultural identities unique among Filipinos: adherence to tradition and social expectations, respect for elders and authority, importance of family, and connection to nature. The study concludes that Philippine literature in English short stories served as a platform for negotiating female identity and cultural heritage, offering both reinforcement and subversion of patriarchal structures. The document underscored the enduring challenges of gender representation in literature while celebrating stories that advocated for equality and empowerment, and the themes illustrated the interconnection of Filipino culture, traditions, and social structures.

**Keywords**— Women, Cultural Identity, Philippine Literature, Short Stories, Feminist Structuralist.

## INTRODUCTION

The origin of Philippine literature in English can be traced back to the American Colonial Period (Lumbera & Lumbera, 1997). With the intent of pacifying the people after introducing them to the American ideals of “universality, practicality, and democracy,” the Americans have institutionalized the use of English as the language of instruction. As Filipinos were already freed from religious persecution and censorship of the Spanish colonizers, this period also witnessed the founding of many education institutions, like the Philippine Normal School, and journalistic publications such as the Philippine Free Press that encouraged the use and spread of the English language. In as early as ten years since, Filipinos were

already writing prose and poetry in English (De Ungria, 2024).

However, it was not until the 1930s and 1940s that Philippine literature in English, along with its writers, flourished on its own. This period in Philippine literary history saw the rise of some of the most memorable authors whose works are being read until the present like Jose Garcia Villa, Angela Manalang Gloria, Manuel Arguilla, and Carlos Bulosan, to name a few (De Ungria, 2024). With it being considered a secondary language in the Philippines (Kirkpatrick & Deterding, 2011) as cited in Dela Cruz (2022) and being continually used in media, education, business, Philippine literature in English continued to thrive in the present.

Considering these concerns, this study attempted to create a toolkit which shall equip teachers with skills to competently teach literature in English. The use of feminist criticism attempted to describe the ways in which literature, in the context of the selections, at least, has demonstrated the patriarchal domination of the female bodies by taking into account the power relations embedded in the literary text (Guo, 2018). Meanwhile, structuralist criticism investigated into the underlying structures and/or patterns to arrive at conclusions about the literary text at hand as well as the system from which they have been derived (Poetry Foundation, 2024).

Women characters in Philippine literature often negotiated their identity during patriarchal traditions, familial expectations, and national ideologies. Stories such as those by writers like Kerima Polotan, Gilda Cordero-Fernando, and Edith Tiempo explored women's struggles for autonomy, voice, and self-definition. Through feminist criticism, these stories can be unpacked to show how female characters resisted or internalized gender roles imposed upon them. Structuralism, on the other hand, helped to uncover the narrative techniques and cultural codes—such as binaries of male/female, strong/weak, tradition/modernity—that shaped how these women are portrayed. This dual lens helped to expose how literary structures either perpetuated or dismantled stereotypical images of women.

Therefore, a feminist-structuralist study of women and cultural identity in Philippine short stories written in English offered valuable insights into the gendered dimensions of Filipino cultural life. These narratives not only articulated the struggles and resilience of women but also challenged the cultural and literary structures that defined them. Through such an analysis, literature became an essential tool for promoting gender awareness, cultural understanding, and ultimately, inclusive development.

This study aimed to analyze five select short stories in Philippine Literature in English namely: Footnote to the Youth by Jose Garcia Villa, Wedding Dance by Amador T. Daguio, Dead Stars by Paz Marquez Benitez, How My Brother Brought Home a Wife by

Manuel E. Arguilla and Magnificence by Estrella Alfon, using structuralist- feminist with an end view of developing a learning toolkit.

Specifically, it sought answers to the following questions:

1. How are women portrayed in the five (5) select stories when viewed from the feminist literary perspective?
2. What Filipino cultural identities are revealed in the five (5) select stories when viewed from the structuralist literary perspectives?
3. What structuralist-feminist learning toolkit can be developed?

These stories were viewed from the structuralist and feminist literary theories, considering the specific aspects of these stories that comprehensively informed the analyses.

The data gleaned from this literary analysis were then be utilized as bases for crafting a literary criticism toolkit that would assist teachers and learners alike in understanding these five select short stories or any other

This study aimed to develop a toolkit anchored on the structuralist and feminist literary analyses of five (5) select Philippine short stories in English. Furthermore, this would serve as a guide for teachers and students in reading and understanding literary texts.

## 2. METHODOLOGY

As this is particularly interested in performing a critical analysis of literary texts, the research approach most appropriate for this study is the qualitative approach. Qualitative research is an approach to research that interrogates the quality of relationships, activities, situations, etc. Typically, studies that are qualitative in nature collect data in the form of transcripts, field notes, textbook passages, or anything else that can communicate actual words and action verbalized or performed by people (Fraenkel, Wallen, & Hyun, 2022).

More specifically, in this study, a literary analysis was performed. More than a summary of a literary work, a literary analysis is an act of argumentation that offered

an interpretation, judgment, or critical evaluation of the work. This may be accompanied by a probing into the literary devices, lexical choices, stylistic decisions, writing structures, etc. employed by the author and found in the work. A literary analysis is typically performed to understand the specific ideas, word choices, or writing structures an author has made use of in his work or works (Germann Community College, 2024).

### **Data Sources**

Five (5) select short stories written in English and by Filipino authors were used for this study. These literary selections include the following: “Footnote to Youth” by Jose Garcia Villa, “How my Brother Leon Brought Home a Wife” by Manuel Arguilla, “Magnificence” by Estrella Alfon, “The Wedding Dance” by Amador Daguio, and “Dead Stars” by Paz Marquez Benitez.

### **Data Analysis Procedure**

To arrive at the answers to the research questions, two data analysis procedures were utilized, textual analysis and thematic analysis.

To produce a thorough interpretation of the literary selections individually, textual analysis was employed. Falling under qualitative analysis that focused on the fundamental ideological and cultural assumptions of a text, textual analysis, according to (Smith, 2017) is the method researchers make use of to probe into the messages as they appeared through varied mediums including documents, or as in the case of this research, literature.

The primary objective of textual analysis was not to unearth the absolute meaning of a text but to offer alternative interpretations of the examined material (Arya, 2020).

Furthermore, thematic analysis was used in analyzing the parallel phenomena and themes observable in the five literary selections chosen for this study. Thematic analysis is defined as the method of analysis whereby patterns of meaning across a particular data set are systematically identified, organized, and offered insights. As a method of analysis, it allows for

researchers to observe and process collective or shared meanings and experiences (Braun & Clarke, 2012).

In performing a thematic analysis, Braun and Clarke (2012) provide six phases. Chronologically, these include: (1) familiarizing the data, (2) generating initial codes, (3) searching for themes, (4) reviewing potential themes, (5) defining and naming themes, and (6) producing the report.

### **Ethical Considerations**

In the conduct of this research, one ethical consideration was reflexivity. Reflexivity pertained to a researcher’s examination of his own systems of subjectivities and biases, and how carefully and critically accounting how these can be influential in the trajectory the research process moved toward (Jamieson, Govaart, & Pownall, 2023).

Acknowledging the inherent subjective nature of this study, being grounded on literary and critical perspectives, the researcher’s awareness of her own biases and belief systems was crucial throughout the entire research process, particularly in the offering of literary interpretations of the literary texts. In this regard, there may be many forms of reflexivity that may arise from this study such as theoretical, methodological, cultural, social, political, subjective, etc.

## **3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

### **Women Portrayal as Viewed Under a Feminist Literary Perspectives of the Select Texts**

This study applied feminist literary criticism to analyze five select literary texts. The texts chosen for the analysis included Footnote to Youth by Jose Garcia Villa, The Wedding Dance by Amador Daguio, Dead Stars by Paz Marquez Benitez, How My Brother Leon Brought Home a Wife by Manuel Arguilla, and Magnificence by Estrella Alfon.

In the analysis performed, the following portrayals and phenomena were observed: (1) women as wives, (2) women as doers of household chores, (3) women as subjects of objectification and sexualization, (4) women as ‘others’, and (4) women as strong individuals.

*Table 1. Women as Wives*

Short Story	Character	Description
<b>Footnote to Youth</b>	Teang	Obedient, supportive, loving, dutiful, emotional restraint, loyal, committed, resilient
<b>Wedding Dance</b>	Lumnay	Assertive, loving, faithful, devoted, heartbroken, traditional, lonely
<b>Wedding Dance</b>	Madulimay	Young, hopeful, accepting, fertile, desirable, obedient
<b>Dead Stars</b>	Esperanza	Submissive, restrained, indicative, practical, reserved, loyal, committed, dignified, patient, dutiful
<b>How My Brother Leon Brought Home a Wife</b>	Maria	Loving, graceful, adaptable, devoted, respectful
<b>Magnificence</b>	Mother	Protective, decisive, firm, courageous, assertive, commanding

Table 1. Discussed woman as a wives. In the analysis performed, it was observed that among the five stories, women characters, both main and minor, wives were a staple. While women portrayed as wives is not a particularly curious phenomenon in all of literature, it is interesting to note that these female characters were only depicted as wives and/or mothers. Outside these roles, they had no other identities.

Teang, in *Footnote to Youth* by José Garcia Villa, was portrayed as a gentle, obedient, and quietly supportive wife. She was loving and dutiful, accepting her role in the household and standing by Dodong even as the weight of early marriage begun to show. Though she didn't openly voice her regrets, Teang was shown to be thoughtful and reflective, occasionally wondering what her life might had been like if she had married someone else. Teang's character represented the realities of youthful decisions, and how love, when rushed, can turn into a life of silent compromise and unspoken longing.

Lumnay, as a wife in *Wedding Dance*, was portrayed as a deeply loving woman who genuinely cared for Awiyao and longed to remain with him despite the painful situation they faced. She remained devoted, staying loyal to him even after he decided to marry another woman, hoping to have a child. Her devotion was evident in how she treasured their marriage and the years they spent together, holding on to their memories with deep affection. Being a traditional woman, she valued their marriage and the cultural customs that had shaped their lives, even when those same customs led to her suffering. Deeply emotional,

her inner pain was palpable in her words and actions, and ultimately, she was left feeling lonely and abandoned as Awiyao walked away to be with someone else.

Madulimay, as portrayed in *Wedding Dance*, was a relatively quiet but significant character, symbolizing new beginnings and societal expectations. She could be described as young and hopeful, representing the future that Awiyao sought—particularly his hope for a child. As a wife, she was likely obedient and accepting, conforming to the cultural tradition of marrying a man who left his former wife due to childlessness. Though not much was revealed about her personality, Madulimay appeared to be respectful and reserved, especially in the way she stayed in the background during Awiyao's emotional conversation with Lumnay. She embodied the ideal woman in their tribal society—fertile, desirable, and compliant with tradition. While she may not yet share the deep bond that Lumnay had with Awiyao, Madulimay symbolized the role of a hopeful, traditional, and dutiful wife in the eyes of their culture.

Esperanza, in *Dead Stars* by Paz Marquez Benitez, was portrayed as a practical, reserved, and conventional wife. She was a woman who valued duty, stability, and social expectations over fleeting emotions. As a wife, she was loyal and committed, standing by Alfredo despite sensing his emotional distance. Esperanza was also strong-willed and dignified, maintaining her composure even when Alfredo's affections seemed to waver. She could be seen as emotionally distant, not given to display of

affection, but rather focused on fulfilling her role as a proper wife. Her patience and sense of propriety reflected the societal norms she upholds, making her a symbol of tradition and moral obligation. Despite the emotional undercurrents in her marriage, Esperanza remained steadfast, rational, and dutiful, embodying the image of a wife who chose responsibility over passion.

Maria, in *How My Brother Leon Brought Home a Wife* by Manuel Arguilla, was portrayed as a graceful, gentle, and loving wife. Coming from the city, she showed herself to be respectful, understanding, and adaptable as she met and interacted with Leon's rural family. Maria was also patient and considerate, showing no complaints or discomfort during their long and tiring journey to the province. She was warm-hearted and sincere, expressing her affection for Leon in quiet but meaningful ways. Despite the cultural differences between her city upbringing and her husband's provincial roots, Maria was open-minded,

humble, and willing to embrace her new life. Her actions and demeanor revealed her desire to be accepted and her readiness to adjust, making her a truly devoted, respectful, and thoughtful wife.

In *Magnificence* by Estrella Alfon, the mother was portrayed as a protective, strong, and decisive wife. When faced with the disturbing situation involving the man who tried to harm her daughter, she acted with calm authority and firm resolve, showcasing her courage and intelligence in handling a sensitive moment. As a wife, she was attentive and observant, not only fulfilling her domestic duties but also being deeply aware of her surroundings and the people in her home. She was nurturing and compassionate, but when needed, became assertive and commanding to ensure the safety of her family. Her composure, grace under pressure, and maternal instinct made her a figure of dignity and strength, showing that as a wife and mother, she balanced warmth with unwavering protection.

**Table 2. Women as Doers of Household Chores**

Story	Character	Description
<b>Footnote to Youth</b>	Teang	Cooking, washing clothes, cleaning the home, taking care of the children
<b>Wedding Dance</b>	Lumnay	Planting beans, cleaning jars, keeping a house clean, planting rice, pounding the rice
<b>Dead Stars</b>	Esperanza	The story did not directly describe the household chores Esperanza performed
<b>How My Brother Leon Brought Home a Wife</b>	Maria	The story focused more on Maria's character and how she adjusted to rural life rather than listing specific household chores
<b>Magnificence</b>	The mother	Watched over the children

In relation to the first theme, Table 2, shows women as doers of household chores. The stories chosen for this study not only had the tendency to portray women as wives but to also associate them with performing household chores. This is consistent with Dewi and Pratama's (2021) observation in Indonesian novels where mothers are typically portrayed to be doing majority of the household chores all the while receiving nonexistent help from male counterparts.

In *Footnote to Youth*, while the story did not explicitly list every household chore Teang performed, it was

implied through her role as a young wife and mother in a rural setting that she was responsible for many domestic duties. As a wife, Teang likely engaged in cooking meals, washing clothes, and cleaning the home to maintain a proper household for Dodong and their children. She was also involved in taking care of their children, which reflected her role as a nurturing and attentive mother. These everyday chores symbolized her silent dedication and the routine responsibilities that come with marrying young, showing how her life had become rooted in domestic work and care.

In *Wedding Dance* by Amador Daguio, Lumnay was depicted as a hardworking and responsible wife who diligently performed various household chores that reflected her commitment to her role. She spent her days planting beans and planting rice, contributing to the family's food supply and supporting their livelihood.

In *Dead Stars* by Paz Marquez Benitez, the story did not directly describe the household chores Esperanza performed.

In *How My Brother Leon Brought Home a Wife* by Manuel Arguilla, the story focused more on Maria's character and how she adjusted to rural life rather than listing specific household chores.

In *Magnificence* by Estrella Alfon, the mother was portrayed as a caring and attentive figure who was deeply involved in the well-being of her family. While the story focused more on her protective instincts than on daily routines, it could be inferred from the setting that she actively took part in various household chores.

**Table 3. Women as Objectified and Sexualized Beings**

Story	Character(s)	Description
<b>Footnote to Youth</b>	Teang	Young, longing, fantasy
<b>Wedding Dance</b>	Lumnay	The body was firm and full but she could not bear children, objectified in her ability (or inability) to bear children
<b>Wedding Dance</b>	Madulimay	Young and fertile and had the ability to bear children
<b>Dead Stars</b>	Esperanza	Object of duty
<b>Dead Stars</b>	Julia	"A woman past first bloom, light and clear of complexion, spare of arms and of breast... a woman distinctly not average"
<b>How My Brother Leon Brought Home a Wife</b>	Maria	Object of longing, pretty, graceful, modest, "She was fragrant like a morning when papayas are in bloom"
<b>Magnificence</b>	Mother	Objectified as the authority at home
<b>Magnificence</b>	Female Child	Abused... "The man's arms tightened around the little girl until she wriggled free, letting out a soft, breathless laugh. She looked up at him with a smile, her expression one of mild confusion, yet still innocent."

Table 3, discussed woman as objectified and sexualized beings. While truly objectionable, the objectification and sexualization of women is nothing novel in the literary landscape. Analyzing the stories involved in this study adds more literature to that claim. To put things into perspective, objectification, according to Susanti, et al., (2021) is defined as treating and/or seeing women as objects.

These phenomena—objectification and sexualization—are primarily evident in all five stories, in varying degrees, with some being more blatant than others.

To illustrate, in Jose Garcia Villa's *Footnote to Youth*, the objectification and sexualization of women were apparent in the case of Teang's character. Almost all

mention of Teang were laced with sexual innuendoes. For instance, when Dodong was coming home from the field and stopped by a body of water to bathe, he was described to have "He imagined wild, youthful dreams of himself and Teang, his girl... How much he desired her. She made him want to touch her, to hold her close..." Villa (1933).

While indirect, Dodong's daydream was easily deciphered as a sexual fantasy involving him and Teang. In this excerpt, the female character was reduced to a mere sexual object utilized by a male character to achieve sexual gratification, equating her attractiveness to a certain sexual value

In *Wedding Dance* by Amador Daguio, Lumnay was not overtly sexualized, but she could be seen as

objectified within the cultural expectations of marriage and womanhood in her community. Her worth as a wife was measured by her ability to bear children, reducing her identity to her reproductive capacity rather than her emotions, intelligence, or personal desires. In the text, Lumnay described her body as something that” was full of promise. It could dance; it could work quickly in the fields; it could climb the mountains with ease. Even now, it stands firm but I am useless” – Daguio (1940). Lumnay represented many women who were objectified by cultural traditions that saw them as vessels for childbirth rather than individuals with feelings and dreams

In contrast, in *Dead Stars* and *How My Brother Leon Brought Home a Wife*, the objectification and sexualization of women were less apparent compared to the other three stories. For example, in *Dead Stars*, Julia was complimented by Alfredo as pretty, a description which the character deflected because, perhaps, it seemed to her as a superficial way of describing a woman and may connote that Alfredo’s attraction to her was only physical and hence, superficial.

Similar with Julia was Esperanza, another character from *Dead Stars*, whose descriptions in the narration were hinting at possible sexualization and objectification. In the story, she was described as” a woman beyond her youthful prime, with a light, clear complexion and slender arms and chest.... a woman distinctly not average.” These descriptions of Esperanza, like that of Julia, were shallow and do not transcend beyond the physical appearance of the characters.

Moreover, the comparison of a female character to an object is also observed in another story *How My Brother Leon Brought Home a Wife* by Manuel E. Arguilla. The description of Maria literally reads: “She was fragrant like a morning when papayas are in bloom”. Clearly, the image of papayas in bloom was connotatively sexual and suggestive of women’s breasts. Maria was not overtly objectified or sexualized in the traditional sense. However, there were subtle elements in the story where she was viewed through a male perspective, which could suggest a degree of objectification in how she was judged based on her beauty and ability to adapt to provincial life.

The mother herself was not sexualized, but her role in the story challenged traditional gendered expectations of women as passive or weak in the face of danger. While Vicente, as a man, initially held power through his deception and grooming tactics, the mother reclaimed dominance when she realized what he had done. Her rage and swift punishment of Vicente subverted the notion that women should be submissive or forgiving. In a story where sexualization was a danger to the child, the mother represented the opposite force—a protector who refused to let her daughter be objectified. Her violent reaction ensured that Vicente was punished rather than excused, making her the embodiment of justice. The mother was not objectified or sexualized in the story, but she served as a powerful counterforce against the objectification and sexualization of the child. She was a symbol of maternal justice, strength, and protection, ensuring that Vicente’s predatory actions do not go unpunished.

**Table 4.** *Women as the ‘Others’*

Story	Character	Description
<b>Footnote to Youth</b>	Teang	Fear to be disliked; she “did not complain” and “did not tell Dodong this...” because she was “not wishing him to dislike her”
<b>Wedding Dance</b>	Lumnay	The female half in the two-part union, had to make the sacrifice of suffering for the failure to bring into fruition a child that would perpetuate their tribe
<b>Dead Stars</b>	Esperanza	Emotional and gendered othering
<b>Dead Stars</b>	Julia	Idealized Othering; Julia became a projection of Alfredo’s desires, not a real person. Temporal Othering; Julia existed largely in Alfredo’s past. Even when he met her again at the end, it’s clear that she was never what he imagined

<b>How My Brother Leon Brought Home a Wife</b>	Maria	An outsider trying to infiltrate the community of her husband. “I am afraid. He may not like me.”
<b>Magnificence</b>	Mother	Power and authority; she took on a role of active protector, distancing herself from the stereotype of the weak, forgiving woman. Moral superiority; the mother embodied righteousness and justice, placing her in direct opposition to Vicente, who represented corruption and evil. She “others” herself from conventional femininity, proving that maternal love could be both protective and powerful

The concept of othering has always been present in patriarchally loaded literatures. Othering, according to Chang (1998) as cited in Brons (2015), pertained to the construction and identification of an in-group and out-group in an unequal and imbalanced opposition by relegating inferiority or radical alienness to the outgroup. Vichiensing (2017) identified several ways in which the concept of othering can be observed. These comprise of exclusion and discrimination.

In the stories analyzed, there were several instances of ‘othering’. For example, in Footnote to Youth, Teang’s main motivation for suffering in silence despite being burdened and exhausted by the eternal chores of being a wife and mother was her fear of being disliked. She kept to herself her dissatisfaction in the kind of life she had. In fact, she “did not complain”, and “did not tell Dodong this...” because she was “not wishing him to dislike her”. The apparent fear to be disliked exemplified the concept of ‘othering’. Teang suffered in silence because she was aware that there were possible detrimental repercussions if she ever spoke up and complained.

Whereas the othering in Arguilla’s story happened to Maria who was an outsider trying to infiltrate the community of her husband, quite the opposite happened to Lumnay in Daguio’s Wedding Dance. When Lumnay possessed certain characteristics deemed desirable by the tribe, she was both desired by the men and envied by the women. Lumnay, in the story, was described as:

“And yet was she not the best dancer of the village? Did she not have the most lightness and grace? Could she not, alone among all women, dance like a bird tripping for grains on the ground, beautifully timed to

the beat of the gangsas? Did not the men praise her supple body, and the women envy the way she stretched her hands like the wings of the mountain eagle now and then as she danced...” Daguio (1940).

However, there was a huge shift in her position in the society. From someone so prized and “It was full of promise... it could dance... it could work swiftly in the fields... it could climb mountains with ease...”,

Othering, in the story Dead Stars, didn’t have to be racial or colonial — it can also be emotional, psychological, or gender-based, depending on how a character was framed or distanced by the narrator or protagonist.

This made Esperanza the “Other” to Julia — who represented romance, emotional freedom, and what Alfredo perceived as his “true” self.

Esperanza was considered also as gendered othering for she was confined to a traditional female role, and Alfredo didn’t really see her beyond it. She was not allowed the complexity that he gave himself or Julia. Her feelings about Alfredo’s wavering affections were never deeply explored — she was only seen through his perspective, which objectified and simplified her.

Julia was also othered in the story, though not in the same way as Esperanza. Instead of being diminished or dismissed, she was placed on a pedestal — turned into an ideal rather than seen as a real person. Alfredo projected his desires onto her; she became a symbol of freedom, passion, and the life he believed he had missed.

In the story of Magnificence by Estrella Alfon, othering was manifested in how the mother asserted

her authority and moral superiority, setting herself apart from both Vicente (the predator) and traditional gender expectations. Othering in this context referred to the way she was positioned as different from or in opposition to others, particularly in terms of power dynamics, gender roles, and morality.

Othering was manifested in the mother through power and authority. At the beginning, the mother seemed

passive, allowing Vicente into their home and trusting him with her children. However, the moment she recognized the danger, she immediately shifted into a position of dominance.

By taking on a role that was traditionally associated with male authority, she "others" herself from conventional femininity, proving that maternal love could be both protective and powerful.

*Table 5. Women as Strong Individuals*

Story	Character	Description
<b>Footnote to Youth</b>	Teang	Resilient, hard-working, had emotional strength
<b>Wedding Dance</b>	Lumnay	Resilient, independent, openhearted, defied cultural expectations
<b>Dead Stars</b>	Esperanza	Open-minded, emotionally resilient, moral strength
<b>Dead Stars</b>	Julia	Emotionally independent, clearly moved on from her emotional conflict
<b>How My Brother Leon Brought Home a Wife</b>	Maria	Adaptable, confident, emotionally strong
<b>Magnificence</b>	Mother	Protective, independent, brave, quick and firm in her decisions
<b>Magnificence</b>	Female child	Vulnerable, ability to seek safety in a moment of fear, her awareness

Table 5, discussed woman as strong individual. In the earlier discussions of female depictions in the five classic stories specially curated for this study, or even in most classic and canonical literary works, both foreign and Philippine, authors have always had a propensity to portray women as the oppressed, marginalized, and 'othered' parties. Additionally, according to Cer (2015), female characters are often portrayed with stereotypical identities and are typically given fewer qualities compared to their male counterparts, who are usually attributed with stronger values.

Commonly, too, women representations in literature are associated with certain qualities such as being passive, sentimental, dependent, obedient, etc. In a study by Aslan (2010), it was also observed that women represented through the characters are frequently depicted as violated, emotional, without identities, sexualized, etc. Interestingly, these qualities have all been observed with the female characters after probing into the five stories for this study.

In Footnote to Youth by Jose Garcia Villa, Teang was often portrayed as a victim of early marriage, but she also demonstrated strength in several ways. Her quiet endurance, sense of responsibility, and emotional depth showed that she was not weak rather, she was a strong individual who bore the hardships of marriage and motherhood with resilience. Teang showed strength in the story by enduring the hardships of young marriage. Even though she realized that marrying young had taken away her freedom and youth, she did not abandon her responsibilities as a wife and mother.

In Wedding Dance by Amador Daguio, Lumnay was a strong individual because she demonstrated emotional resilience, independence, and quiet defiance in the face of heartbreak and societal expectations. Even though she was abandoned by her husband, Awiyao, for not being able to bear children, she refused to see herself as weak or worthless. Instead, she asserted her strength through her actions, emotions, and final decision to walk away from the expectations placed

upon her. Despite her deep love for Awiyao, she did not beg him to stay. She expressed her pain but does not allow herself to be completely broken by his decision. Her ability to confront Awiyao directly, asking him why things must end this way, showed that she was not afraid to speak her emotions.

To exemplify, in *Dead Stars*, Esperanza, the girl Julia had a love triangle with Alfredo, demonstrated strength in her own way. For instance, despite the possibility of being left alone or humiliated, had her fiancé jilted her on or before the matrimonial ceremony, she confronted him, saying: “Why don't you speak openly before it's too late? You don't need to worry about me or what people will think,” and “If you want to take back your word, if you're tired of— why don't you just tell me you're tired of me??” Evidently, in these passages, the author highlighted how Esperanza had a mindset ahead of her own time as she was concerned more about the truth or the reality of the situation—Alfredo, being no longer in love with her— more than she was concerned or worried over her reputation, certainly something that was almost unheard of during their period when people cared so much about appearance and what other people had to say. Esperanza could be seen as a strong individual through her emotional resilience, moral strength, and quiet dignity.

On the other hand, Julia Salas could also be seen as a strong individual through her self-respect, emotional independence, and ability to move on.

Meanwhile, Maria in *How My Brother Leon Brought Home a Wife* was a strong individual, demonstrated through her adaptability, grace, and quiet confidence. Coming from the city, she entered a rural environment that was entirely new to her, yet she did not complain or showed discomfort. Instead, she embraced the customs and lifestyle of her husband's family with humility and respect. Her willingness to travel the long distance to the house without protest, and her kind interaction with Leon's younger brother and father, showed her emotional strength and openness.

Being the most modern of all the five stories in this selection, Estrella Alfon's *Magnificence* portrayed women in the strongest light possible. First and

foremost, it was only in this story from the five selections where the woman was depicted as someone who had a role outside being a wife.

However, perhaps, the most apparent depiction of strength is in the portrayal of women resisting against an abusive figure. This resistance was exemplified twice in the story, first by the child, and then by the mother.

Meanwhile, still in *Magnificence*, another female symbol of strength was found in the character of the mother. In the earlier discussion, she was presented to be a woman attributed a leadership position, a phenomenon that was not likely to happen before. Moreover, in the story, the mother was depicted to have stood up to a male abuser. In the grand scheme of things, this could be easily interpreted as woman standing up the patriarchy. Particularly in the story, the mother was described to have stood up to the man who was caught in the act of abusing the woman's daughter. Taking none of it, the mother was described to have:

“... raised her hand and slapped him full hard in the face. He retreated down one tread of the stairs with the force of the blow, but the mother followed him. With her other hand she slapped him on the other side of the face again. And so down the stairs they went, the man backwards, his face continually open to the force of the woman's slapping. Alternately she lifted her right hand and made him retreat before her until they reached the bottom landing.” Alfon (1960).

At the time of its publication, the depiction of women standing up to male abusers was not commonplace. To have depicted women not only standing up but also fighting back their abusers sent a strong feminist message among readers, that women should not be subject to abuse simply because they are perceived as weak. This is further emphasized by a certain passage in the story which shows the triumph of the woman against in the patriarchy. In the story, it was said that “He offered no resistance, no defense. In the face of her silence and the harshness of her words, he shrank back, retreating, until a sound like a whimper escaped his mouth.”

#### **4. SUMMARY, FINDING, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

##### **Summary**

The study aimed to analyze five (5) select short stories in English written by Filipino authors employing the structuralist-feminist critical lens. Additionally, it sought to develop a literary toolkit to aid readers or learners in understanding literature from these literary perspectives.

Specifically, this study sought answers to the following questions:

1. How are women portrayed in the five (5) select stories when viewed from the feminist literary criticism?
2. What Filipino cultural identities are revealed in the five (5) select stories when viewed from the structuralist literary criticism?
3. What structuralist-feminist learning toolkit can be developed?

To arrive with answers to these questions, two data analysis procedures were utilized, textual analysis and thematic analysis. The analysis revealed the interesting results for the three research questions.

The feminist reading of the five literary texts included the five themes. These themes reflected the different portrayals of women across different stories and different time periods. These themes included the following: (1) women as wives, (2) women as doers of household chores, (3) women as subjects of objectification and sexualization, (4) women as 'others', and women as 'strong' individuals. Meanwhile, a structuralist analysis of the same literary texts revealed the following themes. Using the structuralist theory, these themes showed the cultural values Filipinos are normally portrayed. The following were the themes found: (1) adherence to tradition and social expectations, (2) respect for elders and authority, (3) importance of family, and (4) connection to nature.

Developing a literary toolkit anchored on the structuralist and feminist perspectives needed to identify salient points. For the feminist criticism, this included the following steps: (1) analyzing gender roles and representations, (2) situating the work

according to its context and culture, (3) emphasizing the silencing or marginalization of women, (4) deconstructing the patriarchal ideology, and lastly, (5) focusing on the intersection of gender with race, class, and sexuality, etc. These steps provide a structure for approaching literature from the feminist perspective, often influenced by the cultural and historical milieus of the work. Moreover, these steps underscored revealing the ways in which women are silenced and oppressed, or how patriarchal ideologies continued to penetrate the society. It explored the intersectionality of gender with other marks of identity such as race, class, and sexuality. Ultimately, this approach attempted to critique and deconstructed systems of inequality while promoting a more inclusive take of the text.

##### **Conclusions**

Based on the findings of the study, the following conclusions were drawn:

Upon analyzing the five literary works from a feminist perspective, certain portrayals of women were revealed including typical depiction as wives, doers of household chores, subjects of objectifications and as others while also emphasizing their strength and their capacity to subvert stereotypes. Moreover, the selected texts had a propensity to predominantly portray women in their traditional and constrained roles, mirroring certain socio-cultural contexts of their times. Women were typically portrayed as wives, confined to household duties, and subjected to objectification of exclusion. On the contrary, there are moments of resistance, strength, and some attempts to challenge these norms, suggesting potential shifts in societal perspectives.

In sum, the document underscored the enduring challenges of gender representation in literature while celebrating stories that advocate for equality and empowerment.

This study probed into the Filipino cultural identities using the structuralist questioning. The investigation focused largely on themes like adherence to tradition, respect for elders, the importance of family, and a connection to nature. These themes highlighted how Filipino characters often considered as priority the

societal norms and collective values over personal wants, divulging the tension between individual and collective expectations. Respect for elders and authority arose as a stronghold of the Filipino culture, with filial piety largely affecting the behavior of the characters. The portrayal of family as the central unit of life, molding the identities and decisions, often requiring sacrifice to fulfill obligations to the family and expectations of the society.

Additionally, nature is used both as a backdrop and a symbol in the stories, reflecting emotions and reinforcing cultural values like fertility, continuity, and integration into the traditional ways of life. All in all, these themes illustrated the interconnection of Filipino culture, traditions, and social structures.

This study approached five literary texts using the Feminist and Structuralist theories. Structuralism encouraged a systematic comprehension of literature that reflected universal structures, underscoring the interplay of language and cultural codes as to how texts convey meaning. On the other hand, the feminist approach complemented the structural tradition by foregrounding the socio-political dimensions of gender and power within the texts.

It analyzed the female representation, the influence of patriarchal ideologies, and intertwining of identity markers such as gender, race, and class. This approach highlighted resistance and agency within the text. Through these frameworks, readers are armed to deconstruct patriarchal norms and to explore more inclusive interpretations of the literary texts. In sum, these approaches helped untangle the complexities of literature offering a holistic perspective on the interactions among culture, structure, and identity in storytelling.

### **Recommendations**

Based on the findings and conclusions of this study, the following recommendations are hereby provided:

#### ***Reexamine canonical texts through feminist lenses.***

Promote the study and rereading of canonical literary texts using the feminist criticism. This can lead to finding surreptitious gender biases and provide fresh eyes on already read and familiar works. Doing critical

engagement with these should be encouraged to be a part of the academic instruction and literary discourse to not only challenge traditional views on classic texts but also offer fresher readings and encourage critical thinking.

#### ***Develop interdisciplinary approaches to structuralist criticism.***

The structuralist lens can be further developed by incorporating views from other disciplines such as from the fields of anthropology, linguistics, and sociology. An interdisciplinary approach to reading literary texts can help shape more informed insights and views into how certain cultural systems, myths, and binary oppositions find their way to the text. Workshops and further research projects can develop these connections.

#### ***Emphasize cultural and historical contexts in education.***

Literature educators and learners may be encouraged to explore cultural and historical contexts of literary texts. This will allow readers to be familiar with underlying structures, traditions, and social expectations that can also inform a story. Teaching materials should have discussions on how cultural norms affect storytelling and develop character.

#### ***Incorporate intersectional analyses.***

Future literary studies and criticism may highlight the interplay of gender, race, class, sexuality, and culture to probe more deeply into the understanding of systemic oppressions.

Emphasizing these intersections can offer a more nuanced perspective of the experiences portrayed in literature and their vaster social implications. This approach could be imbibed into the school curricula to enrich students' perspectives.

#### ***Incorporate Comparative Analyses in Literary Studies.***

Comparative analyses of texts that reflect different cultural identities, regions, or time periods can help students and readers understand the universal and unique aspects of cultural narratives. For example, comparing Filipino literature to other Southeast Asian works can reveal shared cultural structures and distinct traditions.

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