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The Woman in the Mirror: Imaging the Filipino Woman in Short Stories in English by Filipino Woman Authors

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ABSTRACT

This paper attempted to draw the image of the Filipino woman as depicted by female protagonists in selected short stories in English (1925-1986) written by Filipino woman authors. Specifically, the paper aimed to answer the following questions: (1) How are female protagonists depicted in the selected short stories written by Filipino woman authors? What are their virtues, vices, passions, and struggles?; and (2) What roles do these female protagonists play in the Philippine society? A virtue displayed by the most female characters is having a sense of responsibility. Most of the woman characters are passionate in preserving their relationship with their loved ones or keeping the peace among the family members. The Filipino woman, in the short stories, has projected varied images which could be categorized as martyr, social victim, homemaker, mother, and fighter. The Filipino woman is a product of her time and milieu – heterogeneous in looks, psyche, and roles in the society.

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1. Introduction: The (Filipino) Woman in Question

Much has been written and said about woman. A wide range of opinions and varied reactions about the female of the species has sprung from every border of society. She is man's friend and foe, personifying calm and chaos. She is an idiot and a savant, a sinner and a saint (Cañares, 2005). Yes, she can be contradiction itself, but there is no denying that her presence cannot be ignored.

People are classified in different ways, yet the easiest and oldest way is to categorize them into man or woman. Since the time of Adam, man has enjoyed an elevated position in the home, in the workplace, and in society while the woman has been viewed as a mere housekeeper, proud of her man's success outside the home. The woman's place is the home; the man's place is the board room. The woman is thought of as inferior to the man. She exists "to gratify man, be part of his conquest and enhance his manhood" (Azarcon, 1988, p. 36).

This perception, elicited and imposed by society, is now debunked by women who have become more assertive in articulating their demands for equality between the sexes and respect for rights they are entitled to.

Women valorize themselves by exploring their spectrum of values and position they occupy in a largely patriarchal society. The woman is not only a domesticated partner of man but someone who also carries the noble task of shaping and improving humanity. She wants to be recognized as an intellectual, capable of full participation in the society where she moves about. She is capable of carrying out anything she puts her mind into.

A great revolution has also taken place in some Asian countries. This upheaval

liberated the woman who has been chained to the kitchen sink for years. It sent her out of the home where she was a mere housewife and babysitter. Yes, she still attends to her domestic chores, but she now has a career to balance her old responsibilities. Many working mothers double as government officials, journalists, social development workers, engineers, and the like. Nowadays, more and more women take on roles previously perceived for men only. The Asian women, according to Francisca Fearon (1989), have now the freedom to choose their own identities.

Obstacles brought by the traditional and closed culture still exist. In this respect, Fearon (1989) believes that "Asia still trails behind the West in accepting women's equality and femininity as a respectable combination" (p. 27). This seems true in places like Iran, Singapore, Thailand, and China.

Iranian authorities claim that there is no legal basis for sex discrimination in their country. All citizens have the right to work in any capacity and in any position. But because of patriarchal norms and attitudes, women are discouraged from working outside the home and discriminated against when employed (Columbia University School of Law, 1977). In Singapore, women are regarded as inferior to men because of traditional and patriarchal attitudes of its people. Thai women are given opportunity to work side by side with their men but are still expected to prepare the evening meal and to attend to the children's needs. Chinese women are still tied to the home. To Eoyang (1994), "Women in China have been long suffering; they have literally borne the burden of the country's patriarchal heritage" (p. 5).

Like most Asian women, the Filipina supplements and, in many cases, solely



provides for the family's needs and yet, in spite of her effort, she becomes an unwilling victim of discrimination. Azarcon (1988) refers to her lot as "double day or dual life which implies that housework and childcare is [sic] a woman's primary responsibility" (p. 20).

The Filipina wife is supposed to enjoy equal footing with her husband. This was true before the coming of the Spaniards when she was considered her husband's companion, not his slave (Mananzan, 1997).

The Filipino woman of pre-Hispanic era was a chanter, a priestess, and a warrior. Her predominant role was unquestioned. As priestess and healer, she performed ritual dances and songs during weddings and funerals. The coming of the Spaniards changed all these. The Filipino woman became silent and docile, hovering over kitchen, church, and cradle. Women were treated as secondary citizens. Missionaries acknowledged their intelligence, practicality, and sensuality; but that was all. Women were controlled by their husbands. Everything the wife did had to conform to the standard of the husband whom she needed to gratify. In this regard, Mananzan (1997) rightly points out that "He also exercised authority over her personal appearance; she should dress in accordance to her husband's wishes" (p. 24).

But the Filipina wants to revolutionize this negative perception — unwanted before birth and childhood, wanted as an adult for sex, unwanted again as an elderly. So she fights for her own place under the sun. She affirms that sex is not a determinant of a person's capacity and ability to serve the people and to stand as an individual. Espousing feminism, she wants to "struggle for equal rights at all levels in the present socio-cultural system where man enjoys the dominant role." (Muñoz, 1992, p. 27)

However, in the Philippines, the image of the Filipino woman has evolved from being a bearer of children to becoming the bearer of the earth's fruit as she expands her activities beyond the household. Thus, man has accepted her in the farm, in the office, and in the factory. Focusing on the Filipino women who play different roles in life's significant activities, Pura Santillan Castrence (1977), in a speech delivered before the faculty and the graduate students of the Angeles State University, commented that:

We have shown the Filipina in the sweeping scenes of her life as heroine in the story of her country. We see her now, active in almost every field of endeavor, in agriculture, in industries both as worker and as administrator, in educational institutions, both as teacher and as head in offices, as clerks and secretaries but also as managers in hospitals, as doctors, nurses or attendants in high government and in low government positions, in foreign service, a chief or helper. She is ubiquitous, and her everywhere-ness is taken for granted. True, she is still dissatisfied with the inequities caused by sex discrimination, but she is taking these things in stride and continues fighting for man-woman equality along with her other work. (pp. 16-17)

These women concerns are contemporary subject matters in fiction too. Therefore, this paper is an attempt to analyze how the image of the Filipino woman is mirrored by female protagonists in selected short stories in English (1925-1986) by Filipino woman authors. Specifically, the study is aimed to answer the following questions: (1) How are female protagonists depicted in the selected short stories written by Filipino woman authors? What are their virtues, vices, passions, and struggles? and (2) What roles do these female protagonists play in the Philippine society? The



researcher attempted to take a look at the Filipino women, borrowing the female writers' gaze, to present a more authentic image of themselves as it evolved through the years.

The following short stories, mainly chosen from the *Songs of Ourselves*, an anthology of writings of Filipino women in English published in 1994 by Edna Z. Manlapaz, were used in the study. "Dead Stars," which is the acknowledged first English short story written by a Filipino, was also considered in the analysis.

1. "Dead Stars" by Paz Marquez- Benitez (1925)
2. "The Small Key" by Paz Latorena (1927)
3. "Servant Girl" by Estrella Alfon (1937)
4. "Maternity Leave" by Ligaya Victorio-Reyes (1940)
5. "Magnificence" by Estrella Alfon (1960)
6. "Unfinished Story" by Joy T. Dayrit (1979)
7. "Pieces of String" by Tita Lacambra-Ayala (1984)
8. "Family Rites" by Rosario Cruz-Lucero (1986)

With this background, the paper aimed to analyze the abovementioned short stories to promote full appreciation of the Filipinas' literary works since such (even contemporary works) are not widely read in Philippine literature books. A close analysis of the different woman characters in the short stories under consideration surely reflected the image as well as the reality of the Filipino woman.

2. Female Protagonists as Depicted in the Selected Short Stories

Characterization is a literary tool used to describe a person's physical, moral, social, mental, and emotional characteristics. This is achieved through a careful understanding of the narrator's direct description, the protagonist's thoughts,

words and actions, as well as through what the other characters say about the protagonist (Barnet, Burto, Cain, & Stubbs, 2003). To characterize the female protagonists in the short stories under study, the writer adapted the approach of characterization devised by Galda and Cullinan (2002). Such characteristics have been classified into virtues possessed, vices shown, passions displayed, and struggles undergone by the protagonists.

Table 1: Character analysis of the female protagonists

Protagonist → Julia – "Dead Stars"			
Virtue	Vice	Passion	Struggle
* Willingness to sacrifice her love so Alfredo can perform his duty to marry his betrothed * Possession of a sense of humor and a highly spirited personality * Has wit and tact, sense of propriety	* Passive acceptance of the "inevitable"	* Assurance of Alfredo's love	* Pain caused by Alfredo's decision to marry Esperanza out of moral obligation
Protagonist → Esperanza – "Dead Stars"			
Virtue	Vice	Passion	Struggle
* Unwavering hope in not giving up on Alfredo	* Inability to fight for her love	* Assurance of love from Alfredo	* Husband's infidelity * Fear of losing Alfredo to another woman
Protagonist → Soledad – "The Small Key"			
Virtue	Vice	Passion	Struggle
* Sense of responsibility * Penchant for hard work * Calmness in adversity * Willingness to show endurance and sacrifice	* Jealousy over memories of the husband's late wife * Impulsive behavior * Inability to express her emotions	* Exertion of effort to preserve the relationship	* Effacing thoughts of Pedro's deceased wife * Ignoring Pedro's sentimentality in keeping the deceased wife's clothes
Protagonist → Rosa – "Servant Girl"			
Virtue	Vice	Passion	Struggle
* Sense of responsibility * Calmness/ Patience	None	* Achieving a better life through marriage	* Realizing dream only by escaping from reality

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despite humiliations * Courage in time of danger			* Escaping mistress's physical abuse
Protagonist → Lucia – “Maternity Leave”			
Virtue	Vice	Passion	Struggle
* Performing hard work * Endurance and sacrifice despite life's vicissitudes	* Despair over financial problems	* Easing the financial burden of the family * Providing the family with a more comfortable life	* Fear of losing her job as a teacher * Untoward effects of taking a maternity leave in mid semester
Protagonist → The Mother – “Magnificence”			
Virtue	Vice	Passion	Struggle
* Courage in protecting her children from a sex pervert * Sense of responsibility * Hospitality * Pride over children's achievements	* Failure to sense right away the evil design of others	* Protecting the children	*Safeguarding her children from danger of all kinds
Protagonist → The Movie House Usherette – “Unfinished Story”			
Virtue	Vice	Passion	Struggle
* Patience to wait for the lover to return * Hard work * Love and affection * Sense of responsibility	* Engaging in the futile exercise to wait for the lover who has only “used” her	* Finishing her studies (to become a Certified Public Accountant) * Love for the boyfriend unworthy of her affection	* Being clueless about the lover's sudden abandonment * Uncertainty about the lover's return to her life
Protagonist → The Grandmother – “Pieces of String”			
Virtue	Vice	Passion	Struggle
* Love and affection * Sense of responsibility	None	* Assuring love from her son she hopes to be with again * Ensuring the welfare of her grand-children	* Hopelessness about the possible return of her son
Protagonist → Linda – “Family Rites”			
Virtue	Vice	Passion	Struggle
* Love and affection * Sense of responsibility * Endurance and sacrifice	None	* Keeping her family together despite the husband's infidelity * Developing close relationship with her daughter	* Husband's infidelity * Daughter's unappreciative attitude towards old practices

Table 1 presents the character analysis of the nine female protagonists in the short stories under study. Using the coding units (virtues, vices, passions, struggles), the profile of each protagonist was carefully examined.

2.1 Virtues

Among the nine female protagonists, six displayed the virtue of having a sense of responsibility; four practiced the virtue of love and affection; three characters had the virtues of hard work, calmness, and endurance/sacrifice; and two, bravery. Other virtues demonstrated were courage, hope, hospitality, and patience.

2.2 Vices

Several female protagonists, under study, were found to be with vices. Soledad was depicted as a jealous wife who, in her failure to verbalize her feelings, resorted to doing an act she would later on regret. Lucia, choosing an easy way out of a predicament, had an abortion to get rid of an additional mouth to feed. Like most of their Oriental sisters, Julia and Esperanza passively waited for their beloved Alfredo to choose between them. Neither actually did anything to have herself “win” the competition. Even the “magnificent” mother failed in the beginning to sense the evil design of the “helpful” sex pervert. Could it be her too-trusting nature that made her so very much like the proverbial Chinese monkey who “sees no evil”? Then there is the Pollyanna that is the movie house usherette. Like the two tramps in Beckett's play, she is not tired of waiting for her Godot.

2.3 Passions

Three protagonists were passionate in their desire to provide the family with a better life, thus, assure the welfare of the children and grandchildren. Five female



characters did their best to preserve their relationship with their loved ones or keep the peace among the family members. Other passions shared by the female protagonists were to jump over the other side of the fence where the grass is greener. To them, their passport to this “utopia” is either marriage or a college degree.

2.4 Struggles

Four of the female protagonists struggled to assuage the pain of the husband's/lover's infidelity or abandonment by a loved one. Others tried to stop themselves from being hopelessly romantic and physically abused. Another feared losing her job as a teacher for taking a maternity leave in mid semester. An unnamed mother showed her tenacity in safeguarding her children from a sexual pervert.

3. Roles Played by the Female Protagonists in the Philippine society

The Filipino woman, mirrored by the female protagonists in the short stories under study, plays different societal roles as martyr, social victim, homemaker, mother, and fighter.

3.1 The Filipino Woman as a Martyr

Martyrdom has a compelling power because of its psychological implications. Powerless in a society, where men make choices for her, the woman affirms her strength by enduring her pain and her loss. Four of the female protagonists in the selected short stories are martyrs who take up their crosses to the altar of self-abnegation. Soledad of “*The Small Key*,” victim of the green-eyed monster, cries by herself, unsure of her husband's love. Lucia of “*Maternity Leave*” decides to abort the baby she can no longer provide for. To wait in vain for her lover is the lot of the protagonist of “*Unfinished Story*.” The last one to take the trek to

martyrdom is Linda of “*Family Rites*” who accepts her husband's philandering to save her marriage, thus, preserve the family.

3.1.1 Soledad – “*The Small Key*”

Latorena's “*The Small Key*” presents Soledad as fitting to a T the image of the silently suffering martyr. A martyr freely chooses to bear pain and loss for the sake of a principle or a cause. The endurance of such suffering becomes a heroic and virtuous act. A situation in the story points this out.

With deliberate care he untied the knot, and, detaching the big key, dropped the small one back into his pocket. She watched him fixedly as he did this. The smile left her face and a strange look came into her eyes as she took the big key from him without a word. Together they left the dining room.

One readily notices something bothering her, yet she chooses to keep it to herself. Her husband, though unaware of her feelings, notices the way she looks.

“You look pale and tired,” he remarked softly. “What have you been doing all morning?”

“Nothing,” she said listlessly, “but the heat gives me a headache.”

Pedro is worried though Soledad says she is fine. He will ask Tia Maria to check on her while he is away.

Unable to verbalize her overpowering jealousy of her husband's deceased first wife, Soledad burns the woman's clothes that Pedro still keeps. This made her sick afterward. Jealous and insecure, Soledad finally gives in to her unarticulated heartaches. Soledad's fever is psychosomatic, indicative of her guilt and her fear. Burning the first wife's clothes is an act of survival on her part but one which risks earning the ire and displeasure of her husband.

A cow that had strayed by looked over her shoulder with a round vague inquiry and



went on chewing her cud, blissfully unaware of such things as a gnawing fear in the heart of a woman and a still smouldering resentment in a man's.

3.1.2 Lucia – “*Maternity Leave*”

An underpaid public school teacher, Lucia does not know how to cope with the difficulties of another maternity leave. First, there are bills to take care of. Second, the third child is just six months old. Third, she might not be able to return to school to teach. Fourth, four months without any salary is really devastating. She refuses to tell her husband, Dading, of her pregnancy, for she cares so much about him that she wants to spare him from worrying. She does not feel happiness or excitement over the new life inside her womb, yet she has chosen to carry the burden alone. She decides to abort her baby to free herself of all the anxieties of another maternity leave.

All other considerations vanished from her mind. It was so easy, once one had arrived at a decision. She was going to be free from a whole year of worry. No need to tell Dading. This was going to be simple.

Lucia is the masochistic female who chooses to suffer with nary a complaint than burden her husband with the thought of raising another child.

Carmen Guerrero-Nakpil (1999) blames the Maria Clara syndrome for this masochism of the Filipino woman. She says:

But the most unfortunate of all of Maria Clara's legacies was the masochist attitude. Because of Maria Clara, millions of Filipinas learned to enjoy suffering and humiliation. They took up their crosses and followed her to the apotheosis of romantic sanctification.

3.1.3 The Movie House Usherette - “*Unfinished Story*”

The usherette in a movie house is another martyr. Dante, her live-in partner is writing a play, a major requirement of his university

degree. After her job, she helps him type the play he is working on.

After work I help Dante with his play. I type it out for him on his rented Olivetti, using two or three fingers from one hand while resting my head on the other. Tired from work I type slowly...

When the play is finished, Dante has suddenly become taciturn. He gives his girlfriend the cold shoulder treatment though the latter tries hard to get his attention – narrating to him what to her are interesting things she encounters every day. Dante sometimes listens, but often, he shows no interest in her rattling. In time, he begins to go out evenings to a bookstore or for a walk. Then, he fails to come home leaving her only his suitcase. A pathetically hopeless romantic, she convinces herself that Dante will one day come back.

At work the next day I load fresh batteries into my flashlight and in the dark flash it brightly against my palm, fingers, knuckles, and blindly into the loge people's faces until they squint... Guiding a lone man to his seat I flash a light short of a step up and he trips. Ursula visits my station to bring me cheer. I tell her that Dante had brought with him my suitcase instead of his. Mine is of straw and his, of leather, and Ursula convinces me of Dante's thoughtfulness: It was a gift, don't you see? I tell her that he also did not bring the burner, the chair, and some books on the desk. Ursula convinces me, before she hurries back to her station at the orchestra, it means nothing else but Dante will come home one day.

3.1.4 Linda – “*Family Rites*”

Rosario Cruz-Lucero's protagonist, Linda, is expected to accept her husband's extramarital affairs because hers is the responsibility of keeping the marriage intact. She has chosen to stay with her husband though they have a lot of incompatibilities and misunderstandings. She chooses to play the aggrieved wife for the sake of her child



who must not grow up in a broken home. In the Philippines, it is common for a man to have a mistress or even a collection of women. It becomes his badge of machismo and virility. On the other hand, Filipino culture does not give the woman the same leeway because she is expected to be “loyal to the end” to the only man in her life (Profile of a Filipino, 1996).

All these four protagonists show the Filipino woman as a martyr who takes refuge in the adage that “ignorance is bliss.” Bob Garon (2007) describes what a martyr is like:

If you are a martyr, there is a good chance that you are into avoidance and evasion. You avoid conflict as much as possible even if it means a lot of personal sufferings. Perhaps you know your husband is going out with women of the night, but you remain quiet about it. And when your friends tell you about it, you dance around the issue instead of meeting it head on.

3.2 The Filipino Woman as a Social Victim

Four of the seven female protagonists in the selected short stories can be considered social victims — Rosa of “*Servant Girl*,” Lucia of “*Maternity Leave*,” and Esperanza and Julia of “*Dead Stars*.”

3.2.1 Esperanza and Julia - “*Dead Stars*”

Esperanza and Julia are victims of a society that imposes its will on the helpless followers of its established conventions. Concerned with the demands of his social status, Alfredo is forced to marry Esperanza to whom he has long been betrothed. So as not to bring “dishonor” to his and his fiancée’s families, he “dumps” Julia Salas, who quietly accepts Alfredo’s decision.

Esperanza, too, has to act out her part in this charade. Marry Alfredo she must, lest

she be the cynosure of gossip if dropped like a hot potato by her long-time sweetheart.

Yet, Alfredo finds that his thoughts of Julia are affecting his relationship with his wife. He may have been kind, gentle, and even tender to her, but he remains immeasurably far away, beyond her reach. He, thus, becomes a stranger to his wife, a fact which Esperanza painfully accepts.

Similarly, Julia is a victim of Alfredo’s tradition-dictated choice. Although Alfredo loves her better, he gives her up without even putting up a fight to win her.

“*Dead Stars*” depicts two women who find themselves feeling empty, bereft of light like dead stars turning into black holes in the firmament of the heavens.

3.2.2 Rosa - “*Servant Girl*”

Rosa is twice-over a victim of society. Her being a woman and her being poor are the culprits responsible for this condition. She is forced by economic hardship to work as a helper to an abusive mistress. Subjected to sexual harassment by the muscular Sancho, she is even more vulnerable to fantasizing the gentle *cochero* who has twice rescued her from the bully like the medieval knight in shining armor (complete with the horse, albeit attached to the *kalesa*). Since the day Rosa met Angel, she has thought of him without fail.

Now, in the days that followed, she thought of him, the way he had wound an arm around her knees and carried her like a little girl. She dreamed about the gentleness of his fingers. She smiled remembering the way he had laid out the clothes on the stones to bleach. She knew that meant he must do his own washing. And she ached in tenderness over him and his need for a woman like her to do such things for him, things like mending the straight tear she had noticed at the knee of his trousers when her foot had rested on them; like measuring his *tartanilla* seat cushions for him, and making them, and



fitting them on the seat pads... In her thoughts, she spoke to him and he always answered.

Unlike before, Rosa is not irritated anymore whenever the women at the bathhouse tease her about Sancho. She just gives them a smile and thinks of Angel, “picking her up and being gentle with her.”

Rosa lives a miserable life as a servant being battered and endlessly nagged by an alcoholic mistress. Unable to bear her suffering, Rosa decides to run away. On the road, she meets Angel who will fulfill her dream of happiness. Rosa undergoes an awakening of sort when she realizes that her *cochero* does not even remember her, and that his name is not Angel. This second encounter with her “hero” makes Rosa resigned to her lot in life. Thus, she is found back in the house of her cruel mistress, “forgetting all her vows about never stepping into it again.”

Rosa represents a woman aspiring for a better life, which can only be achieved with the help of a man. The ignorant servant girl clings to her romantic notions of an ideal man, an imaginary romantic world where her “savior” literally sweeps her off her feet. But in the end, the “better life” offered by a man crumbled.

Nelly Stromquist (1998) says that this dream is shared by many women in developing countries:

...in many developing countries, girls marry at a young age and generally to older men, which ensures the wives’ subordination to their husbands since these young wives are usually less educated and thus less able to generate an independent or substantial income.

3.2.3 Lucia - “*Maternity Leave*”

Only a mother is privileged to experience the pain of tearing flesh in the delivery room. After that, she works hard to buy a box of powdered milk, wakes up at

three in the morning to give her young a bottle of milk, washes the baby’s soiled clothes, and changes the diapers.

“*Maternity Leave*” was written during the Japanese period when teachers’ maternity leave was without pay. Victorio (the author), who is a teacher herself; makes Lucia represent the exploited teachers of a bureaucracy that punishes a teacher who dares to have a kid in mid semester. During World War II, strict policies for permanency forced a woman to sacrifice her sixty-peso salary for a maternity leave. Even her fellow teachers have been judgmental in saying that “she is too old for that,” that being pregnant at 38 is embarrassing. In some ways, Lucia is bitter because of the things she cannot buy for herself. Her telling “If I were in your place I’d live in housecoats and have a dozen babies” shows the grudge she feels over life’s unfairness to poor mothers like her.

In the Philippines, women fill a large portion of the teaching profession. Public school teachers, particularly, are ironically employed by their class enemies: the government and the education capitalists. The government, as the largest employer of teachers in the country, pays them very low wages. The sad thing is that they are made to do a thousand-and-one jobs not directly related to their work – presiding over village meetings, dancing at the Manila International Airport when the President arrives, shepherding their children through the streets as they wave their hands, flags, flowers, and the like.

3.3 *The Filipino Woman as a Homemaker*

Women are often relegated to the role of housekeepers in society. It is their primary duty to satisfy the needs of their families. “Implicit in this advice is the notion that by keeping a clean, neat, pious home and filling it with warmth and inviting smells, women



are achieving their highest calling” (Austine, n.d., para 8). Two of the nine female protagonists in the short stories under study are unadulterated housekeepers – Soledad of “The Small Key” and Rosa of “Servant Girl.”

3.3.1 Soledad - “The Small Key”

The traditional view of a woman’s role in the family as a housekeeper is typified by Soledad. She is a good wife to Pedro whom she calls *Indo*. She stays at home, doing all the household chores while her husband attends to the plow fields. Several situations in the story depict Soledad as a homemaker. First is when she asks for Pedro’s newly ironed clothes that need darning.

“Where are the shirts I ironed yesterday?” she asked as she approached the table.

“In my trunk, I think,” he answered.

“Some of them need darning,” and observing the empty plate she added, “Do you want more rice?”

Another situation shows Soledad as an impeccable housekeeper who keeps a spotless kitchen.

Tia Maria was nowhere to be seen, but that did not bother him for it was Sunday and the work in the south field was finished. However, he missed the pleasant aroma which came from the kitchen every time he woke up early in the morning.

The kitchen looked neat but cheerless, and an immediate search for wood brought no results.

Soledad’s playing to the hilt her role as an efficient housekeeper and solicitous wife has been repeatedly shown in the story. She caters to Pedro’s needs serving him like a master and pleasing him with a house that is clean and warm.

3.3.2 Rosa - “Servant Girl”

Rosa, the domesticated housekeeper, is good in doing her chores. She sweeps the yard or trims the scraggly hedge of viola bushes; or she loiters on an errand for

tomatoes or vinegar. Even after she tries to run away from her cruel mistress, she still comes back to do the tasks she regularly performs – “... turn on the light in the kitchen, and hum over the preparation for a meal.” But her sluggish movement is quite noticeable. For instance, “Rosa was scrubbing the clothes, she was washing slowly. She went her slow way with the can.”

Traditionally, rural and tribal women do all the work. Their functions include cooking, cleaning, teaching the children, washing clothes, doing repairs, budgeting, and managing the farm. After the husband has finished tilling the farmland, the wife does the planting, the daily maintenance, the carrying of water, and the harvesting. Normally, the husband helps in the harvesting, but the tribal woman is responsible for finding food for the family. She also acts as the mediator between her children and her husband. She manages practically everything, but she does not have control over finances or in decision making.

Rosa is like those rural and tribal women who do all the work. She would be seen “scrubbing the clothes she was washing” and “gathering the clothes she had to bleach,” “she took the can from the kitchen table to fetch drinking water,” “she would sweep the yard or trim the scraggly edge of viola bushes;” or “she would loiter on an errand for tomatoes and vinegar,” and “... she hummed over her preparations for a meal.” Like a typical housekeeper and wife, Rosa does all the household chores not for her family but for her mistress. The only difference is that Rosa is paid for her service while a traditional wife who does the same household works does not earn a penny for her services. Neither are traditional housekeepers’ subjects to nagging mistresses; although, at times, they suffer



from their own husbands in ways more than one.

Filipino women find pride in their work. They do not find themselves alienated from their chores because they work with, around, and for their families. This family-oriented mindset gives them a sense of dignity and responsibility. The family and the children are the priorities in a Filipino woman's list.

Cynthia Nolasco (n.d. as cited in Mananzan, 1991) in her essay "The woman problem: Gender, class and state oppression," points out:

Our cultural values exert extreme pressure on the woman to keep her from active participation in the world affairs putting her to "where she belongs" – the home. The vast majority of the world's women, including Filipino women, play three major functions: first, child bearing; second, childrearing; third, housekeeping. (p. 80)

3.4 *The Filipino Woman as a Mother*

Four of the nine female protagonists are mothers – Lucia of "Maternity Leave", the mother in "Magnificence", Linda of "Family Rites", and the grandmother in "Pieces of String."

3.4.1 Lucia - "Maternity Leave"

In the Philippines, it is very easy to tell whether a woman is a mother or not. If her skin sags with weariness, rushes home to cook, she is on the heavy side, she spends her salary on the kids, then chances are, she is that noble creature called "mother." Filipino mothers are devoted to their families. Lucia represents the typical mother who would give herself wholly for her children. Lucia would rather see her child unborn than watch him or her suffer the misfortunes of life. Nothing matters to her than to see her children live comfortably.

3.4.2 The Mother - "Magnificence"

"The mother is everything – she is our consolation in sorrow, our hope in misery,

and our strength in weakness. "She is the source of love, mercy, sympathy, and forgiveness" sums up Kahlil Gibran's description of a mother, who is the source of everything. Mothers are usually considered the light and manager of the household while fathers are the providers in the family.

A mother satisfies the child's needs for physical, intellectual, and emotional security and development. The mother in the story takes good care of her family and performs her duties well. She wisely divides her time between her duties as president of the neighborhood association and her family.

In the story, the mother supervises her children in studying their lessons. Concerned with their intellectual development, she accepts Vicente's offer of tutoring her children. Like most mothers, she wants what is best for her children; she wants them to grow up as fine and well-respected individuals. The mother, in her desire to provide emotional and social development to her children, lets them interact with other people like Vicente.

The mother is responsible for disciplining the children; thus, she gets the credits when they grow up to be good members of the community. Upon learning that her children are being complimented by other people, the mother can only be proud of their achievements. A mother wants to be acknowledged for instilling worthwhile cultural values to her children; hence, in the story; the trait of "pakikisama" is displayed by the mother. Filipinos are known for their ability to get along with others. Although Vicente is a stranger to the family, they trust him right away, especially the children. "Pakikisama" also involves helping people. Like the man saying- "I have nothing to do in the evenings, let me help them." Helping others they hardly know is a custom among



the Filipinos who are described as friendly and warm.

The mother serves as a role model to her children. She is the spring of knowledge on household and family matters; that is why, it is important for her to show good examples. After the mother has seen what Vicente is doing with her daughter, "...she stood there saying nothing... She was going to open her mouth but glanced at the boy and closed it, and with the look and inclination of the head, she bade Vicente go upstairs..." She controls herself, concealing her anger seeing that her son is present. She does not want to create a scandal in the neighborhood.

3.4.3 Linda - "Family Rites"

Linda is a full-time housewife who spends her waking hours in taking care of her daughter Chris and doing the household chores. Being superstitious, she passes on old practices to her daughter who frowns upon them. Desiring to help her daughter breeze through the rite of womanhood, she tells Chris to clean her face with the washing from her underwear to prevent having pimples. However, smart Chris knows what is happening to her body and refuses to follow her mother's advice. Feeling that their roles are reversed, Linda resents her daughter's telling her what she has learned from school about menstruation.

Linda, who was once idealistic about love, has turned cynical since her husband's betrayal of her trust. Although she longs for love and affection, she has refused Rex's amorous advances after she discovered his infidelity. But one evening, she voluntarily gives herself to him. She is emotionally dependent on her husband, but try she must to divert her attention to her daughter.

She was weeping, her tears drenching the pillow beneath her. But the sound of sobbing wafted into the bedroom from somewhere far

away, a sad lonely, disembodied sound. Drowsily, she realized she was dreaming, her pillow completely dry, like her eyes. Rex lay on top of her, snoring gently into her ear, having just expelled one last shuddering breath. And she was fenced in, safe and snug under his weight. But the sound came, insistently; and suddenly, now wide awake, she knew the sobbing was coming from Chris' room.

Very carefully, she eased off Rex's weight and went to Chris, who lay in a corner of the bed in one, desolate, spasmodic heap. Silently, knowing the futility of asking why, Linda lay and put an arm around her, stroking her hair, the way Chris used to let her, years ago it seemed. And Chris linked her hands around Linda's neck and wept, unable to contain the hormones that wrought havoc on her moods. Linda felt solace in Chris' touch, to be held so close like this, not as prologue or epilogue to sex, but just to be held like this. Again, she felt that their roles had become reversed. With a vague sense of both guilt and release, Linda realized, at that moment, that she didn't miss Rex's weight on her at all.

Unaware of her strength, Linda manages to keep her family together in spite of the scar caused by Rex's infidelity. Jose J. Reyes (1986) gives us a soap-opera woman character parallel to Linda:

As a soap opera mother, the Filipina is a being of saintly understanding and unwavering heroism. The mother who becomes laundrywoman, household servant, or a market vendor is more endearing than one who sits behind an office desk. (p.230)

Viewing feminine roles in most societies, Parsons and Bales (n.d. as cited in Stromquist, 1998) link motherhood and domestic or family sphere to women. The family is the pillar of society, and women are the agents responsible for its efficient functioning-taking care of children, spouse, and household management. The family is a solidarity unit which necessitates the woman



not to have an occupational role outside the home to avoid conflict and to provide psychological security to all family members. Women are more predisposed toward caring for others.

3.4.4 Grandmother - “*Pieces of String*”

Grandmothers end up nurturing and raising their grandchildren. When a woman becomes a grandmother, she desires to undertake the nitty-gritty aspects of baby care again; she does the work at home, and she makes herself an integral part of the family. Williams (1976) points out: “Women’s place is in the home, fashioning it into a clean, comfortable, attractive place where good food is served, order is maintained and the personal needs of the occupants are met” (p. 287).

In the story, the grandmother is in the twilight of her life, “Her head is gray, seems grayer even in the quieter hours of the night.” She takes care of her grandchildren. She tells them what to do and what to avoid, and scolds them when needed. She prepares cookies for them. She sells crochet items which she makes so she will not be a burden to the family. Her affection and love for the family members are shown when she embroiders pillows, hand-hems pocket handkerchiefs and sews a pair of striped cotton pajamas with the initials of her dearest son, George, who is in the United States. Although it seems that her son prioritizes his wife more than his mother, still the latter shows the genuine ardor of a mother’s love.

Grandmothers, even in their old age, still nurture the nature of motherhood. Although they may be separated from their offspring who leave the grandchildren to her care, they never complain. This is emphasized by Williams (1976): “the concept of maternal instinct, which maintains that women’s nurturing behavior

is an innate, biological determinant shared with other female animals, was readily incorporated into the early doctrines of psychology” (p.15).

Mothers, young or old, are willing to give the best that they could to their children and their progenies.

3.5 *The Filipino Woman as a Fighter*

Of the nine female protagonists, three show courage and bravery – Rosa in “*Servant Girl*”, the mother in “*Magnificence*”, and the usherette in “*Unfinished Story*.”

3.5.1 Rosa - “*Servant Girl*”

Let not Rosa’s return to the kitchen make us conclude that she has trapped herself in a corner. On the contrary, her going back to her mistress’s house is a deliberate and courageous decision motivated by the realization that her servant position is the better option. Although her mistress is abusive, she is totally dependent on Rosa. So, Rosa wields more power and enjoys more freedom under this arrangement than she is likely to have with Sancho, the chauvinist bully. Further, Rosa proves that she is neither the meek-as-a-lamb nor docile-as-Maria-Clara type of a girl. She fights back at her “attackers”– hitting both Sancho and Pedro (or is it Pedro’s horse?) when ill-treated.

3.5.2 The Mother - “*Magnificence*”

Although initially the mother trusts Vicente and accepts his offer of tutoring the children, she is not a total fool. It is probably her woman’s intuition that makes her observe and watch Vicente. A mother provides her children a safe and loving environment. “...But I have watched him with the children, and he seems to dote on them...” The mother tells the father. The latter seems not to have any opinion about Vicente, thus, suggesting that the mother is more perceptive in harboring her suspicions.



Sara Ruddick (1999) points out in her book *Maternal thinking* that a mother establishes criteria for the truth, adequacy, and relevance of proposed answers; and she cares about the findings she can act on.

Mothers are so protective that they want to secure their children from all the harms in the world. They desire to provide a no-fear, no-threat, no-verbal abuse environment to their offspring. With dignity, the mother slapped Vicente several times in the face until he, cowed, goes out of the house. This shows the mother's authority over people who will take advantage of her children's innocence. She turns into a lioness ready to defend her family's dignity. The mother's shining moment is etched in the daughter's mind since she has been a witness to her magnificence in the face of adversity. The mother who tucks her children in bed, who tells them stories at night, and who gives them incessant advice, also protects them when danger calls.

3.5.3 The Movie Usherette - "Unfinished Story"

Women are usually perceived as weak, dependent, and submissive to men. However, the female protagonist in "Unfinished Story" possesses an aura of superiority. "I have power over the loge people – I let them do or not do and guide them well or not." She has a character so strong that she manages to look well despite her inner turmoil. "You don't look like an usherette, he said. I am out of uniform, I said." This female protagonist does not appear as pitiful as that of her lover's female character in a play he is writing. Actually, she thinks that Dante's character is pathetic and thus she muses, "She is about to begin her fourth pathetic adventure." In the protagonist's mind, she is different from that spineless female character.

The usherette continuously tries to overcome the difficulties she experiences by working arduously to make her life better. This is the reason why she patiently works in a movie house for her necessities. As a self-supporting student, she strives hard to arm herself with a college degree. Part of the sacrifice she has to make is enduring the boredom of work because anyway, the salary she gets from it will pay for the rent of her room, food, and her Friday night mathematics course. She is aware that she cannot get a better job unless she finishes college because "women with a college education are more likely to be employed than women who have not attended college" (William, 1976).

She tries to be the best girlfriend that she could ever be by supporting her man and being helpful to him. Tired from work, she manages to help her boyfriend in his thesis. Thus, she says without any complaint, "After work I help Dante with his play. I type it out for him on his rented Olivetti, using two or three fingers from one hand while resting my head on the other. Tired from work I type slowly." She also cooks for him and attends to his other needs.

Her strong personality prevents her from crying when Dante left her. Mourning over him is something she will not do in public. Although hurt, she remains composed, not letting the matter bring her down. She continues working as an usherette and goes on with her life, optimistic that Dante will one day come back. "It means nothing else but that Dante will come home one day," she often quips.

This fighter of a woman does not let the challenges she faces affect her spirits. She will not look miserable, but hold her head up high because she expects that at the end of the day, her hard work will pay off. Never will she let a sad event in her life ruin it



entirely. Obviously, she is unhappy because her loved one has left her without a 'why' or a 'wherefore.' Despite her lover's vanishing into thin air, she remains hopeful of his return. Indeed, hope springs eternal in the human breast.

4. Conclusion

Based on the analysis, a virtue displayed by most female characters is having a sense of responsibility. Six are identified with vices—a passive woman who accepts the "inevitable," a woman who is unable to fight for her love, a jealous wife, a mother who is in despair over financial problem, a mother who fails to sense right away the evil design of others, and a movie usherette who engages in the futile exercise of waiting for the lover who has only "used" her. Most of the woman characters are passionate in preserving their relationship with their loved ones or keeping the peace among the family members. Different struggles in life are undergone by the female characters like assuaging the pain of the husband's or man's infidelity, abandonment by the loved one, trying to stop themselves from being hopelessly romantic, physical abuse, losing a job after taking an ill-timed maternity leave, and safeguarding the children from a sexual pervert.

The Filipino woman in the short stories has projected varied images which could be categorized as martyr, social victim, homemaker, mother, and fighter. In addition, the Filipino woman is a composite character who exhibits both desirable and undesirable traits and is a product of her time and milieu – heterogeneous in looks, psyche, and roles in the society. Varied factors, such as socioeconomic and political conditions as well as personal ambition, can greatly influence the change of image the Filipino woman can undergo. The Filipino woman also has evolved from the

traditionally coy Maria Clara to the modern Filipina who is daring and committed to her endeavors.

In his foreword to *Filipina I*, "a book exclusively *by* women, but *of* and *for* women and men", Nick Joaquin (1984) writes:

... to the Filipino home, which may be said to be a house without private rooms for anybody, male or female. We live in houses of a single chamber, every space in it common to everybody in the family and within that space no doors are locked. No more than her brother does the average Filipina ever hope to enjoy, whether as child or as adult, a room she can call her own.

Noted feminist writer Virginia Woolf exhorts every woman to have a "room of her own." But does the Filipina enjoy this luxury?

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