

A Gynocritic Reading of Selected Filipino Women Writers' Short Stories

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ABSTRACT

Philippine feminism began with the founding of Asociacion Feminista Filipina in 1905 and Asociacion Feminista Ilongga in 1906 to seek women's right to vote. Women's literature began in 1859 when Leona Florentino, considered "the mother of women's literature", started writing poems and later exhibited her work in Madrid and Paris. In 1925, Paz Marquez Benitez wrote the first English modern short story, "Dead Stars". Merging feminism and women's literature, this qualitative study assessed the projection of women in selected short stories written by Filipino women writers in three feminism waves, namely, First Wave (1800-1928), Second Wave (1960-1980) and Third Wave (1990-present). It also threshed out similarities and differences in projection and proposed a new feminist model. Directed Content Analysis, one of Content Analysis' approaches, was used to analyze these stories. American feminist Elaine Showalters' Gynocriticism, a kind of feminist criticism, was employed as a framework. Results using its Biological Model showed that women's bodies had different meanings, such as bodies for domination and reproduction. Employing its Linguistic Model, women were depicted to have reinforced and also opposed previous related studies regarding women's language. Women were projected as ambitious, egoistic and erotic through its Psychoanalytical Model. Women portrayed positive and negative cultural values in its Cultural Model. A new feminist model who is socially aware was proposed based on the study findings.

Keywords: Feminism, women's literature, gynocriticism, feminist model

Introduction

The researcher used feminist criticism in general and Gynocriticism in particular, to assess selected short stories published during the three feminism waves. Gynocriticism created by American feminist Elaine Showalter (1981) was chosen as feminist lens because it captures the essence of being aware of the literature produced by Filipino women. This study deals with a gynocritic reading of selected short stories written by Filipino women within the three feminism waves: the first wave which happened in 1800s- 1928; the second in 1960-1980; and the third, in 1990 to current period. The First Wave fought for woman's right to vote and other political rights. The Second Wave emphasized education, work and reproduction. The Third Wave deals with respect for women's individuality, such as lesbianism, women of color, Black feminism, Third World feminism, among others. Selected stories were chosen based on specific criteria. These are the following: 1) the theme must be about love, 2) the female character must be a protagonist, 3) the story must have won a literary award, and 4) the story must be published within the three feminism waves.

Theoretical Framework

American feminist Elaine Showalter (1981) created Gynocriticism which has four models: biological, linguistic, psychoanalytical and cultural.

Conceptual Framework

In the Biological Model, this study identified the various messages inscribed on the female bodies. These are: 1) body as silenced, 2) sites of sexual and sensual pleasure, 3) site of alienation, 4) site of domination, 5) site of social deviance, 6) source of imagery, 7) site of social neglect and, 8) body as site for reproduction. In the Linguistic Model, Using the Linguistic criticism, the conversations of female characters were studied. Form, Content, Topic and Use (pragmatics) of language were analyzed. In the Psychoanalytical Model, the female Id composed of being ambitious, egoistic and erotic were examined. In the Cultural Model, values significant to women were studied.

Statement of the Problem

The study conducted a gynocritic reading of selected short stories written by Filipino women using Gynocriticism. The First Feminism Wave (1800-1928) stories are "Dead Stars" and "The Small Key" published in 1925 and 1928 respectively. The Second Wave (1960-1980) stories are "The Sounds of Sunday" and "Unfinished Story" published in 1961 and 1979 respectively. The Third Wave (1990-present) stories are "Welostit" and "At Merienda" published in 1997 and 2005 respectively. Specifically, the study sought answers to the following questions:

1. How are women projected in selected short stories in the three waves using the Gynocriticism theory as to:
 - 1.1. Biological Model of Criticism,
 - 1.2. Linguistic Model of Criticism,
 - 1.3. Psychoanalytical Model of Criticism, and
 - 1.4. Cultural Model of Criticism?
2. How do women writers project women in selected short stories from the three waves as to:
 - 2.1. similarities and
 - 2.2. differences?
3. What feminist model was projected from the three waves?

Research Methodology

The study aimed to conduct a gynocritic reading of how women are projected in short stories written by Filipino women writers. The study is qualitative in nature and employed descriptive design. It used Qualitative Content Analysis, particularly Directed Content Analysis. Using existing theory, researcher identified key concepts or variables as initial coding categories. Next operational definitions for each category were determined by using Gynocriticism. Key concepts were identified. These are the Biological Model of Criticism, Linguistic Model of Criticism, Psychoanalytical Model of Criticism and Cultural Model of Criticism. These are called predetermined categories. These categories yielded subcodes, as follows: in the Biological Model, readings on the body of female characters were used. In the Linguistic Model, form, use, topic and content of language were used. In the Psychoanalytical Model, the female Id, consisting of female egoistic, erotic, ambitious levels were examined. In the Cultural Model, cultural values of female

characters were analyzed. Data was obtained through the following procedures: 1) Selection of the sample, 2) Identification of predetermined codes, 3) Classification of the text data under each code, and 4) Interpretation of the text using the feminist point of view. Based on the findings, a feminist model was created.

Findings

Projection of Women

In the Biological Model, the First Wave female characters in the stories were described as having bodies as a site for domination as in the case of Esperanza and Julia; a body as the site for sensual pleasure and sexual attractiveness in the case of Julia; a body of being alienated and being silenced as in the case of Soledad herself. In the Linguistic Model women used language form, topic, content and use that are distinct and unique to women which confirm empirical studies that there are features of language unique to women only. The Psychoanalytical Model showed Esperanza and Soledad were ambitious while Julia was not. Esperanza and Soledad were while Julia was portrayed as not egoistic. All did not exhibit eroticism. The Cultural Model showed the values in high esteem were as follows: commitment to engagement and marriage, singlehood, and being submissive and domesticated. The Second Wave results showed that Second Wave female characters were described to possess bodies of domination in the Biological Model. In the Linguistic Model, similar to the First Wave, women in the Second Wave used features of language that were distinctly used by females only. The Psychoanalytical Model depicted that Emma and the usherette were ambitious. Both were not egoistic. Both did not show eroticism. In the Cultural Model, women held values of being dutiful and forgiving and being strong. Third Wave findings showed that in the Biological Model, the Third Wave characters were described to have bodies as sites for reproduction, bodies as evidence of social neglect, as site for sexual and sensual pleasure and as site for alienation. In the Linguistic Model, **Third Wave women used obscene language such as “fucking”**. In the Psychoanalytical Model, Third Wave women were ambitious. In the Cultural Model, Third Wave women are strong despite male dominance.

Similarities

Similarities in the Projection of Women in the Biological Model showed that the body as site of domination is the common similarity among all the three waves. In the Linguistic Model, similarities were observed among all three waves in Language Form, Topic, Content and Use. In terms of Language Form, women in the selected stories used expressive words, superpolite words (euphemism), adverb of intensity, psychological state verbs, adjectives and tag questions. They were all impolite, even if they used euphemisms or words that replaced other words to make the word pleasant. With regard to Topic, women discussed separation in marital and boyfriend relationships among the three waves. In terms of Language Content, the use of figures of speech is similar among all the three waves. Women used hyperbole, metaphor, personification and simile in their conversations. With regard to Language Use, similarities between two waves (Second and Third Waves) showed that the Conversational Maxims of Quantity and Quality were violated in the conversations between characters. In the Psychoanalytical Model, being ambitious is the similarity of the Id across all the three waves. In the Cultural Model, being a strong woman is the similarity among the three waves.

Differences

Differences in the Projection of Women in the Biological Model revealed that there are two unique readings: the First Wave women were read as having a silent body while the Third Wave women were perceived to have bodies as sites for reproduction, sources of imagery and evidence of social neglect. These readings were not present in the Second Wave. The Second Wave women did not exhibit any unique qualities.

The Linguistic Model yielded results. In terms of Form, each wave presented differences which are unique to that particular wave. The First Wave women used indirect request, by asking questions so that the men will help them. The Third Wave women spoke obscene language such as "fucking". The Second Wave did not have any unique features. With regard to Topic, the First Wave women talked about another woman, clothes to be ironed and their hometown. The Second Wave women talked about bribery, corruption, and pressuring boyfriend to find work. The Third Wave women talked about their favorite food, husbands' mistress, pregnancy, childbirth, death of a child, desire to work outside the home, desire to visit husband's parents and friends, lovelife and education. In using the first-person and third-person points of view, women who talked to men discussed about different topics. This implies that women in all the three waves are knowledgeable about various topics. Furthermore, women are more talkative than men. There are no differences in Language Content among women in the three waves. This implies that females use figurative language, indicating that they do not want to offend the listener during conversations. This indicates that women are not frank and direct. In Language Use, the First Wave women used performative verbs and felicity conditions which other women in other waves did not utter. This implies that women have strong emotions and they say words appropriate to the situation. In the Psychoanalytical Model, there were no observed differences among the three waves. In the Cultural Model, the First Wave women believed in the commitment to engagement and marital vows, singlehood, and being submissive and domesticated. The Second Wave women held the belief that a wife should be forgiving and dutiful and be strong despite male dominance. The Third Wave women held a similar belief that the woman should be strong despite male dominance.

New Feminist Model

Based on findings, a new feminist model was created in terms of the following: 1) Based on the results culled from the Biological Model, the feminist knows how to take care of herself. 2) Findings from the Linguistic Model the feminist speaks out her feelings and ideas. 3) Based on the results of the Psychological Model, the feminist strives to reach her dreams because she is ambitious. 4) The Cultural Model findings show that the feminist knows how to keep relationships with other people harmoniously.

Summary of Findings

Based on the data analyzed and interpreted, the summary gave an overview of the findings of this study.

Projection of Women in Selected Short Stories in Three Feminism Waves

Biological Model

The First Wave women were characterized as having bodies as silenced; as site of sexual and sensual pleasure, as site of alienation, site of domination and site of social deviance. The Second Wave women were portrayed to possess bodies as site of

domination and social deviance. The Third Wave women were represented to have bodies as site of sexual and sensual pleasure, alienation, domination, reproduction, source of imagery and evidence of social neglect.

Linguistic Model

Form, Topic, Content and Use (Pragmatics) were components studied. Findings showed that a female language exists.

Psychoanalytical Model

The Psychoanalytical Model of Criticism depicted women as ambitious in all the waves. Each woman had a goal that she worked hard to achieve in the selected stories.

Cultural Model

The Cultural Model of Criticism projected women as having different cultural values.

Similarities and Differences in the Projection of Women in the Three Feminism Waves

Similarities were shown in all the three waves. In Biological Criticism, women were revealed to possess a body as the site of domination, in which they were dictated by society to wear things that are presentable to society such as make up and clothes. Women in all the waves were characterized to use language that implied tentativeness. They were emotional, evaluative and used adjectives and figurative language to impart their feelings and ideas. They used language appropriately in some situations and inappropriately in other situations. Based on Psychoanalytical Model, women were illustrated to be ambitious in all the three waves. In Cultural Model, they were featured to own certain cultural values depending on their situation in life.

Differences in each wave were illustrated by each Model of Criticism. Biologically, the First Wave women possessed a body as silenced, which other women did not own. The Third Wave women were represented to own a body as site of reproduction which other waves did not discuss even though the Second Wave had a mother character. The Third Wave women were detailed to drink and eat in excess, so they had bodies as site of social neglect, which other waves did not own. The Third Wave women were illustrated to have bodies as source of imagery because they treated their body parts as human beings.

The Feminist Model

Based on the projection of women in this study, a feminist model was developed. The feminist knows how to take care of herself, speaks out her feelings and ideas, strives to reach her dreams because she is ambitious and knows how to keep relationships with other people harmoniously.

Conclusions

This study was tasked to achieve a projection of women in selected short stories written by fellow women. To achieve this aim, through the Directed Content Analysis, data was gathered, analyzed and interpreted according to the Gynocriticism lens. In view of the findings of this study, the following conclusions were drawn:

1. Women are projected in various images, based on different gynocritic readings, such as Biological, Linguistic, Psychoanalytical and Cultural Models.

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2. Gynocritic reading revealed that there are similarities and differences in each wave. The women in all the waves have learned to cope with changes in their lives and adjust to these changes.
3. The feminist model was created based on the Biological, Linguistic, Psychoanalytical and Cultural Models of Criticism.

Recommendations

Based on the findings and conclusion of this study, the following recommendations are humbly suggested by the researcher for the specific stakeholders:

1. Students should have an appreciation of works created by Filipino women writers. Currently, the curriculum exposes them to Western writers' works.
2. Teachers may be able to present various reading materials written by Filipino women writers, so that their students would gain knowledge regarding Philippine literature.
3. Curriculum developers would include gender in general and women studies in particular in the curriculum for better understanding.
4. Writers may showcase literature showing the Philippine culture, language and psyche of Filipinos.
5. Readers may develop a sense of nationalism and pride in reading works created by Filipino women writers.
6. Future Researchers may want to explore the new feminist model in criticizing literature.

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