

The Mechanisms of Defenses: Mistresses in the Philippine Contemporary Narratives

Christopher Y. Wright

College of Education, Arts, and Sciences
National University, Manila
cywright@national-u.edu.ph

Jerome C. Hilario

Senior High School
Division of Antipolo City, DepEd
jerome.hilario@deped.gov.ph

Abstract: Through the psychoanalytic lens, this paper examined the image of mistresses in the Philippine contemporary narratives. The study covered four selected contemporary short stories by the Filipino female authors (1949-present). To establish warranted assertions for this study, the researcher followed the following stages: (1) drafting the criteria for selecting the authors; (2) crafting the criteria for the literary selections; and (3) analyzing and interpreting short stories. The present study revealed the following findings: (a) the image of the Filipino mistress is remarkably seen as physically beautiful, emotionally stable, and intellectually impressive; (b) the Filipino mistress' behavior is rooted from economical, emotional, and social factors. The factors are nonexclusive and sometimes overlapping; (c) to protect the self, the Filipino mistress has employed different defense mechanisms, which include repression, displacement, sublimation, denial, and projection. Apart from the use of Psychoanalysis in the other Philippine narratives in English, this study also recommends the use of the parameters and set criteria established in this paper in terms of selecting literary texts that can be explored and considered meaningfully in literary research.

Keywords: psychoanalysis; defense mechanism; Filipino mistress; contemporary literature

1. INTRODUCTION

Much has been said about mistresses as they have painted glossy and glittering images of glamorized indecent affairs through the spurt of their narratives in the contemporary Philippine society. The surge of the Filipinos' interest in infidelity carries through media and letters as society patronizes such sensitive mistress-themed works, as it makes the *No Other Woman* a box office record-breaking film, and *The Etiquette of the Mistress*, which is a movie adaptation of Julie Yap Daza's novel of the same title, as a crowd-pleaser. The dominance of these stories continues to uphold a specific place in every household as each has remarkably patronized the teleseryes with the same contents, which are titled as the following: *Magkaribal*, *The Mistress*, *Temptation of Wife*, *A Beautiful Affair*, and *A Secret Affair*. With this phenomenon, it greatly shows that the Filipino writings through media have centered on the persona

of mistress in the Philippine society, thus, makes her stature more prevailing. In fact, she has been dunned with dire names like home-wrecker, *querida*, *kulasisi*, *kabit*, concubine, number 2, and kept-woman, to name a few. Such names collectively mean "a money-grabbing younger seductress" Sison (2015). Also, she has been solely blamed for getting into a filthy affair with a man whom many believe to be simply incapable of resistance Sison (2005), and she is more than a one-night stand and less than a wife and may be considered and treated as a partner, a playmate, or a prostitute Hau, Tuvera, and Reyes (2013). Her literary presence has also manifested that she does not only exist as a flesh-and-blood human being but as a fictional character as well.

With this, a mistress, no matter how she is being doomed, insulted, hated, verbally and physically discriminated against, and cursed for bringing chaos to every family, has been present in every aspect of society,

literature, culture, religion, and history. She has been used for different subjective purposes in exchange of monetary, personal, and sexual grants. To cite, King Solomon, the builder of the First Temple in Jerusalem, had three hundred concubines for sole purpose of personal happiness. John F. Kennedy, a former American President, had a controversial mistress in the name of Judith Campbell for sexual gratification. Also, Camilla Parker Bowles introduced herself to Prince Charles by reminding him that her grandmother had been the mistress of his grandfather (Abbot, 2010). In the Philippines, the ousted Philippine President Joseph Estrada had used state funds for his mistresses' mansions (Doronilla, 2001) as well as the dictator President Ferdinand Marcos (Meyer, 1987), not to mention the many political names in the Philippine congress and senate that have allegedly used public funds for their other women.

The blame and stigma are intense fires that exclusively keep on burning mistress's persona than her man. In fact, Lauser (2006) stated that a man with a mistress may even be admired for being a "real man," which conforms to a macho image of the Philippine society. To counteract, it is assumed that the Filipino mistress is a behavioral strategist who has used some mechanisms which Freud (1921) termed as defense mechanisms, which are considered normal responses against the frustrating, difficult, and painful situations and experiences. Also, it could be noted that there are Filipino mistresses who prefer to be "in a circle" with their fellow mistresses. This practice is seen in the study of Klein and Kunda (1992) that found out a favorable and motivating response to those who are stigmatized people like them if they are together. The Psychoanalytic theory clearly

explains that this is a kind of strategy; a mechanism to somehow protect themselves.

Freud (1921) stated that all people can employ defences that are developed by the ego to protect itself from anxiety. If in case that the id, superego, and reality-made anxieties that provoke demands have penetrated the conscious mind, the ego develops many defense mechanisms to cope with this situation (Freud, 1921). The defense mechanisms safeguard the conscious mind against depraved feelings and corrupted thoughts. Such negative thoughts are products of stigma created by society through the predominant antagonistic persona of the Filipino mistress in literary genres and the domains of Philippine literature.

Since there has been, if none, very limited study attempted to draw the image of the Filipino mistress as depicted by female protagonists in the Philippine narratives written by female authors, this study is conducted to fill the gaps in the literary field. Much focus is given to characters' behavior and performances.

Specifically, the paper sought to achieve the following objectives:

1. Describe the depictions of the Filipino mistress in the following contemporary English narratives:
(1.1) *The Chiefest Mourner* (1949) by Aida Rivera-Ford; (1.2) *Fairy Tale for the City* (1955) by Estrella D. Alfon; (1.3) *Glo* (from *The Hand of the Enemy*, 1962) by Kerima Polotan Tuvera; and (1.4) *The Key* by Socorro Tates (1967).
2. Analyze the Filipino mistress' behavior through the following aspects/factors:
(2.1) economical; (2.2) emotional; (2.3) and social; and
3. Interpret the literary Filipino mistress' behaviors through the Freudian

psychoanalytic view on defense mechanisms.

2. METHODOLOGY

The study used the Descriptive analysis employing Freudian psychoanalysis, centering on defense mechanisms, as its frame of reference to the selected literary selections. The method involves identifying, analyzing, and classifying the protagonists' personality depicted in the texts, and the defense mechanisms that they used. Further, the corpus of the study is composed of four (4) contemporary Filipino mistress-themed short stories in English, namely: (1) *The Chieftest Mourner* (1949); (1.2) *Fairy Tale for the City* (1955); (1.3) *Glo* (from *The Hand of the Enemy*, 1962); and (1.4) *The Key* (1967).

The following steps were highly considered and followed by the researchers:

I. The researchers undertook a wide network of literary researches. Such underwent two phases:

- (A) *Crafting the criteria for the authors:* The researcher surveyed names of established contemporary female authors in the literary field. The chosen four (4) established pen pushers should have received awards and recognitions from both national and international award-giving bodies.
- (B) *Drafting the criteria for the selections:* The selections of the short stories were based on the following criteria: (1) The English stories are written by the established female Filipino authors; (2) The selections are contemporary texts that are published from 1949 to date; and (3) The stories are

centered on the Filipino mistress who faces personal, familial, morality and social dilemmas.

II. The researcher engaged in the rigorous text analyses that follow:

- (A) A close reading of the four selected narratives was conducted;
- (B) The profile of each mistress-protagonist was identified through literary characterization;
- (C) The behavior of each protagonist was studied based on the economical, emotional, and social aspects of their beings;
- (D) Each character underwent a literary analysis using Freud's psychoanalysis; finally,
- (E) The analysis included the employed defense mechanisms of the protagonists.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This paper aimed to draw the image of the Filipino mistress as depicted by female protagonists in the contemporary Philippine fictions in English written by female authors through Freudian psychoanalysis. Specifically, it sought to achieve the following goals: (1) describe the depictions of the Filipino mistress in the following contemporary English narratives: (1.1) *The Chieftest Mourner* (1949) by Aida Rivera-Ford; (1.2) *Fairy Tale for the City* (1955) by Estrella D. Alfon; (1.3) *Glo* (from *The Hand of the Enemy*, 1962) by Kerima Polotan-Tuvera; and (1.4) *The Key* by Socorro Tates (1967); (2) analyze the Filipino mistress behavior through the following aspects/factors: (2.1) economical, (2.2) emotional, (2.3) and social; and (3) interpret the literary Filipino mistress' behaviors through the Freudian psychoanalytic view on defense mechanisms.

1) *The Image of the Filipino Mistress*

To describe the depictions of the protagonists, the researchers have employed the technique of Aristotelian Literary Characterization based on the following aspects: (a) the author’s presentations; (b) the character’s actions, intellect, belief, words, physique, and wardrobe; and (c) the words of other characters about the protagonist. Subsequently, the researchers have profiled and classified the personas’ characteristics based on the following Aristotelian-patterned checklist of aspects/profiles of characterization: (a) physical appearance; (b) emotional stability; and (c) intellectual capacity.

Table 1: The Image of the Filipino Mistress Checklist

Mistress - Protagonist	Aspects/Profiles of Characterization					
	Physical Appearance		Emotional Stability		Intellectual Capacity	
	Attractive	Simple	Firm	Weak	Impressive	Low
<i>Esa of the Chieftest Mourner</i>	✓				✓	
<i>Maria of Fairy Tale for the City</i>	✓					✓
<i>Magdalene of The Key</i>		✓				✓
<i>Glo of the Hand of the Enemy</i>	✓		✓		✓	

Profile1: The Filipino Mistress’ Physical Appearance

The Filipino mistress is remarkably seen as extraordinarily beautiful. In fact, all four (4) protagonists are impressively looking

from the way they talk, act, and dress. The beauty that each one exudes is incomparable as how either the narrator or the other characters describe her. To cite, Esa is depicted as “[a] young, [an] accomplished, and a woman of means.” She carries herself well in spite of social conflicts and pressures. Comparatively, Glo is presented as a strikingly impressive character that has a heart for late parties. Her physical attributes are described as “skinny, unsubstantial, spare-fleshed girl” that for her man would mean sexually appealing. Her remarkable chin deceptively suggests an innocent face that conceals her true being as an erotic woman who is “savage in bed.” With regard to Maria, she blossomed from “a flippant little urchin” into “a bold brash angel of the streets.” Though depicted as a young impish street urchin, her beauty stood out the others that made her man fall in love to her.

However, the character of Magdalene is simple. Though regarded as the company secretary, her image is not striking because she is unpredictable and sometimes aloof and withdrawn. Despite this simplicity, her boss acknowledges her primness and simplicity as “the whole world all to hell” for him.

Profile2: The Filipino Mistress’ Emotional Stability

The matured Filipino mistress is never vulnerable and in a weak position. This is proven by how she is depicted by story that she is in. She has stood still to the test of her character. The conflicts that she has faced help to shape her personality and trigger to become an adaptable being and a protector of his own persona. In fact, the Filipino mistress has been ironed as a strong woman who knows how to fight for what is seemingly hers. She is depicted to have a stronger character and persona than the real wife. Her emotional stability is unmatched for she

knows how to employ ways on how to deal with anxieties brought by social and moral conflicts or issues.

Seemingly, the Filipino mistress has to be strong and resilient for she is just considered the other woman whose purpose for her man is never absolute. Thus, when faced with confrontations, she must also have the guts and the grit in order to withstand the competition with the legal wife as evidenced by her projected strength.

To prove, Esa, the Chieftest mourner, showcases her emotional stability that is beyond compare for standing beside the lifeless man she loved despite criticisms and scandals. Her courage and determination as a mistress is noticeable especially when she attends the funeral where the legal wife and the bereaved family are present. Also, Glo's firmness is supreme. She has shown her steadfast attitude by choosing to commit adultery and spitting such fact in front of her husband. Magdalene is also considered a brave kept woman. Because of life's atrocities, she has to be firm to address financial problems her family is facing. Further, she is considered brave when she can be civil and mannerly in front of her boss' wife. However, Maria, the youngest, is weak for she cannot control the situation she is in. Because of immaturity, she was overpowered by her man's decisions. Her purpose as the other woman is based mainly from the man's need of fighting his own desolation.

Profile3: The Filipino Mistress' Intellectual Capacity

The intellectual capacity of the Filipino mistress is impressively high. Generally, she has shown the ability to learn things and deal with difficult situations in public. In fact, in the case of Esa, her presence in the funeral is remarkably

significant so as how she positions herself. Her expression of great sorrow deeply upon the man's death as she defends her presence and presents her untold sacrifices shows her cleverness. In comparison, Glo, who has been known into late parties has established her name to be one of the "intellectual impostors." Such membership is only exclusively for "arty people" that include "folks from radio and TV who are copywriters and poets at heart." In fact, Glo is known to be a literature lover as she writes her own poetry and is associated with Baudelaire.

Conversely, the character of Maria exudes vulnerability. Though honest, she does not know and master anything in life. To prove, she was taught by his man things like how to '*soften her voice, not to talk unless spoken to, and keep silent without appearing dumb.*' She was not able to go to school but with the man's help, she was able to finish high school. On the same ground, despite Magdalene's usual serene and collected self, she is somehow the same as Maria as she was deemed forgetful and careless as evidenced by the key she had misplaced at home. She is easily confused with things. Her diligence and sense of efficiency is at always at risk.

2) The Behaviors of the Filipino Mistress as Rooted from Economical, Emotional, and Social Aspects/ Factors

The economical, emotional, and social aspects of the protagonist were used to specifically determine the reasons behind their "beings" as mistresses. The researchers have individually presented them with respect to their respective cases as mistresses.

Case No. 1: Esa from the Chieftest Mourner (The Faithful Lover – Emotional Factor)

Esa, a distinguished other, seems to be the chieftest mourner in the narrative. She is a woman of means. In fact, when she became the mistress of the poet, she had already something to offer. Her existence is not dependent on the material needs. Her affiliation to the poet is purely emotional. She stays with him until his last breath because she loves him. In truth, she helped him when he was in the lowest point of his life, and it was her who did the immense sacrifice for the man, not only by "*selling her jewels to earn money*," which is really hard for a woman to do, but also by "*staying at his side to take good care of him when he was ill*." Also, Esa's presence in the funeral is a significant expression of undying and faithful love. Despite the possibility of being nagged and hated by the relatives of the dead poet, she remained and expressed her great sorrow deeply upon the man's death. This is remarkable evidence that she just loved the man wholeheartedly in spite of the awaiting social discrimination.

Case No. 2: Maria from Fairy Tale from the City (The Needy Mistress – Economical and Emotional Factors)

Maria, a young light-fair-haired girl and used to sell cigarettes in the streets, is the mistress who has undergone an evolution after meeting her man. Her impoverished background leads her to the hands of Amado, who through the years, stood by her. She blossomed from "a flippant little urchin" into "a bold brash angel of the streets" under his care. He taught her everything and even sent her to school. Since the time that she was a mischievous, poor and raggedly clothed youngster, she was never left alone. Maria was depicted to be an outspoken, daring, and bold person whom not accustomed to be doing proper and polite things.

From the littlest things to know like how to '*soften her voice, not to talk unless spoken to, and keep silent without appearing dumb*,' were all taught by Amado. With this background, nobody can question her attachment to the man. The feeling that drives Maria to stay with Amado is a result of economic needs that eventually lead to an emotional attachment.

Case No. 3: Magdalene from The Key (The Dreamer – Economical Factor)

Magdalene, also known as Len, is already married and a mother to two teen-aged daughters. From the onset, she has established her weakness as she is deemed forgetful and careless as evidenced by the key she had misplaced at home. She has been pressured by her own family to move into a bigger house of their own. However, since she is just a secretary in the company, the possibility of her dream house for the family is far to be true. Then, here comes her boss who always wants her to be at her beautiful image. The possibility of her dreams since she is young up to the present time for her family becomes very possible, especially when her boss presents to her his gift—the house that she longs for.

The attachment that Magdalene has to her boss starts from her need to achieve her frustrations in life. She is not financially privileged as her family only rents an apartment, but she is trying her best to give her family a nice home and life. Magdalene is indeed a diligent person however, her disloyalty to her family especially to her husband as depicted by having an affair with her boss is a test to her morals and conscience. Indeed, the attachment is purely materialistic.

Case No.4: Glo from the Hand of the Enemy (The Materialistic Mistress – Economical Factor)

Glo is presented as a strikingly impressive character that has a heart for late parties and a member of intellectual impostors. She is known to be a literature lover as she writes her own poetry and is associated with Baudelaire. Her physical attributes are unequalled to her intellect as she is described as “skinny, unsubstantial, spare-fleshed girl.” Despite her physique, she has been known by her man as ferociously erotic woman who is “savage in bed.” Her mastery of the arts in “bed” has been concealed by her deceptively innocent face, significantly her chin. Glo has a complex personality as how her man, Doming, describes it. She is a typical courageous contemporary mistress whose frankness is beyond compare. She is described as a person who will die if she will give up her credit cards. This has been proven to be true as she gives much appreciation and value to expensive materials, including but not limited to, “canvasses, stones, cashmeres, perfumes, and rare rendition or edition of things.” Her attachment to her man is purely materialistic and economical. She needs him as how she needs monetary supports.

3) *In Defense of the Mistresses:*

The literary Filipino mistress’ behaviors were analyzed through the Freudian psychoanalytic lens. The analysis revealed that characters’ performative behavior in the Philippine society is an outcome of their defense mechanisms. Freud (as cited by Tyson, 2014) believed that people’s behavior in society is affected by their unconscious, which is influenced by childhood memories, and driven by desires, fears and conflicts of which they are mostly unaware of.

Hence, the need to unravel characters’ repressed desires and coping-defense mechanisms is deemed necessary.

3.1 *Repression*

All mistress-protagonists manifested repression to some extent. The characters of Esa, Glo, Maria, and Magdalene showed the unconscious “forgetting” to strategically escape from blame and to safeguard their conscious mind and conscience against depraved feelings and corrupted thoughts. They have mastered the “arts of repression” for they act as normal as possible, as if their presence does not bring any conflict to anyone. They have concealed not only their frustrating realities but also the sense and call of their existence – being value-laden people.

3.2 *Displacement*

Displacement involves taking out one’s frustrations, feelings, and impulses and displacing these on people or objects that are less threatening (such as spouse, children, pets, or toys), rather than express anger or any other negative attitude in ways that could lead to negative consequences on the closest family members or self.

3.2.1 *Esa*

The other woman, Esa, who is young, accomplished, and a woman of means, is definitely in love with the deceased poet. She showed her great love and loyalty in the cluster of white flowers placed at the foot of the casket which is telling everyone that she was loyal to the poet up to his last breath. The widow’s veil is also significant and appalling somehow for she is

claiming the position of the legal wife. Her loyalty and steadfastness is displaced in the form of white flowers and of the widow's veil. Also, the mascara which has run down her cheeks made her shrivelled, physically diminished, signifies defeat and gave everyone the idea that she was indeed the chieftest mourner of all.

3.2.2 *Glo*

Glo is inclined with late parties with her stunning friends. Her physical attributes are unequalled to her intellect as she is described as "skinny, unsubstantial, spare-fleshed girl." Despite her physique, she has been known by her man as ferociously erotic woman who is "savage in bed." Her mastery of the arts in "bed" has been her defense to conceal her lacking physical qualities. Also, she is described as a person who will die if she will give up her credit cards. This has been proven true as she gives much appreciation and value to expensive materials, including but not limited to, "canvasses, stones, cashmeres, perfumes, and rare rendition or edition of things." This material attachment is an act of displacing her life's frustrations.

3.2.3 *Magdalene*

The deceiving Magdalene who is serene and has the collected self is remarkably fascinated with beauty and magnificence. Such interest is extraordinarily seen on how she takes care of her flowers such as roses that means sophistication, sampaguita for simplicity, and

orchids for exotic mystery. This likeness is a long-time frustration that is displaced by the less threatening medium—the flowers. Little did people know, Magdalene has repressed her desire since she was a child, from the day that she dreamed of a garden of putter up to the day that she received her boss' house gift. Additionally, Magdalene's act of bathing is her way of cleansing her guilt.

3.3 *Sublimation*

This is similar to displacement but takes place when one manages to displace his negative emotions into a constructive rather than a destructive activity like venturing into art or sports.

3.3.1 *Glo*

Glo is presented as a strikingly impressive character that has a heart for late parties and a member of intellectual impostors. She is known to be a literature lover as she writes her own poetry and is associated with Baudelaire. Her association to literature is a way of putting her regressions into something constructive.

3.4 *Denial*

Denial is an outright refusal to admit or recognize that something has occurred or is currently occurring. Denial can involve a flat out rejection of the existence of a fact or reality.

The four Filipino mistresses have exhibited denial especially with the case of Glo whom showed great rejection of not committing any wrongdoing to her husband. In the same manner, Magdalene

denied the truth when she was asked by her husband and daughters about the large money she obtained for the realization of their house. Generally, the Filipino mistress has the tendency to refuse to admit a truth or a reality, or provide assertions that an allegation is false or never happened. Whenever she is confronted with either a personal problem, or faced with reality, she can simply avoid such by denying its existence.

3.5 *Projection*

Projection is a defense mechanism that involves taking own unacceptable qualities or feelings and ascribing them to other people.

3.5.1 *Glo*

Glo, to enjoy all her luxuries, preferred to become a mistress to Doming. Her standards of living are so high that she definitely needs the resources of the man. When her husband, whom cannot afford to give Glo the life she wanted, got the chance to go abroad and help his detained father. During the confrontation, Glo got the chance to revert the situation and blame Bello for not loving her. For Glo, it is but her husband's fault why their marriage did not work out because he will be leaving the country. But it is Glo whom lied to her husband and chose Doming to satisfy her materialistic self.

3.5.2 *Magdalene*

Magdalene is indeed a good wife to her husband. When Magdalene got the money the boss offered her, she fished out some to her husband for

he was asking to allow him to join the boys as he promised. The money conceals the wife's betrayal to her husband knowing that they are in need of money because of their plan of having a decent home.

4. CONCLUSION

The present study examined image of mistresses in the Philippine contemporary prose in English through the psychoanalytic lens. Much focus has been given to characters' behavior and performances. The study revealed the following findings: (a) The image of the Filipino mistress is remarkably seen as physically beautiful, emotionally stable, and intellectually impressive; (b) The Filipino mistress' behavior is rooted from economical, emotional, and social factors. The factors are nonexclusive and sometimes overlapping; (c) To protect the self, the Filipino mistress has employed different defense mechanisms, which include repression, displacement, sublimation, denial, and projection.

While this study provided some new interesting insights about the Filipina mistress, it also has some limitations. Methodologically, this study employed a descriptive analysis, which limited the research in generalizing all mistresses across places since it only allowed one to make summations about the people. Therefore, caution should be made on the interpretation of the findings provided. Second, the study centered on the defense mechanism and did not thoroughly discuss the theory of the levels of the mind that included: id, ego, and superego. Future studies may include other corpus [i.e. novels, dramas, poetry] and other literary criticisms [e.g. Feminism, Marxism, and others] to fully understand the underlying reasons for the mistress' behavior and to obtain more conclusive results.

Despite its limitations, the present study has clear implications for understanding the Filipino mistress in the English narratives. It likewise contributes the use of the parameters and set criteria established in this research in terms of selecting reading texts that can be explored and considered meaningfully in literary research.

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