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The Modern Filipina Archetypes and Ambiguities in the *Wildflower*

Teleserye vis-à-vis Filipinos' Sensibilities

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ABSTRACT

The article is a discourse analysis of the *Wildflower teleserye*, exploring the themes and portrayals of the main character and the ambiguities projected by her characterization. The research's objective revolves around the details that upon the attempt of the teleserye to flaunt the modern archetypes of a Filipina, a strong and empowered woman who liberates under the yoke of patriarchal hegemony, her actions and ways were deemed crucial and subjected to great scrutiny. The researcher also dealt with how these portrayals affect and reflect the Filipinos' way of thinking and sense of morality. Two major literary theories were used to underscore the article's crucial points. To show how the woman portrayals in *teleserye* try to subvert the idea and configuration of patriarchy, Feminism (Helene Cixous) was used. Meanwhile, Deconstructionism (Jacques Derrida) was employed to show that in the attempt of the *teleserye* to empower the woman lead character, remove her from her marginalized and stereotypical views, and liberate her from the yoke of patriarchal hegemony, the result was otherwise. Based on these analyses, a synthesis of Filipinos' sensibilities on how it affects and reflects their ways of thinking was crafted.

INTRODUCTION

People learned to sway in the ripples of the fast-changing state of their surroundings. As a classic song line goes, "everything is in constant change." These changes have an impact on society, culture, and people. In gender equality, women continue to push beyond machismo, establishing themselves as humans who live in the same world (Graff *et al.*, 2019). Women's roles undergo metamorphosis as "modern women" recognize their worth, equal place, and equal rights in the social, economic, and political arenas. They learned to break free from the shadows of men and forge their own identities (Hudson *et al.*, 2012). In the field of politics, for example, Senator Meriam Defensor Santiago, exemplifies a modern woman whose definition is validated solely by her actions, not by culture or other people. She is described as a woman who lives by her principles. It testifies to what Cixous (1981) said: that a woman should break the snare of silence and liberate her soul from its shell (Mendoza, 2012). It is also evident that contemporary or even modern writers, regardless of gender, would always have anthologies of works whose subjects are women.

Moreover, different portrayals of women are highly celebrated in the medium where the audience occupies the biggest share, like movies and television programs (Gil, 2016). Though there are still some *teleseryes* in which women debonair play a typical "Maria Clara" role who typifies the idea of what a Filipina should be like (someone who conformed to society's dictum), most of the top rating *teleseryes* nowadays deviate from the mainstreaming and stereotyping of woman characters. Modern series shows how female protagonists and antagonists demonstrate strength and power that defies popular perceptions of what women should be,

portrayals whose roles go beyond the orthodox and typical Filipina stereotype (Angulo and Tito, 2019). A deviant characterization gives female characters voice and power: both empowering and liberating.

Filipinos are undeniably fanatics of *teleseryes* even long before the start of the new millennium (Garchitorea, 2014). During the late 1980s and early 1990s, Filipinos were captivated by soap operas such as *Mara at Clara* and *Esperanza*, two of the most well-known and well-loved soap operas of all time. The soap opera was coined after the show sponsors, whose products are detergent soap, and its target audience is the mothers at home (Sanchez, 2021). One of the apparent reasons why Filipinos love *teleseryes* is because it mirrors the way of living of the viewers, especially those that are marginalized (Singhal and Rogers, 2012). Filipino *teleseryes* were riddled with tired and overused stereotypes, tropes, and plotlines. The *teleserye Wildflower*, aired on ABS-CBN in 2017, has a revenge comeback theme and has its fair share of these things, but it uses it well. With the viral confrontation scenes that have become "meme-worthy" and iconic on social media, the portrayals of women in the *teleserye* made the series even more enjoyable. The powerplay between and among the characters indicates the juggling of roles between the powerful and the powerless (Ocampo, 2022). Furthermore, the centrality of female characters, mainly how the insecure antagonist thought she could get rid of the protagonist for good, typically by plotting ill events and chaos to the main character (Buonanno, 2017). However, the protagonist is alive and decides to grow a spine and plot her revenge comeback to drag the antagonist's nose in the dirt, making this *teleserye* pikes an exciting lens to study the portrayal of female characters. The paper delves into the details that upon the attempt

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of the teleserye to flaunt the modern archetypes of a Filipina, a strong and empowered woman who liberates under the yoke of patriarchal hegemony, the actions and ways of the woman character seem to be crucial for it calls to be subjected to great scrutiny (especially if standards, like morality to name one, will be considered). Moreover, the researcher would like to know how these portrayals affect and reflect the Filipinos' way of thinking and sense of morality. These intricate portrayals of the woman character will serve as the point of reference for the researcher to discuss his views. As the researcher ventures in his discussion, two significant literary theories are equally important in delineating his points. These are 1. Feminism (Helene Cixous), to show how the woman portrayals in *teleserye* try to subvert the idea and configuration of patriarchy, and 2. Deconstructionism (Jacques Derrida) to show that in the attempt of the *teleserye* to empower the woman's lead character, remove her from her marginalized and stereotypical views, and liberate her from the yoke of patriarchal hegemony, the

result was otherwise. Based on these analyses, a synthesis of Filipinos' sensibilities (on how it affects and reflects their ways of thinking) will be crafted

METHODOLOGY

This paper aimed to reveal the ambiguities of women's portrayal in the *teleserye* and how these modern Filipina archetypes and ambiguities affect and reflect the Filipinos' ways of thinking and morality. To give substance to the objective of the study, the researcher used discourse analysis in evaluating the merit of the teleserye. Selected episodes were purposively chosen, serving as the point of reference in analyzing the content. The framing analysis style and the primary approach of coding, comprehending, synthesizing, theorizing, and re-contextualizing were used to identify the recurring themes.

According to Tyson (1950), structuralist analyses of narrative examine in minute detail the inner "workings" of literary texts to discover the fundamental structural units (such as units of narrative progression) or functions

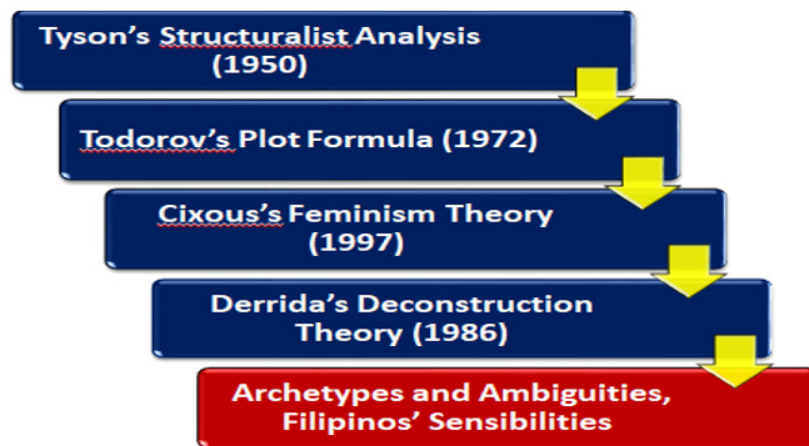


Figure 1: Top-Down Model of analyzing the Modern Filipina Archetypes and Ambiguities in the *Wildflower Teleserye vis-à-vis* Filipino's Sensibilities

(such as character functions) that govern texts' narrative operations. The plot formula serves as the basis for where a writer's work revolves. Once deciphered, it helps the readers to understand the story better. It also allows the reader to unlock the theme of the text he is reading. Feminism by Cixous was used to show how the woman portrayals in *teleserye* try to subvert the idea and configuration of patriarchy, and the deconstruction by Derrida (1986) was used to show that in the attempt of the *teleserye* to empower the woman lead character, remove her from her marginalized and stereotypical views, and to liberate her from the yoke of patriarchal hegemony, the result was otherwise.

DISCUSSION

Gestalt psychology leaves a significant mark in education when it exudes its maxim that the "whole is better than the sum of its parts" (Koffka, 2013). However, many debates devoured the silence as critics dissent such ideas. While it is true that people judge the merit of something by its totality, there is no denying the fact that there are

plenty of elements that fabricate it. When evaluating and judging the merit of a work, the details are crucial because they lay the foundation for the entire object (Wageman *et al.*, 2012).

In literature, every narrative has its structure and depends on how the writer crafts her story. According to Tyson (1950), structuralist analyses of narrative examine in minute detail the inner "workings" of literary texts to discover the fundamental structural units (such as units of narrative progression) or functions (such as character functions) that govern texts' narrative operations. Among the different discussions regarding structuralism, the researcher used Todorov's (1975) narratology of a literary text or the so-called plot formula of a text. The plot formula serves as the basis for where a writer's work revolves. Once deciphered, it helps the readers better understand the story. It also allows the reader to unlock the theme of the text he is reading. Using Todorov's plot formula in the *Wildflower teleserye*, the researcher came up "Search-Realization-Liberation" tale which serves as the warp and woof of the *teleserye's* narratives. Having this

plot formula, the researcher shows how the narratives of the *teleserye* give the dress to the story and give life to the lead woman character.

The Celebration of Woman’s Character

According to Jung (2014), archetypes are based and developed on recurring images, characters, narrative designs, and themes. They are recurrent narrative designs, patterns of action, character types, themes, and images that are identifiable in a wide variety of literary and non-literary text and other forms of discourse. It served as the primary goal of this paper: to look for recurring images portrayed by the main woman character in the *Wildflower teleserye*. “Revenge has never been this

wild” has been the compelling tagline of the top-rating *teleserye*, *Wildflower* directed by Onat Diaz, starring Maja Salvador, Joseph Marco, RK Bagatsing, Vin Abrenica, and Roxanne Barcelo, which was first aired on February 13, 2017. The plot revolves around Lily (Maja Salvador), whose life is caught in delirious horror when she and her family meet the influential and powerful Ardiente family headed by Don Emilio (Tirso Cruz III). Lily’s parents were killed by Emilia (Aiko Melendez), and she was lucky enough to escape death (Librarian, 2017). To avenge her unfortunate situation and give justice to her parents, she transformed herself and became Ivy Aguas, a bold and robust woman who claimed revenge for her family. Using discourse analysis to assess the *teleserye*’s worth, selected

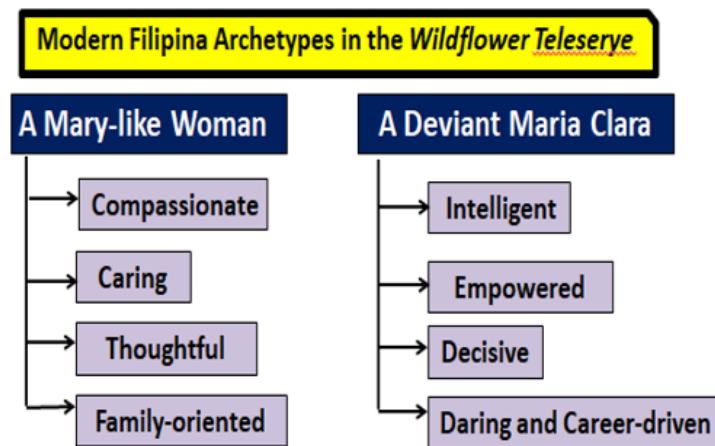


Figure 2: Identified Modern Filipina Archetypes and Ambiguities in the *Wildflower*

episodes were purposefully chosen to serve as a point of reference in analyzing its content. The framing analysis style and the basic approach of coding, comprehending, synthesizing, theorizing, and re-contextualizing were used to identify recurring themes. Based on the analysis, two significant archetypes were found.

The portrayal of the main character in the story is a deviant woman who contradicts the typical portrayals of lead women roles. In the story, Ivy is portrayed as a liberated woman who is independent, intelligent, empowered, daring, and career-driven: all these and other stuff that serves as the elements to pursue her goal, which is to avenge her family from the Ardiente. It is far different from the usual portrayal of a lead woman character who typifies a “Maria Clara-image” that serves as the standard of what a Filipina should be (Sanchez, 2015). Most of the *teleseryes* that conform to the mainstream portray a woman lead character as a debonair who carries the moral standard and is worthy of being emulated (Hau, 2021). However, Ivy’s characterization gives a new dress to a Filipina character that deviates from the norm and character mainstreaming. In the *teleserye*, her characterization speaks of a modern woman whose dependency doesn’t lie to anyone except her trust in herself and will-power to accomplish things. Ivy’s portrayal celebrates how a modern Filipina should act in ways that would liberate her from gender castration

and establish a fortified identity in a world where men are still the ones who control the helm. Her sense of decisiveness and ability to use rational thinking quickly in critical situations attest that she does not resort to her emotions to evaluate and judge things; instead, reason guides her decisions. The typical archetype of the “Maria Clara” image cannot be seen in her character. Instead, it is a blend of an independent and intelligent woman guided by the desire to accomplish a particular goal. Though she has a love interest in the story, in the name of Diego (Joseph Marco), she still managed to fight her emotions and not be controlled by them; hence, she was able to sacrifice her feelings to pursue her desire. This explicit description of the protagonist only shows how the character embodies a new persona different from the usual way of characterizing a lead woman role (Frankel, 2014). A modern Filipina has portrayed a woman of hybridity: she embodies the spirit of Mary-like characteristics: compassionate, caring, and family-oriented, yet she knows how to stand on her ground, is aware of her important roles and definition as a woman, and fights for her rights. These characterizations, which stem from her desire to bring justice to her family, highlight her desire for vengeance and liberation. She must respond to the voice within her; thus, this act effectively subverted patriarchy. Moreover, her portrayals speak about a modern Filipina who, amidst the grueling demand of society and the fight

against the strong current of machismo, she was able to stand up and be on her own. The “search-realization-liberation” tale was put to an end when the Ardiente suffered from her hands and when she got the justice she deserved for her family.

The *Teleserye*'s Ambiguities

In the search for justice, Ivy Aguas realizes that she needs to be a different person, a strong and will-powered woman, to avenge her family against the Ardiente. This situation proves that the woman in the context of the narrative is not a hollow entity because she has her own force that shapes her identity. This point suggests that the *teleserye* promotes a strong feministic touch. The subversion of patriarchal hegemony is found in the aspect where she needs to transform from Lily to Ivy Aguas, a liberation from a weak character to a strong and brave woman whose actions are determined by rational thinking, not emotions (Bindu, 2019); whose life is dependent on no one but herself; and whose decisions are not clouded by subjective predispositions, but instead based on a pure analysis of the situation at hand. However, there are nuances in the *teleserye* that tainted its intention to give voice to the woman character.

The portrayal of Ivy as a woman who would do everything just for vengeance is a strong ambiguity. Ambiguities can be observed by understanding the perception of morally ambiguous characters. Understanding and identifying all of the individual factors is a topic fraught with mystery. Various influences, such as trauma, motives, and actions, influence how morally ambiguous characters are perceived (Boudy, 2022). In the *teleserye*, she was taught how to use people to her advantage. She also learned how to use even her own body, a commodification of “woman’s entity,” to manipulate her rivals, specifically the Ardiente (RK Bagatsing) heir, who will soon be her husband. These wicked portrayals are against the accepted “moral standards,” and instead of giving a strong voice to the character of Ivy, the result was otherwise (Akhtar *et al.*, 2021). There are many ways for the *teleserye* to liberate Ivy from the plights she is experiencing by claiming justice for her family. She does not need to do evil to avenge her afflictions because she also loses a major part of herself in the process of doing these things.

The viewers might put great sympathy on the part of Ivy; however, this sympathy was never sustained, for the measure used by her is a desperate and very hostile act. Instead of proving that Ivy’s character was strong, the turnout of events only shows how frail she was. Her ways to avenge her family prove that she succumbed to grief and anger; hence she lost herself and her sense of identity. It is indeed a terrible mistake rooted in error made by the Ardiente. But it can never be corrected by making another one. As Harris (2019) said, a mistake used to correct another error is like using a double-edged knife. As you cut the other, you also cut yourself.

While it is true that the Ardiente family owns the most significant part of all the blame in the story, Ivy and

Ardiente have the proportionate fault. Due to this, one could say that even if Ivy gets the justice she deserves, she will never be free from the horrors of her actions. The damage she caused to the people surrounding her will never be erased and cannot be rectified instantly; thus, even if justice is served to her, she will never have absolute freedom. The title of the *teleserye* itself was used as a metaphor to describe what she is becoming, a *wildflower* lost in the vast forest of vengeance and anger.

The *Teleserye* and Filipinos’ Sensibilities

The characterizations of the women before always portray a “Maria Clara” image, someone considered to be the epitome of what a Filipina should be (Maguddayao, 2016). Women’s roles are conformist to the Filipino norms, one who serves as a “house” mother, a passive wife, and the light of the family (Lui, 2012). However, in the modern milieu, modern women are career driven, independent, rational, and deviant. These characterizations accurately represent Ivy Aguas (Maja Salvador) ‘s portrayal in *Wildflower*. However, instead of showing strength to her feministic character, the result was otherwise to the extent that it undermined her whole personality.

These modern archetypes and ambiguities gleaned from the *teleserye* speak about Filipinos’ way of thinking and sense of morality. Most Filipinos would sympathize with the pitied state of Ivy Aguas when her family was tortured and killed by the Ardiente; hence, they are rooting in a plot of vengeance for Ivy to claim justice for her parents. Filipinos pity those who are the underdog and abused, characters who are caught and struggling in an antagonistic setting (Bergstrand and Jasper, 2018). The act of the main character claiming revenge or justice for her pitied state also fuels the desire of the Filipinos to watch more of the program and be a fan of the character playing her part. The Filipinos become part and player of the story as they embody the character who mirrors their sphere of reality (Durian, 2013).

The vicarious feeling is evident in Filipino culture and is also why soap operas down to *teleseryes* thrive even in the postmodern world (Manalansan, 2014). But what is intriguing is the fact that though the character of Ivy plays no “Maria Clara” image and one that deviates from what seems to be a long-accepted standard of morality, Filipinos are still apathetic to her character. Moreover, though Ivy’s ways of dealing with her rivals are far beyond the established Filipino values, the viewers would still celebrate her victory over the Ardiente and would be elated if Ivy’s plan favored her.

These nuances in the story reveal how Filipinos are innately entangled with their split-level morality. Even if there is a universal acceptance in the Filipinos’ way of thinking that revenge is a negative term, people would still love to see Ivy avenging her parents and claim justice even if her actions are far beyond moral standards. Moreover, the split-level morality is highly evident in celebrating a woman’s struggle to defy her own “nature”, her process of undergoing metamorphic changes triggered by her

ill-fated situation to the extent of losing her identity to pursue her desire of avenging her parents. This split-level morality among Filipinos is but just another element that causes modern *teleseryes* to also deviate from the old archetypes of what a woman character should be like. That is why in most *teleseryes* nowadays, the woman character is deviant and different from gender mainstreaming, a new persona set in a post-modern milieu.

CONCLUSION

Filipinos love to see women who, amidst their suffering, still learned to stand and fight against tribulations in life; empowered women caught in the world of plagued conformity, yet will not accept passivity in the realm of machismo and would try their best to emasculate men's manipulative power; that even the women's ways go against the standard of morality, people would still be in great mania if the woman character succeeds in her plans. So there is no question if why this *teleserye* aces its rating on top. This *teleserye* reflects the split-level morality that every Filipino possesses. It is part of the secret formula in creating modern Filipina archetypes and innovative stories far different from the soap operas, which are now just part of the Filipinos' history.

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