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Proximity of Women Representations: Male Writers' Panorama in Selected Prose Fiction

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Abstract

This study explores how male writers portray women in prose fiction and how these portrayals reflect or differ from real-life gendered experiences across historical periods. The study aimed to (1) analyze the differences in the portrayal of Filipino women's representation in terms of morals and decision-making in different periods and (2) investigate how prose fiction written by Filipino male authors reveals the proximity of women's representation to real-life gender experiences. A descriptive-qualitative research design was employed, using content analysis and narrative analysis to examine five selected prose fictions from the Pre-Colonial Period (900-1565), Spanish Period (1565-1898), Early 20th Century Period (1901-1950), 20th Century Period (1951-2000), and for 21st Century or Contemporary Period (2001-Present). Feminist literary criticism guided the interpretation of each text. Significant findings reveal that Filipino women's morals and decision making in precolonial and late 20th century periods were largely conformed to social norms, whereas Spanish, early 20th, and 21st century periods were often exhibited moral deviance and assertive decision making. The findings revealed that women were represented in distinct roles that evolved through time, from cultural leaders and nurturers to silent sufferers and survivors. While some female characters conformed to social norms, others defied them, showing inner strength and resistance. These representations reflect actual challenges faced by women, such as limited power, emotional labor, and objectification. In conclusion, the selected male-authored prose fiction closely mirrors gendered realities and highlights the gradual shift toward recognizing women's strength and evolving roles in society.

Keywords: *Gender representation; Filipino women; male-authored fiction; feminist literary criticism*

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Introduction

Literature is a powerful mirror of societal values, cultural ideologies, and gender constructs, capturing the complexity of human experiences across different histories. Among its many genres, prose fiction holds particular significance because of its ability to present narratives that reflect everyday realities while also shaping reader's perspectives. A brief narrative focuses on a single theme in literature. It allows authors to distill human experiences into stories that resonate deeply with readers. According to British playwright, novelist, and short story writer W. Somerset Maugham, prose fiction is a piece of fiction dealing with a single incident, material or spiritual, and having unity of effect (Ribo, 2019). Building on this view, scholars emphasize that prose fiction is not only a vehicle for entertainment but also an avenue for exploring norms, cultural tensions, and ideological struggles (Locher et al., 2023).

In Philippine literature, gendered narratives reveal the underlying currents of ideology, tradition, and power. The portrayal of Filipino women in prose fiction has long reflected the evolving tensions between societal norms and gender roles. Historically, Filipino writers have exemplified women as a beacon of hope, endurance, and moral strength through the centuries. Feminist critics argue that even seemingly idealized representations often reinforce patriarchal values by limiting women to roles of virtue, sacrifice, and morality (Weygold, 2023).

Remarkably, the lens of masculinity plays a critical role in how female representation is exemplified and exposed by writers. In *Turtle Season* by Timothy R. Montes, the story shows more favorable characterization for men than women (Casil-Batang, 2021). This story won first prize in the 51st Palanca Awards, Future Fiction Category. In addition, the story of Jose Dalisay—*Oldtimers* shows submissiveness in female characters (Dials, 2017). These two prose fictions were written by well-known male writers in the Philippines who both exemplified gender biases about women. As Swartzentruber (2023) notes, female characters are often portrayed as pieces in a larger game, seldom taking on the role of the ones who control or shape the game themselves.

In this context, prose authored by Filipino men offers unique insights into how masculinity frames women's representation, not just in terms of roles but in constructing their very identities. As Ladzekpo, Attiye, and Davi (2024) found, the narratives reflect how male perspectives, consciously or unconsciously, shape notions of morality, agency, and relational dynamics among female characters. Readers encounter women portrayed as caretakers, seductresses, martyrs, or symbols of virtue—roles often rooted in the authors' socialization and historical milieu (Finger & Shoults, 2023). From gender-theoretical standpoint, such depictions highlight how literature becomes a site where patriarchal ideologies are reproduced, reinforcing the marginalization of women by restricting them to roles that affirm male dominance.

Distinctively, the Philippines has a lot of influential fictional writers who have helped define and shape the literary landscape. As shown in the lens of literature, the ideal Filipino woman embodies resilience, moral integrity, and courage, confronting challenges with determination while advocating for social change and uplifting marginalized voices, inspiring others to act (Mangarin & Bungabong, 2024). They provide a broad scope of women's lives in different eras, where readers could visualize the generation-to-generation civilizations with their assigned roles. In this way, prose fiction writers document women's struggles and accomplishments and, at the time, participate in sustaining cultural narratives that confine them to predetermined roles.

Filipino women have undergone different changes. In olden times, from precolonial equality and active community participation (Jose et al., 2021), to colonial suppression and relegation to domestic roles (Camagay, 1995), and later to American-influenced empowerment (Sobritchea, 1996), representations have evolved with history. Despite modern gains in equality, challenges remain—patriarchy, continues to shadow progress (Li, 2022). These eras highlight how

gender roles in literature and society are not fixed but continuously reshaped by cultural and societal forces. This historical timeline underscores the importance of analyzing how different eras influence the depiction of women in prose fiction, particularly when framed through the perspectives of male writers.

Accordingly, Filipino women are represented by authors in history to have diverse and traditional gender roles such as being sexual objects of men, doing household chores, and taking care of family members. Male writers have often depicted females based on their social influences. With that in mind, readers' interpretations of these portrayals may affect their behavior and manifestation of women's roles in society (Peter, 2010). Moreover, Tripathi (2025) emphasize that fiction can challenge norms, spark change, and illuminate evolving gender roles within cultural and political contexts. Despite the idea that women play a significant role in shaping society in social, political, economic, cultural, and religious spheres because they are capable of participating due to their effective skills and abilities, including knowledge to overcome obstacles that may occur during the performance of roles (Mojumber, 2020).

While there have been many studies focusing on gender representation in literature, there is still a valuable opportunity to explore how Filipino male authors depict women in prose fiction throughout various historical contexts in the Philippines. This area of research could provide deeper insights into cultural narratives and contribute to a more comprehensive understanding of gender dynamics in literature. Many existing research studies centers on feminist perspectives or female-authored literary texts, often overlooking how male perspectives contribute to the literary image of Filipino women in prose fiction. This is a critical oversight, considering that male-authored prose may frequently shape mainstream literary discourse and may influence societal expectations. As Stuhler (2024) argues, literature reflects persistent gender biases, highlighting how texts not only mirror but also shape societal norms.

In this light, the present study aims (1) to analyze the differences in the portrayal of Filipino women's roles in terms of morals and decision-making in different periods and (2) to investigate how prose fiction written by Filipino male writers reveals the proximity of women's representations to real-life gendered experiences. By addressing these objectives, this study contributes to the body of knowledge by comprehensively analyzing and determining the extent to which representation of women in male-authored panoramas reflects, reinforces, or challenges existing gender norms in the Philippine society.

Methodology

This study used a descriptive-qualitative research design in examining the proximity of gender representation in male authors panorama in selected prose fiction. Creswell et al. (2018) defined qualitative research as an investigation process for comprehending a social or human problem based on forming a complex, holistic picture with words and reporting detailed views of informants.

The analysis of proximity of Filipino women's representation in male-authored prose fictions followed a systematic process. First, each prose fiction was closely read to identify passages that illustrated women's morals and decision making. Second, these passages were deductively coded into predefined categories such as conformity and deviance for morals and rational and irrational for decision making (Weber, 1990). Third content analysis was utilized to group the codes, extract recurring themes, and compare women's role across different historical periods (Macnamara, 2018). Fourth, narrative analysis was conducted to interpret the meaning of characters' choices and how male authors' perspective shaped these portrayals (Allen, 2017). Finally, feminist literary criticism framed the overall interpretation, connecting textual evidence to broader gender ideologies, there showing the proximity of literary representation to Filipino women's real-life experiences (Guo, 2018).

As a primary data source of this study, five prose fictions were carefully selected to

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represent women's portrayals across different historical periods in Philippine literature. *Waywaya* by F. Sionil Jose was chosen for the Pre-Colonial Period (900-1565) because it reflects indigenous values, community practices, and women's positions in early Filipino society. *Guardia de Honor* by Nick Joaquin represents the Spanish Period (1565-1898), capturing the effects of colonial Catholic ideals that reinforce women's domestic and religious roles. *The Maid, the Man, and the Wife* by Manuel Arguilla, from Early 20th Century Period (1901-1950), reveals gender dynamics shaped by sociopolitical transitions under American influence. For Late 20th Century Period (1951-2000), *Kara's Place* by Luis Joaquin Katigbak was selected for its modern lens urban relationships and shifting gender expectations. Finally, *Goats 4 Sale* by Jose Dalisay for 21st Century or Contemporary Period (2001-Present) illustrates how contemporary prose continues to depict women's struggles and moral choices considering globalization and persistent patriarchal norms. All five prose fictions were written by award-winning male Filipino writers, making them significant cultural artifacts that collectively provide a historical continuum for analyzing the proximity of women representation.

Results and Discussion

1. Variations in Women's Representations in Male-Written Panoramas

a. Morals

Filipino male writers portrayed Filipino women's roles in terms of morals, the standard to help people behave and act following the prescribed correct manners, and the balance between shortage and excessiveness. In a given situation, the female characters' overall morality depends on the community's norms as portrayed by male short story writers in multigenerational periods in their chosen short stories. Morals being considered as women's roles indicate how people behave in society, and these can either be conformity or deviance.

1) Conformity

F. Sionil Jose, in his *Waywaya,* and Luis Joaquin Katigbak, in his *Kara's Place*, revealed their female characters' morals as conformity in their short stories during the pre-colonial period and the late 20th century. Conformity is the widespread tendency to act and think like the people around them. In F. Sionil José's story, Waywaya's character illustrates the challenges of cultural adaptation. As she integrates into the Daya community, she must conform to their traditions and values, which contrast sharply with her own. The narrator highlights this transition, illustrating Waywaya's gradual assimilation. This agrees with the study of Mangarin and Bungabong (2024) that Filipino women draw on moral integrity to align with societal expectations, enabling them to participate meaningfully in their communities. Initially, her different ways and attitudes stemming from her origins in Laud are apparent. However, the narrator notes a transformation:

> *…her ways, her attitudes were different and all because she was from Laud... But in time, all the pots in the kitchen were clean of soot, the firewood rack below the house was neatly stacked… (p. 3).*

In F. Sionil José's story, Waywaya's adaptation to the Dayaw community is evident as she abandons her Laud weaving patterns in favor of new designs that reflect Dayaw's cultural traditions. This shift highlights her commitment to integrating with her new surroundings while retaining her identity. He shows Waywaya's successful adaptation as she eventually meets the community's expectations, demonstrating her growing integration into their way of life. This aligns with the study of Ladzekpo, Attiye, and Davi (2024) that the narratives reflect how male perspectives, consciously or unconsciously, shape notions of morality, agency, and relational dynamics among female characters. The narrator's description of Waywaya's evolving craft underscores her successful blend of personal heritage and local customs as shown below.

> *…Waywaya asked if she could weave... She did not use the patterns from where she*

came; she fashioned new ones, using the primary reds and blacks of the Taga-Daya and in time, she made trousers for Dayaw, for Parbangon, and last of all, a dress for herself. (p.12).

Similarly, in Luis Joaquin Katigbak's story, Kara's journey exemplifies her conformity to the moral standards of her environment in the late 20th century. Despite facing unwelcoming conditions, she adapts by normalizing the discomfort and treating the persistent noise as background hiss. Her ability to adjust to such challenges reflects her moral alignment with the societal expectations imposed upon her. Through Kara's perspective as shown in the lines, the narrative underscores the personal sacrifices and internal resilience required to conform and endure in a demanding environment.

…I don't really mind all that, though. I've rented worse places… The noise I can tune out after a while; it just becomes like a background hiss, like the white noise of an off-duty TV… (p. 1).

Luis Joaquin Katigbak reveals Kara's deep conformity to her surroundings in the late 20th century through her acceptance of the unpleasant aspects of her environment. Her ability to adapt and tune out these discomforts highlights her struggle to align her morals with the evolving expectations of her new circumstances. It has a resemblance to the idea of Infante et al. (2010) that individuals often conform to societal expectations instead of pursuing personal aspirations, as adhering to established norms is generally perceived as more convenient than creating an alternative path. This notion is reflected by Luis Joaquin Katigbak in Kara's submission to her living conditions, as she notes the common place and the nature of her experiences despite the persistent discomfort:

…The springs creak as I lie down. I take a deep breath, close my eyes. I can hear another argument starting next door. I can hear the scratching and scrabbling of my two rodent roommates as they cavort… (p. 8).

2) Deviance

Nick Joaquin, Manuel Arguilla, and Jose Dalisay portray their female characters whose morals deviate significantly from societal norms in the Spanish period, early 20th century, and 21st century. This deviance underscores a departure from accepted ethical and legal standards, reflecting their resistance to prevailing moral codes. Through these characters, the authors reveal the personal and societal conflicts that arise when women challenge or defy traditional expectations. This is evident in the study of Aguilar (1989) that Filipino women often deviate from expected societal norms, challenging traditional morality while navigating family and community roles and asserting their presence in public life. This is evident in the character of Natalia Godoy from Joaquin's *Guardia de Honor*, where her moral deviance is illustrated by her unexpected emotional choice, to defy societal expectations. Her father's reaction highlights the stark contrast between Natalia's desires and the rigid norms of their society, as shown in the following quoted lines:

…Suddenly forlorn—" I love" is the door girls slam in their fathers' faces—speechlessly turned away. He had always expected, of course, that she would marry someday—but not that she would fall in love…. (p. 80).

Nick Joaquin portrays Natalia Godoy's character, exemplifying the broader theme of moral deviance. Her refusal to adhere to her father's expectations reflects a deep-seated tension between personal desires and societal norms. This is significantly related to the idea of Colman (2015) that deviance, as related to morals, is a system of actions or individual actions that depart from socially acceptable legal and ethical standards. This is evident in the lines of Natalia with her granddaughter about her choice, revealing both the profound internal conflict she experiences and the intense societal pressures she endures. Through her lines, Nick Joaquin highlights the tension between pursuing personal desires and adhering to societal standards, capturing the essence of her moral deviance.

…Well, I know nothing of this fate of yours; but I do know that people call me a very stubborn girl! Do you know what it is to love? (p. 87).

Likewise, Manuel Arguilla depicts the Wife's morals as deviance in his story *The Man, the Maid, and the Wife* by challenging the early 20th-century societal norms. The Wife's refusal to show compassion towards Martina, despite her gender, exemplifies her rejection of traditional moral expectations within her community. Her harshness, as revealed in her pointed inquiry, underscores a deeper defiance of social conventions, reflecting a broader commentary on the struggles between personal values and societal norms. This is reflected in these quoted lines.

…I could have applauded her. It was exactly what I had been wanting to say. At my wife's words, Martina became almost tearful. (p. 104).

This portrayal of moral deviance in Manuel Arguilla's story reflects that the Wife's actions stand in sharp contrast to the expectations of the early 20th century, illustrating how deviance manifests differently depending on the character's circumstances and personal values. This aligns with the study of Brauer and Chekroun (2005) that actions which violate social norms may include both informal social rules or more formal societal expectations and laws, which are also considered deviant behaviors. This is evident in the character of the Wife, as her husband's decision to defer an important matter to her highlights her significant role in making choices.

His reluctance to address the issue directly and instead calling his Wife underscores her influence and autonomy within their relationship. This moment reveals how the Wife's deviation from traditional norms is not just a personal rebellion but also a reflection of her empowered position in the household. This is captured in his admission when he states:

…I picked up the Esquire, opened it, closed it, put it down, and still I could find no word to say. So, I called my wife who is in the sala. (p. 104).

Similarly, in José Dalisay's story *Goats 4 Sale*, the Girl embodies moral deviance in the 21st century by defying societal norms. Dalisay characterizes her as challenging conventional expectations. This portrayal highlights her deliberate departure from age-appropriate and culturally accepted standards, emphasizing her rebellion against established norms as illustrated by Rod's description of her appearance.

…She looked like she could have been anywhere between fifteen and twenty– very likely fifteen trying to look like twenty, the foal-like slenderness of the younger girl merely exaggerated by the ridiculously heavy makeup. (p. 470).

In José Dalisay's *Goats 4 Sale*, the Girl's behavior sharply contrasts with conventional norms. Her actions challenge the traditional expectations imposed on her, particularly in her interactions with an older man. It has similarity with the idea of Hundert (2011), deviance involves actions that violate societal norms, causing harm to individuals and society. It often results in isolation, treatment, correction, or punishment for the deviant.

This is evident when she bends over through the open window on the passenger's side, and Joel observes the driver, a man in his fifties or even older. This moment reveals not only her willingness to engage in behavior deemed socially unacceptable but also her resistance to conforming to established moral standards, as shown in the lines of the narrator below.

She bent over through the open window on the passenger's side, and Joel thought he saw the driver ---a man in his fifties or even older—… (p. 470).

The portrayals of Filipino women's morals across various periods reveal their responses to societal norms, ranging from conformity to deviance. F. Sionil Jose's Waywaya in the pre-colonial period illustrates her conformity through her gradual adaptation to the Dayaw community. Nick

Joaquin's Natalia Godoy in the Spanish period defies societal expectations, prioritizing personal desires. Manuel Arguilla's The Wife in the early 20th century demonstrates deviance by assertively navigating her circumstances. Luis Joaquin Katigbak's Kara in the late 20th century reflects conformity and enduring societal pressures, while Jose Dalisay's The Girl in the 21st century epitomizes deviance as she survives in a marginalized role. These portrayals offer a nuanced exploration of morality as a dynamic interplay between personal agency and societal expectations.

b. Decision-making

In this study, decision-making refers to the basis of female characters' decisions and how they arrived at their choices for themselves and their families in multigenerational periods as depicted by male short story writers in their selected short stories. This decision can be approached in a rational manner, based on logic and reason, or in an irrational manner, based on emotion and intuition.

1) Irrational

In their short stories, *Waywaya* by F. Sionil Jose and *Guardia de Honor* by Nick Joaquin, the female characters' decision-making is portrayed as irrational during the pre-colonial and Spanish periods. Women appear to be irrational in their decision-making when they are based on emotion and intuition.

In the short story *Waywaya*, F. Sionil Jose's female character Waywaya has choices that are deeply influenced by emotion and intuition, mirroring the cultural and social norms of the pre-colonial era. This occurs when she chooses to swim in the river by herself, despite the danger that awaits her. It reveals her curiosity and a natural inclination to explore the unfamiliar, even if it means exposing herself to risky situations. Dayaw encapsulates this in the following line.

> *…you silly girl, going there alone and so far away from home. What were you doing there by yourself, anyway?" he paused and laughed… (p. 4).*

F. Sionil Jose portrayed Waywaya's decision-making as a blend of innocence and emotional impulsiveness. Her actions are not dictated by logic but by a childlike wonder, a strong emotional connection, and an unawareness of the world around her during the pre-colonial era. This is similar to the idea of Dawes (2021) that there is a self-contradiction in irrational decision-making because the decision-maker does not fully understand the various alternatives and thereby fails to appreciate a possible self-contradiction. This is evident in the character of Waywaya when the narrator explains why she chooses to go alone in the river, as shown in the following lines.

> *…she was curious, that she would have crossed the river, too, if only she were made to run swiftly like a deer, that she had gone up the mountain often… (p. 8).*

In like manner, Nick Joaquin's *Guardia de Honor* explores the complexities of decision-making during the Spanish period in the Philippines, where women's choices were often swayed by irrational decision-making rather than rational thought. Nick Joaquin illustrates Natalia's struggle with decisions influenced by her emotions and premonitions. This becomes particularly clear when Natalia's father explains that her choice of companion for the procession is based on her emotion, as indicated by her father's words.

> *…But I told you, Natalia, when those young men first spoke to me, that you yourself should decide. Whatever your choice, I would have approved of it. I believe in the reasons of the heart… (p. 81).*

Nick Joaquin illustrates Natalia's decisions to follow her heart, valuing emotional authenticity over rationality during the Spanish period. Natalia's feelings, depicted by Nick Joaquin, have the power to greatly influence, modify, or even dictate the outcomes of her choices. This aligns with the ideas of Whitener and Salter (2022) and Profeta (2017) that emotion can influence decision-making, and women are often

underrepresented in these processes. Natalia's growing dread prompts her to reconsider being with Esteban, whom she doesn't love. Her desperate plea to change her decision reveals how fear and intuition shape her thoughts, as shown in the next lines.

> *…There was something else, Aunt Elisa—something terrible, a feeling of something terrible about to happen! We cannot ride with Estaban—we must not ride with Esteban! Oh hurry, Auntie, and tell him so —but hurry! hurry! (p. 88).*

2) Rational

As represented in the prose fiction of Manuel Arguilla, *The Man, the Maid, and the Wife* during the early 20th century, Luis Joaquin Katigbak, *Kara's Place* in the late 20th century and Jose Dalisay, *Goats 4 Sale* in the 21st century, rational decision-making are portrayed by these authors in their female characters. Women use rational decision-making to achieve goals by evaluating a set of alternatives, assessing their consequences, prioritizing them by importance, and making optimal choices.

The portrayal of the Wife's decision-making shifts to one rooted in logic and reason in Manuel Arguilla's *The Maid, the Man, and the Wife*. The male writer shows the Wife as rational and deliberate in her actions, navigating her domestic environment with a clear sense of purpose and control. This is evident in the dialogue between the Wife and her husband when they discuss their new housemaid. The wife knows how to handle her husband's attitude, which helps her decide on choosing their new maid. It shows that her choice of maid is guided by more than appearances. She values qualities and practical attributes that align with their needs. This is shown in the following quoted lines:

> *…She's ugly as sin," I remarked to my wife mildly. "You would notice that first thing, of course," she said. "Well, I am not exactly blind," I retorted. "Exactly," my wife said. "That's why I am glad about Perfecta. (p. 104).*

Manuel Arguilla shows that the Wife can remain grounded and rational, even in the face of her husband's more surface-level observations in the early 20th century. Arguilla portrays the Wife as observant of her actions, which makes her become rational in her decision and has good outcomes of her choices. This aligns with the idea of Uzonwanne (2016) that when someone acts based on rational decision-making, the outcome tend to serve their self-interest while remaining consistent with their personal values.

This is more evident in the dialogue between the Husband and the Wife when the Husband wants Perfecta to be dismissed, but the Wife insists on not dismissing her. This exchange shows the Wife's methodical approach to decision-making, where she seeks clear information before making a judgment as depicted in these quoted lines.

> *…We will have to dismiss her," I announced firmly. "Immediately. The whole thing is intolerable. Ridiculous." "…You aren't going to dismiss nobody," said my wife "Nossir, Perfecta stays. (p. 108).*

Similarly, Luis Joaquin Katigbak's *Kara's Place* continues this theme of rational decision-making in the late 20th century. Katigbak portrays Kara as a female character who navigates her circumstances with logic and a strong sense of self. The protagonist's decisions are driven by a clear understanding of her situation and a deliberate choice to act in her best interest. Katigbak shows this in the scene when Eric tries to kiss Kara. Kara pushes her away to show she has control and is making rational decisions to protect herself.

> *…I push him away, with all the strength that suddenly surges into me. He staggers, and for a second he looks like he's going to fall, but he manages to plant his hand on the table for support. (p. 7).*

Luis Joaquin Katigbak portrays Kara has sensible thoughts which lead her to arrive at her best decisions and make her rational in the late 20th century. She knows where and when to set boundaries because she thinks carefully about the consequences of her actions. This

conforms to the study of Julmi (2019) that a sensible decision-maker examines and assesses occurrences, reactions, and feedback before drawing conclusions and thinking to make decisions is an example of rational decision-making. This is revealed in the lines of Kara when she stops Eric to confront her Math 17 professor.

> *…Eric, I swear to God, if I pick up the Collegian next week and find out he's the lead story, I'll never talk to you again. (p. 6).*

Likewise, Jose Dalisay's *Goats 4 Sale* also portrays rational decision-making, rooted in the harsh realities of life in the 21st century. In the story, the female character, known as The Girl, demonstrates a decision-making process guided by logic and reason, showcasing her acute understanding of the environment. This is exemplified in the conversation between the goat's dealer and Rodney, where the dealer explains The Girl's strategic approach.

> *…She's a new one," he said, counting out the change. "Hasn't been there for four days. Start early because the real pros will be coming soon and she's going to have to find another tree, or a pimp if she wants to keep working. (p. 471).*

Jose Dalisay reflects a brutally rational approach to decision-making, where the character assesses her situation and makes choices that will facilitate her to continue working. The Girl's decisions are not influenced by emotions but by a strategic understanding of the world she inhabits. This is related to the concept of Burns and Roszkowska (2016) that rational decision-making is concerned with finding the best means to given ends in the face of a situation where a person considers a finite set of alternatives, ascribes consequences to them, orders these consequences according to their importance and value. It is particularly evident in the observations of the goat dealer, who has been closely watching her from the outset, as shown below.

> *…The cops already picked her up, once, the other day, and she was back in two hours, so you know they didn't give her a free ride home. (p. 471).*

The text highlights Jose Dalisay's depiction of the Girl as she reflects on the actions of the police, demonstrating an acute awareness of her surroundings and the necessity to confront the challenges within her environment. This contradicts with the study of Tiangson (2018) that contemporary prose fictions showed development in women's role in society.

The portrayal of Filipino women's decision-making in the selected prose fiction shows both rational and irrational approaches across different periods. In F. Sionil Jose's *Waywaya*, decision-making is irrational, driven by emotion, as seen in Waywaya's choice to explore the river alone. Nick Joaquin's *Guardia de Honor* also highlights irrational choices through Natalia Godoy's intuition during the Spanish period. In contrast, Manuel Arguilla's *The Maid, the Man, and the Wife* presents the Wife as a rational decision-maker in the early 20th century. Luis Joaquin Katigbak's *Kara's Place* shows Kara's rationality in the late 20th century, while Jose Dalisay's *Goats 4 Sale* depicts the Girl's practical, survival-driven decisions in the 21st century. These stories reveal how decision-making evolves based on cultural, social, and personal factors.

2. Proximity of Women's Representations in Male-Written Panoramas

a. F. Sionil Jose -*Waywaya* (Pre-colonial Period)

In *Waywaya*, F. Sionil Jose portrays the female character as a strong, independent woman who bravely challenges the norms of tribal loyalty for the sake of love and unity. By choosing to love a man from an enemy tribe, Waywaya demonstrates emotional strength and defiance against political norms, which sets her apart from the usual passive portrayals of women. This representation highlights how Filipino women have historically influenced both their homes and their communities, showing a significant shift

from the limited views seen in later colonial stories. In the case of Waywaya, she showed kindness, concern, and respect to the people from the other tribe as shown in the following line.

> *…She was friendly; she smiled at all whom she met and to Dayaw's people and friends, she showed obeisance and respect. (p. 8).*

Her character showcases cultural pride and dignity while also highlighting a woman's ability to bring people together in times of conflict. By acting as a peacemaker and connecting different tribes, she reflects the important role women have played as nurturers and harmonizers in society. This reflects to the study of Hiep et al. (2021) that the empowering roles women held in many pre-colonial Philippine communities, where they were decision-makers and respected as babaylans or spiritual leaders. This is portrayed in the following quoted lines:

> *… Waywaya would not be able to last; her ways, her attitudes were different and all because she was from Laud. The older women made the same remarks... But in time, all the pots in the kitchen were clean of soot, and the firewood rack below the house was neatly stacked. (p. 14).*

Therefore, Sionil Jose's portrayal of Waywaya demonstrates how women's choices, especially in love and loyalty, can break down barriers in society. This echoes the history of pre-colonial Filipino women, whose representation extended beyond being subservient to include spiritual, emotional, and political influence. The prose fiction highlights that these early women had agency and wisdom, and their representation in literature reminds us of the valuable contributions to Filipino culture.

b. Nick Joaquin –*Guardia de Honor* (Spanish Period)

As shown in Nick Joaquin's prose fiction, the character of Natalia embodies themes of devotion, purity, and mysticism, reflecting the Marian image from the Spanish colonial period. Natalia represents religious values and is closely tied to beauty and ritual. This aligns with how women were viewed during the Spanish rule—as caretakers of Catholic morals, often placed on a pedestal but limited in their roles outside the domestic sphere. This is evident in the story when Natalia's granddaughter introduces her to her daughter.

> *… Her name was Natalia, and she was the grandmother of my mother's grandmother and her beauty became a proverb in the family. (p. 79).*

However, underneath this admiration, Natalia's voice is largely silent. Her life revolves around fulfilling a symbolic role defined by societal and male expectations. This reflects the study of Drum (2001) that the experiences of many Filipinas during that time—celebrated at home but denied power and agency in public life. This is reflected in the dialogue between Natalia and her father.

> *"…My poor baby, but you have already chosen?" "Yes, father." "… and not only for this afternoon, " "For all my life." "Good. Then ride with that one." (p. 79).*

> *"…Of course, child. Go and ride with this one you have not chosen, and I shall tell the more fortunate one that, only for this afternoon, he is fortunate." (p. 80).*

Through Joaquin's narratives, Natalia is admired, this admiration also confines her freedom. The prose fiction reveals a realistic portrayal of Filipino women shaped by colonial Catholic ideals, where their worth was tied to their virtue and beauty. This depiction shows that the devotion of women can sometimes mask deeper issues of control within society.

c. Manuel Arguilla –The Maid, the Man, and the Wife (Early 20th Century)

Arguilla, in his prose fiction –*The Maid, the Man, and the Wife*, the Wife was introduced by him as a modern, vocal, and independent woman navigating an emotionally layered relationship. Unlike the more restrained women of earlier periods, Arguilla showed that the Wife can speak her mind and exercise

autonomy. However, underneath this confident exterior is a longing for a meaningful a genuine connection, highlighting the emotional effort still expected of women during the early 20th century.

The Wife in the story is not afraid to express her genuine feelings even if it hurts other people's feelings. The Wife is self-centered. Her focus is more on what she could get or gain rather than thinking of how to help others. She is also self-righteous and overbearing, not considering other person's feelings. Manuel Arguilla revealed the Wife's representation through her husband's observation.

> *…At my wife's words, Martina became almost tearful. Yes, it was true she was going to the province. No, it wasn't true she found another place. (p. 103).*

The Wife's directness serves as both a symbol of her aggressiveness and vulnerability. Arguilla showed that she used it as a form of her defense mechanism against her vulnerability as a woman during her period. This duality reflects the experience of many Filipino women in the early 20th century. They fought for their rights through their vocal approach to societal norms in the Philippines, yet they still face the heavy expectations around emotional support and caregiving (Riddle, 2021). This is shown from the point of view of the husband as well as his conversation with his Wife about terminating their house maid Perfecta.

> *…I laughed and by the expression on my wife's face, I knew I had laughed at the wrong time again. She went out that morning in high dudgeon. (p. 107).*

> *… You aren't going to dismiss anybody," said my wife, "Nossirs, Perfecta stays." "If she goes, I stay, I mean if she stays, I go," I corrected myself, gnashing my teeth in exasperation. "Good riddance," said my wife comfortably." (pp. 108-109).*

Through the Wife's character, Katigbak illustrates that even strong women deal with societal pressure linked to gender. While her honesty and confidence are celebrated, the prose fiction also hints at how female strength is often misunderstood or romanticized by men. This literary representation emphasizes that despite changes in gender roles, deeper emotional challenges still exist.

d. Luis Joaquin Katigbak –*Kara's Place* (Late 20th Century)

In *Kara's Place*, Luis Joaquin captures the silent emotional tension. He represents Kara as cold, indifferent, and deeply wounded. Though she does not vocally speak, her character reflects the emotional burden many women in the late 20th century endured—expected to remain silent and dignified despite the objectification of their environment. Through Kara's perspective, the narrative underscores the personal sacrifices and internal resilience required to conform and endure in a demanding environment. This is shown in the following quoted lines:

> *…Of course, I know enough never to step out of the bathroom wearing just a towel or even a bathrobe; but for my landlord's useless son it's apparently a turn-on just to see me in shorts and slippers. (p. 1).*

Kara's silence about her situation is not merely submission—it becomes an act of resistance. Her refusal to confront the people who objectified her is a form of controlled defiance, showing how women in patriarchal settings found subtle ways to assert themselves. Meanwhile, Kara's portrayal as a passive object of desire highlights the double oppression of class and gender, reflecting how women were often sexualized by society and exploited in both literature and real life. This is prevalent in the study of Casil-Batang (2021) that more favorable characterization for men than women. Katigbak shows that Kara avoids conflict and promotes healthy relationships with other characters by failing to communicate her feelings and thoughts, as shown in the following quoted lines:

> *…I also feel like asking, hey, wait, what are we anyway? What's this fetch-me-every-day business? Did I miss something? Aren't we getting a little bit ahead of ourselves? (p. 3).*

> *…There are times when I wish rats could talk. Hell, there are times when I wish dogs could talk, and cats, and all sorts of animals, and inanimate objects too—I could have conversations with my books, and ask my clothes which of them I want to go out with today. (p. 7).*

Katigbak's prose fiction mirrors the gendered dynamics of the period, where female was mistaken for weakness but were layered with suppressed rage and resilience. It reveals the emotional complexity of women's experiences under patriarchy—unheard yet deeply felt. The literary representation resonates with the real-life struggles of Filipino women balancing dignity, pain, and limited social mobility in a rapidly modernizing yet still male-dominated society during the late 20th century.

e. Jose Dalisay –*Goats 4 Sale* (21st Century Period)

As represented in *Goats 4 Sale*, Jose Dalisay provides a striking look at a woman who is treated as a commodity in society. The Girl, as a female character, is caught in a web of poverty and male control, highlighting the tough situations many Filipino women find themselves in, especially those from disadvantaged backgrounds. This is also reflected in the dialogues of Rodney, who becomes interested in the Girl because of her appearance.

> *"…I wonder how much she charges," said Rodney…Before walking over to his new friends, the dealer turned to Rodney and said, "Maybe five kilos of goat meat?" (p. 471).*

Dalisay shows that the Girl's body becomes a point of negotiation, and her dignity is often compromised by the way her relationships are shaped by transactions. Dalisay does not sugarcoat her experiences; instead, he presents her as a real figure who quietly endures the exploitation she faces. This reflects the study of Goncena (2020) that the ongoing issue is where women sometimes have to give up their independence just to survive, particularly in economically struggling areas. Dalisay portrays a harsh reality where the Girl, likely involved in prostitution, is commodified and dehumanized by the men around her. This is reflected in the following quoted lines:

> *"…a red Nissan Sentra pulled up between them, just a little past her, and she ran over quickly to speak with the driver, who seemed to be asking questions. She bent over through the open window on the passenger's side". (p. 470).*

Through this honest depiction, Dalisay sheds light on the enduring presence of patriarchal systems in 21st-century society. His prose fiction serves not only as a critique of traditional gender roles, but also about economic unfairness. The Girl in *Goats 4 Sale* represents many silent Filipino women whose lives are influenced by the challenging mix of gender, poverty, and lack of power. Her story is one that resonates deeply and highlights urgent social issues that society needs to address.

Conclusion

The study aimed to analyze the portrayal of Filipino women's representation in terms of morals and decision-making across different historical periods and to examine how male-authored prose fiction reflects or diverges from real-life gendered experiences. Using feminist literary criticism, content, analysis, and narrative analysis, five prose fictions from the precolonial, Spanish, early 20th century, late century, and the 21st century periods were examined.

The findings showed that women's morality was represented differently across time. In the precolonial, late 20th, and contemporary periods, female characters generally conformed to the values of resilience, integrity, and strength, reflecting women's real-life moral roles in society. By contrast, the Spanish and early 20th century periods portrayed morality in a deviant manner, limiting women to submissive and restrictive ideals tied to religion, patriarchy, or emotional burdens. In terms of decision-making, the precolonial and contemporary periods showed women exercising greater autonomy and rational judgement, while the

Spanish and Early 20th century periods restricted women's ability to make choices, presenting them as dependent on male or communal authority. The late 20th century period reflected a transitional stage, where women demonstrated quiet resistance and partial decision-making power but remained constrained by patriarchal norms.

Overall, these findings indicate that Filipino male-authored prose fiction both conforms to and deviates from real-life gendered experiences, depending on the historical period. The precolonial and contemporary portrayals were closest to reality, while the Spanish and early 20th century depictions were the most deviant, with the late 20th century showing a gradual shift toward action.

This study is limited to five male-authored prose fictions in English, which narrows the perspectives considered. Future research may expand by examining female-authored works, vernacular literature, and digital narratives to compare how morality and decision-making are represented across gendered authorship and evolving literary forms. Such studies would deepen the understanding of how literature both mirrors and shapes societal views of Filipino women.

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