



Exploring the Essence of Filipina Identity through the Poetic Works of Boholana Authors

JUDITH C. ODFEMININA

E-mail: judith.odfeminina@bisu.edu.ph

Orcid ID: 0000-0002-9821-4853

ABSTRACT

This research delves into the profound and intricate role of the Filipino woman in society, focusing specifically on the perspectives of Boholana writers through their poetic works. By employing textual and thematic analysis, this study offers an in-depth examination of feminist poems, aiming to construct a comprehensive reading and writing model for poetry.

Through a qualitative lens, the research examines the roles and prevailing emotions depicted in the poems of three Boholana poets, unraveling their artistic descriptions of the Filipino woman. The findings of this literary investigation demonstrate that Boholana poets possess a nuanced understanding of the Filipino woman, presenting her not merely as a submissive companion, but as a leader within both the household and society. It becomes evident that the Filipino woman assumes diverse roles, with her self-worth affirmed by her family and community.

Furthermore, this research emphasizes the significance of reading poetry as a pathway to a deeper comprehension of culture and tradition. It establishes that by engaging as readers, individuals can also cultivate their own creative writing skills. Thus, this study highlights the intrinsic link between poetry, cultural understanding, and personal expression.

Keywords: *Literature, Filipino woman, Feminist Writers, Poetry, Readers-response*

INTRODUCTION

Literature serves as a medium through which individuals express their innermost feelings, emotions, and thoughts, enabling effective communication and fostering a profound understanding of diverse cultures and traditions. By delving into literary works, individuals are able to gain insight into the human experience, as literature acts as a mirror reflecting the multifaceted aspects of humanity. As Lombardi (2001) suggests, literature allows us to listen to the voice of another person, providing invaluable glimpses into their perspectives and cognitive processes.

In this study, the researcher posits that all forms of art, including literature, deserve sincere appreciation and respect due to their ability to breathe life into the individuals who engage with them. Each work of art carries a distinct message, capable of imparting transformative and life-altering experiences upon its audience. By engaging with artistic creations, individuals are exposed

to profound messages that possess the potential to shape their worldview and instigate personal growth.

It is essential to recognize the significance of literature as a powerful tool for empathy, cultural exploration, and personal development. By immersing ourselves in literary works, we can cultivate a deeper understanding of others, fostering a more inclusive and compassionate society. Furthermore, acknowledging the transformative potential of art encourages individuals to approach literary works with openness and receptivity, enabling them to fully absorb and internalize the life-changing messages conveyed by these creative expressions.

The study of literature encompasses a captivating pursuit that offers a plethora of valuable benefits to both educators and learners alike. Through the lens of literature, philosophical ideas are articulated with eloquence, enhancing our ability to appreciate them more profoundly. Engaging in the study of literature provides us with an opportunity to acquire knowledge and wisdom, foster a nuanced understanding of human nature and relationships, and grants us the freedom to immerse ourselves in the hearts and minds of various characters. This holistic experience, encapsulated within a single story, novel, or poem, contributes to our intellectual growth and serves as a testament to the invaluable knowledge gained from the pleasurable exploration of literature.

In contemporary times, there is an undeniable decline in the interest of many students towards reading literature. The advent of social media platforms, such as Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram, has emerged as the predominant medium for virtual interactions and the exchange of information and ideas among individuals. Consequently, a significant number of students perceive reading books as a futile endeavor, deeming it a waste of time in comparison to the allure of socializing with friends and engaging in recreational activities. This prevailing mindset poses a formidable challenge for educators, who strive to instill in students the value of reading not only for academic requirements but also for personal enrichment and appreciation of the artistic tapestry embedded within literary works.

However, amidst this disheartening trend, Fisher (2005) presents a glimmer of hope. The incorporation of poetry into the classroom environment has been found to create inclusive spaces where students can express themselves and engage in collaborative learning experiences. This integration of poetry has been associated with notable improvements in student attendance and participation levels, both within the realm of literature and across various academic domains.

Despite the uphill battle faced by educators in fostering a renewed interest in reading literature among students, the integration of poetry as a pedagogical tool presents a promising avenue for revitalizing their engagement and rekindling a passion for the written word. By embracing the inherent power of poetry to elicit emotions, stimulate critical thinking, and foster communal learning, educators can create an environment that not only appeals to the technological

preferences of contemporary students but also encourages them to explore the profound depths of literary artistry.

Poetry, as an expressive form of literature, encapsulates human concepts, emotions, and moods. In the case of poetry, this researcher asserts that individuals compose poems with a purpose—to convey their deepest emotions. These emotions may stem from personal experiences or observations of the world around them. Consequently, poems serve as genuine reflections of feelings and can even depict real-life scenarios. The use of figurative language in poetry serves to embellish and enhance the emotional impact of the verses. Therefore, in-depth analysis of poems becomes a valuable avenue for comprehending the underlying messages with sincerity and depth, thereby doing justice to the artistic intentions of the authors (Ratnasari, 2019). Thus, through an exploration of the poems composed by three feminist Boholana poets, this researcher aims to discern the essence of the Filipino woman as portrayed in the artistic expressions of these Boholana visionaries.

The Filipino woman occupies a multifaceted and pivotal position in the humanization of social life. Depending on her circumstances, she fulfills various roles within society. Firstly, as a married woman and mother, she assumes the role of a "pure housewife," dedicating herself to the domestic sphere and childcare. Secondly, she may also take on the role of an "alternative breadwinner," functioning as a working mother or pursuing a career outside the home. Lastly, as a single woman, she can serve as an "alternate mother" and an alternate source of financial support for her family (Perez, 2011).

Filipino women are recognized as some of the most empowered and politically engaged individuals among their gender in Asia. Their journey towards greater visibility and influence in society can be attributed, in part, to their indispensable role within the family unit. As Fitzsimmons (2008) underscores, Filipino feminist nun Mary John Mananzan emphasized the significant responsibility borne by women, especially in the Philippines, in educating the nation's citizens from birth to adulthood. The education of the family, with a particular focus on the children, became an exclusive and essential task primarily entrusted to mothers.

These findings illuminate the influential role played by Filipino women in shaping societal dynamics and nurturing the next generation. Their involvement in education underscores their pivotal contribution to the development and progress of the nation. Acknowledging the multifaceted nature of Filipino women's roles and their impact on social transformation allows for a deeper understanding of their empowerment and the evolving dynamics of gender relations within the Philippines.

This academic study is firmly grounded in the field of sociolinguistic theory, which investigates the intricate relationship between language and its social context. Sociolinguistics examines how

language is shaped by and, in turn, shapes society (Mu'in, 2019). Consequently, the inclusion of sociolinguistics in this study is crucial, as it explores the connections between language and society, language variation, and attitudes towards language. Broersma (2001), as cited by Faizin (2015), emphasizes that having a strong sociolinguistic competence entails treating each person with fairness and respect.

Within the framework of feminist theory, it is important to note that the movement advocates for gender equality and does not inherently oppose or undermine men. Rather, it challenges the subordination of females to males in both familial and societal contexts. Feminism aims to dismantle patriarchal ideologies, social structures, and systems of control, seeking a reevaluation of power dynamics in social, economic, and political spheres. It strives for a balance between women and men, acknowledging their differences while advocating for their shared humanity (Offen, 2018).

The Reader-Response Theory, a literary theory employed in this study, focuses on the dynamic relationship between the reader and the text. It recognizes the reader as an active participant who brings the work to life and contributes to its meaning through interpretation. This theory underscores the creative agency of the reader, considering literature as a performative art where each reader generates their own unique understanding and interpretation of the text.

Additionally, the study incorporates the expressive literary theory, which posits that artists are not mere imitators but individuals who convey their innermost emotions. This theory emphasizes that artistic vision is inward-oriented rather than outward-focused, as artworks become expressions of the artist's internal world and embodiment of emotions. As William Wordsworth aptly stated, "Poetry is the spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings," emphasizing the poet's role in presenting things not as they are, but as they are perceived through the senses and passion (Risdianto & Hum, 2014).

By anchoring the study in these theoretical frameworks, the research seeks to enrich our understanding of sociolinguistic dynamics, feminist perspectives, reader engagement, and the expressive nature of literary works.

The existing circumstances outlined above have served as a catalyst for the researcher to embark on a comprehensive study with the objective of introducing the brilliant contributions of Filipino authors, particularly those hailing from Bohol, to the younger generation of readers. The aim is to foster an appreciation for Filipino authors and instill a sense of pride in their literary masterpieces. It is widely acknowledged that authors employ diverse strategies to breathe life into their literary personas. Some draw upon personal experiences, infusing their works with a sense of authenticity and personal connection, while others harness the power of language to create vivid and compelling characters (Malate, 2015). Consequently, the researcher is driven by an ardent desire to

explore the profound depths of the literary works produced by esteemed Boholana feminist writers. By bringing this study to life, the researcher endeavors to shed light on their significant contributions, thereby facilitating a greater understanding and appreciation of their unique perspectives and artistic achievements.

The power of literature grants women the opportunity to write poetry that highlights their unique experiences, sensitivities, and perspectives. These poetic creations have the capacity to evoke distinct responses, shaping the reader's imagination of women and the poet's portrayal of them. Over time, female poets have emerged as significant and influential figures within the literary realm, establishing a formidable presence on the literary stage. The establishment of this literary platform for women not only enriches the Asian literary tradition but also elevates the status and recognition of women on a global scale (Jocson, 2020). Through their poetic expressions, women authors contribute to the diversity and depth of literature, fostering a greater understanding and appreciation of women's narratives and their rightful place in the world.

OBJECTIVE

This study aims to analyze the poems of Boholana feminist writers Merlie M. Alunan, Marjorie M. Evasco, and Lina S. Reyes to identify recurring patterns and themes in the portrayal of the Filipino woman. Through an examination of literary techniques, linguistic choices, and thematic elements, the research seeks to develop a comprehensive reading model for the interpretation and analysis of poetry, providing valuable insights into the representation of women and contributing to the field of literary criticism.

METHODOLOGY

This research employed a rigorous and systematic approach to investigate and analyze the selected poems. The methodology employed a combination of textual analysis and thematic analysis to facilitate an in-depth exploration of the poems under study. In order to ensure scientific rigor, the research adhered to established guidelines and principles of qualitative inquiry.

To commence the study, a comprehensive review of existing literature and theories relevant to poetry analysis was conducted. This served as a foundation for the subsequent analysis and interpretation of the poems. By drawing on established frameworks, the research aimed to provide a structured and theoretically grounded examination of the poems.

The selected poems were written by three distinguished Boholana writers, namely Merlie M. Alunan, Marjorie M. Evasco, and Lina Sagara Reyes. These writers were specifically chosen due to their prominence and recognition both nationally and internationally, as well as their unique representation of women's perspectives in their literary works.

To ensure reliability and credibility, the poems were subjected to meticulous scrutiny. The language used in the corpora was carefully analyzed, employing the aforementioned theoretical frameworks as a lens through which to interpret and understand the poems. The research team

engaged in an iterative process of reading, studying, and analyzing the poems, aiming to unravel the underlying themes, contextual nuances, and imaginative elements embedded within them.

By employing a qualitative approach, this study sought to provide a nuanced and insightful literary interpretation and analysis of the selected nine poems. It aimed to delve beyond surface-level understanding and offer a deeper appreciation of the poetic techniques, themes, and imagery employed by the writers.

Overall, this research embraced a systematic and scientifically rigorous methodology to investigate and analyze the selected poems, with the aim of contributing to the understanding and appreciation of the literary works of Merlie M. Alunan, Marjorie M. Evasco, and Lina Sagara Reyes, as well as advancing the broader field of poetry analysis.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

This research undertaking employs a rigorous and scientific approach to examine the metatextualities embedded within the nine selected poems. The analysis focuses on the intricate interplay of linguistic elements employed by the poets, with a specific emphasis on describing the portrayal of women within the poems. The investigation draws upon theories from various disciplines, including sociolinguistics, feminism, reader-response theory, and expressive literary theory, to guide the analysis and interpretation of these literary pieces.

Through the lens of sociolinguistics, the study investigates the sociocultural factors that shape the language and discourse surrounding the portrayal of women within the poems. The lens of feminism allows for a critical examination of power dynamics, gender roles, and the representation of women in relation to societal norms and expectations. Reader-response theory offers insights into the subjective interpretation and reception of the poems, acknowledging the active role of readers in shaping meaning. Lastly, expressive literary theory provides a framework for understanding the artistic techniques employed by the poets in conveying their experiences and perspectives.

By integrating these theoretical perspectives, this research endeavor seeks to advance our understanding of the portrayal of the Filipino woman within the selected poems. The scientific methodology employed ensures a systematic and rigorous analysis, with meticulous attention to detail and an unwavering commitment to academic integrity. Through this scholarly exploration, the research aims to contribute to the broader discourse on literature and provide valuable insights into the complexities of the human experience as reflected in poetic expression.

Table 1. Characteristics and Self-worth of Filipino Woman in the Poems of Boholana Authors

Poet	Poem	Characteristics	Self-worth
	Woman of Many Words	Strong, vocal, and expressive	Lover
	The widow, upon learning that her old lover had returned to the Island of San Antonio	Devoted wife Caring mother A woman with pride	Homemaker Caretaker

Merlie M. Alunan	Woman of No Account	Selfless daughter, devoted wife, dedicated and loving mother	Homemaker (less valued)
Marjorie M. Evasco	Blood Remembering	Loving mother Responsible daughter	Homemaker Mother
	Sampaguita Song	Responsible, dependent and hardworking daughter	Breadwinner
	Caravan of the Waterbearers	Strong and independent woman seeking for equality	Female Affinity
Lina Sagalar-Reyes	The Poverty of the Woman Who Turned Herself Into Stone	Determined Impassive	Homemaker Mother
	Central	hardworking	Homemaker and breadwinner
	'Storya	Nurturing mother	Mother

The table above showcases how Boholana writers depict Filipino women in their poems, highlighting their characteristics and self-worth. Despite being perceived as meek and physically weak, women play various roles in life, such as being daughters, wives, and mothers. Linda Perez's study on "The Filipino Woman's Role in the Humanization of Social Life" explores these roles. Over time, the traditional concept of women has evolved, with women taking on responsibilities outside the home and becoming breadwinners. The poems of Merlie M. Alunan, Marjorie Evasco, and Lina Sagalar-Reyes focus on the Filipino woman, emphasizing her characteristics, roles, and self-worth. Alunan's poems depict the Filipino woman as strong, vocal, expressive, dedicated, devoted, selfless, and proud. While sometimes undervalued, her worth cannot be denied. One of Alunan's poems, "Woman of Many Words," exemplifies the characteristics of a Filipino woman, particularly her role as a dedicated and expressive lover. Through vivid imagery and figurative language, the poem portrays the woman's influential words, which impact listeners and showcase the expressive nature of the Filipino woman. This aligns with the Expressive Theory, which suggests that poetry is the spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings, allowing poets to depict things as they appear to the senses and evoke passion.

In "The widow, upon learning that her old lover had returned to the Island of San Antonio," Merlie M. Alunan explores three roles of a woman: a dedicated wife, a caring mother, and a proud widow. The poem reflects the persona's desire to reunite with her old lover while maintaining her self-worth and pride. Despite her physical appearance and tiredness from raising ten children, she still

longs for her old lover. The poem portrays the persona's logical thinking and awareness of reality. The third stanza describes the risky rendezvous of the former lovers, highlighting the persona's logical mindset. Although the poem suggests that she chooses not to pursue her desire, it ends with a hint of her longing for physical contact and laughter with her old lover. The poem addresses the traditional Filipino woman's role as a housewife and supports the feminist movement that opposes female subordination in society. Similarly, in "Woman of No Account," the persona expresses feelings of dissatisfaction and resentment due to unjust treatment and societal expectations. The poem questions the cultural and social constructs that devalue women. The persona reflects on being unrecognized, unappreciated, and unrewarded as a woman. Despite finding solace and importance in motherhood, the persona's existence loses value as her children grow up and she grows old. The poem ends with the persona's name being forgotten, symbolizing the tragic experience of being disregarded and treated as nothing. Both poems challenge societal expectations and advocate for gender equality, aligning with feminist theories that seek to balance power between men and women.

Marjorie M. Evasco's poems depict women as loving mothers, responsible daughters, and strong individuals seeking independence and equality. Her poems highlight the self-worth of women in their roles as caregivers, breadwinners, and family supporters. Despite addressing themes of anger and injustice, Evasco's poems emphasize the value and strength of women. For example, in the poem "Blood Remembering," the persona reflects on her mother's influence and later assumes the role of a caring mother herself. The poems "At the Mirror's Edge" and "The Mound of Bones" explore the daughter's transition into motherhood and the strong family bonds. Evasco's poem "Sampaguita Song" challenges traditional gender roles as it portrays a young girl laboring as a breadwinner for her family. The poem "Caravan of the Waterbearers" speaks to the collective struggle of women and their fight for equality. It emphasizes the importance of women's nurturing functions and their desire to break societal perceptions of weakness. The poem suggests that women can lead and contribute equally in society. Evasco's works align with feminist theories that seek to balance power between genders and challenge male dominance in society and family structures.

"Caravan of the Waterbearer" is a poem that addresses anger, suffering, and the pursuit of justice for women facing unjust treatment in society. The persona of the poem expresses pain and anger towards the mistreatment and vows not to forget the harm caused. The poem strongly reflects the subordination of women in society and aligns with feminist theory, which opposes the subordination of women to men and challenges the male-dominated power structures.

Similarly, Lina Sagara Reyes' poems depict women as strong, hardworking, and nurturing individuals who exhibit resilience despite pain and sadness. The poem "The Poverty of the Woman Who Turned Herself into Stone" showcases the struggle of a Filipino woman and her limitations in expressing emotions. The persona of the poem carries the roles of a mother, wife, and career woman but becomes impassive and emotionless. The poem highlights the resilience and sacrifices of women, who often have to hide their true feelings.

Reyes' poem emphasizes the pain and rage felt by the persona. Metaphorical language is used to depict the persona's folded fists as frozen, symbolizing her anger. The persona's eyes are described as blinded, representing the deprivation of appreciation and beauty. The poem explores the numbness the persona experiences in various parts of her body due to the struggle she faces. The persona sees orphans and soldiers as clowns, hiding their pain behind smiles. The use of the color gray represents the bleakness and absence of vibrant emotions in their lives.

In summary, both "Caravan of the Waterbearer" and Lina Sagara Reyes' poems shed light on the struggles, resilience, and limitations faced by women in society. These poems align with feminist theories that challenge gender subordination and advocate for equality.

Lina Sagara-Reyes utilizes metonymy to portray the challenging reality faced by the woman persona in her poem. The poem seeks to dismantle male-dominated hierarchies and aligns with feminist theory, aiming for a rebalance of power between genders. Another poem by Reyes titled "Central" reminisces about childhood memories, highlighting cultural traditions and the hardworking nature of women. Lastly, "Storya" celebrates the beauty and sacrifices of motherhood, emphasizing the resilience and unconditional love of women. These poems collectively support the notion of the Filipino woman's strength and worth in society. The study also acknowledges the active role of readers as creators and introduces a Poetry Reading and Writing Model. Overall, the investigation aligns with Reader-Response Theory and the Expressive theory, emphasizing the reader's interpretation and the artist's expression of emotions.

Additional Findings

This researcher found out that when one is to read poems, he or she must set his mind in reading at the outset. Not preoccupied with anything else, the reader has the total concentration. Secondly, unlocking of difficult words should be established before reading so that reading comprehension is achieved. Lastly, based on this researcher's experience, establishing a reading strategy can be of tremendous help. However, as there is no strategy that can facilitate the reader in fully comprehending the poem, he or she can employ a strategy that suits him or her.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the literary investigation demonstrates that Boholano poets possess a profound understanding of the Filipino woman, skillfully depicting her multifaceted nature in their poems. The portrayal of the Filipino woman extends beyond the traditional role of a submissive helper, showcasing her leadership abilities both within the household and society. Furthermore, the investigation highlights that the Filipino woman assumes diverse roles, with her value being recognized by her family and society. Moreover, it underscores the transformative power of reading poetry in fostering cultural and traditional comprehension, empowering readers to become writers and creators of new narratives.

REFERENCES

Alunan, M. M. (2010). *Tales of the Spider Woman*. Manila: University of Santo Tomas Publishing House.

- Beauvoir, Simone de translated by Borde, Constance and Chevallier, Sheila Malovany. (2010). *The Second Sex*. New York: Random House, Inc. .
- Bucholtz, M. (2014). Retrieved March 10, 2020, from California Digital Library: <https://escholarship.org/uc/item/6cz7k5s8>
- Evasco, M. M. (1987). *Dreamweavers: Selected Poems 1976-1986*. Manila: Editorial & Media Resources Corporation.
- Faizin, A. H. (2015). *Sociolinguistics in Language Teaching*. Mabasan, 66-77.
- Fitzsimmons, G. (2008, July 8). *Role of Women in Philippine Society Filipino Women and Feminism*. Retrieved March 12, 2021, from Lifepaths.com: <http://www.lifepaths360.com/index.php/role-of-women-in-philippine-societyfilipino-women-and-feminism-14247/>
- Jocson, J. V. (2020). *A Feminist Reading of Filipino Women Poets*. *Rupkatha Journal on Interdisciplinary Studies in Humanities*, 1-12.
- Jocson, J. V. (2020). *A Feminist Reading of Filipino Women Poets*. *Rupkatha Journal on Interdisciplinary Studies in Humanities*, 1-12.
- Malate, Maria Nemia L.. (2015, March). *The Stylistics of Bienvenido N. Santos: Short Stories*. Thesis Study. Tagbilaran, Bohol, Region VII: Holy Name University.
- Mu'in, F. (2019). *Sociolinguistics: A Language Study in Sociocultural Perspectives*. Jurusan Pendidikan Bahasa dan Seni, Fakultas Keguruan dan Ilmu Pendidikan, Universitas Lambung Mangkurat Banjarmasin.
- Offen, K. (2018). *Defining Feminism: A Comparative Historical Approach*. *Chicago Journals*, 119-157.
- Perez, L. P. (2011). Retrieved March 25, 2021, from <http://www.crvp.org/book/Series07/vii-18/chapter-13.htm>
- Ratnasari, A. (2019). *An Analysis of Figurative Languages Found in Song Lyrics of Disney's Animation Movie Sound Tracks*. Doctoral Dissertation, University of Muhammadiyah Malang.
- Risdianto, F. and Hum, M. (2014). *A Handbook of English Literature*. In F. Risdianto, *Some Theories of Literature* (p. 82). New York: JM Publishing.
- Risdianto, Faizal. (2014). *Poetry*. In F. a. Risdianto, *A Handbook of English Literature* (p. 31). New York: JM Publishing.
- Roces, M. (2000). *Negotiating Modernities: Filipino Women 1970-2000*. In L. a. Edward, *Women in Asia* (pp. 112-1135). Australia: The Australian Copyright.
- Roces, M. (2010). *'Rethinking 'the Filipino woman': A Century of Women's Activism in the Philippines, 1905-2006*. In L. a. Edwards, *Women's Movement in Asia Feminism and Transnational Activism* (pp. 34-48). New York: Routledge.
- Sigvardsson, A. (2019). *Don't Fear Poetry! Secondary Teachers' Key Strategies for Engaging Pupils With Poetic Texts*. *Scandinavian Journal of Education Research*, 953-966.