

## Man-Woman Conflict in Selected Carlos Palanca: Award Winning Plays of the 1980's

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### ABSTRACT

The study attempted to help shape a fuller and deeper understanding of man-woman relationships and its attendant tensions, complications and intricacies seen and refracted through the feminist perspective and psychoanalytic lens. To achieve this objective, three selected Palanca award winning plays in the Philippines were critically examined to this end: The Chieftain's Daughter by Felix Clemente, Celadons by Dhelia Racines, and Brisbane by Bobby Flores Villasis. Freudian psychoanalytic criticism and feminist perspective guided the analysis and interpretation of the text. It aimed to identify the type of man-woman conflicts in each play and the literary devices which are employed in the plays. It also aimed to examine the confluence factors which underlie the conflicts and the insights into the man-woman relationship conveyed by the selected plays. Based on the analysis, among the devices used to highlight the conflict were dialectics and symbolism. Some of the underlying factors which affect the conflicts were the pressure of traditional value and practices, greed, and insecurities. Thus, this study unveiled the nature of gender and conflict and the understanding of the man-woman relationships through the intervention or mediation of literature.

### 1. Introduction

Man and woman represent two different sexes that play an important role in the making of a society. These two are the crown of God's creations---"a little between the angels---however the differences between them have remained an unbridgeable gulf, and tend to initiate clashes. These differences of the ignite conflict between the two. The so-called sexual politics or battle of the sexes has generated questions lodged in the psyche of each man and these have persisted and continued to tease and challenge the mind of the thoughtful. Aside from the visible differences---e.g. anatomical, biological or hormonal and other real differences such as those having to do with emotions, speech or language use, interests and needs---there is the question of how modern individual can relate constructively to the problematic categories "masculine" and "feminine". Is there really an androcentric or phallogocentric point of view that has held way through the ages, thus subordinating, excluding or marginalizing the female point of view? To what extent do the differences between man and woman explain or account for man-woman conflicts? These are categories that seem to determine the perspectives people use to understand themselves and others, yet are also lacking in concreteness, making them the source of sweeping generalizations which always carry profound exceptions. A common formulation of this kind might read, "Men are...women are...but this particular, man or woman is more like this, not like that has both sides within (Frosh, 1988). What would people do that might challenge the received wisdom of what is appropriate to being masculine or feminine? Like culture, mention of man-woman relationship immediately connotes or conjures up variability, differences or contrast and potential conflict. Such binary divides public/private and the nature civilization domains have been the subject of incessant debate, as the ontological basis of the differences between man and woman.

Indisputably, man and woman are by nature different from each other. From the physical point of view, man is taller and woman is on average shorter. Man is coarser and woman is finer. Man's voice is comparatively rough and heavy and woman is delicate and delightful.

Psychologically, man is more inclined to physical exercise, hunting and active life. The feelings of man are bellicose, whereas woman has a peaceful disposition. A woman is more emotional than man. Woman is by nature much interested in ornaments, cosmetics, make-up and the latest fashion in clothes whereas man is not.

These are only a few of the notions that have long figured in the feminist discourse. Who is who and which is which? Despite these incompatibilities and distinct peculiarities, it cannot be denied that the two need each other and cannot live without one another. Though both of love and long for one another, yet both of them want to enforce one's will on the other, and the desire to dominate the other is the classic cause of conflict between the two genders. There is a constant struggle of supremacy. The term patriarchy or as others prefer to call it, the sex and gender system (Ruben, 1975) or "gender regimes" (Cornell, 1987) have been at the center of the feminist discourse from its earliest days.

This study focuses on one of the elements of literature—conflict. Conflict is commonly defined as the clashing of two opposing forces, principles, aims, feelings, and interests. In this study the opposed forces are man and woman and their clashing principles, needs, desires or interests.

Through the Freudian Psychoanalytic Criticism and the Feminist Perspective, this study hopes to shape a fuller understanding of man-woman relationship and its tensions, complications and intricacies seen and refracted through the feminist perspective. It aims to bring light the reasons behind the conflict between man and woman in contemporary Philippine literature using play as genre, and how they reflect the realities behind man and woman conflict, that is, how much verisimilitude and psychological truth the plays are invested with.

## **2. Literature review**

### *2.1 Gender*

Gender is different from sex in that it refers to the social characteristics whereby women and men exist in a dynamic structural relation to each other. Although biologically designated, sex has a significant part to play in the way human experience is defined (Hollway, 1989).

These two words are often used interchangeably, despite having different meanings. Sex refers to a set of biological attributes in humans and animals. It is primarily associated with physical and physiological features including chromosomes, gene expression, hormone levels and function, and reproductive/sexual anatomy. Sex is usually categorized as female or male but there is variation in the biological attributes that comprise sex and how those attributes are expressed. On the other hand, gender refers to the socially constructed roles, behaviors, expressions and identities of girls, women, boys, men, and gender diverse people. It influences how people perceive themselves and each other, how they act and interact, and the distribution of power and resources in society. Gender identity is not confined to a binary (girl/woman, boy/man) nor is it static; it exists along a continuum and can change over time. There is considerable diversity in how individuals and groups understand, experience and express gender through the roles they take on, the expectations placed on them, relations with others and the complex ways that gender is institutionalized in society (<https://cihr-irsc.gc.ca/e/48642.html>).

### *2.2 Man and Woman Conflict*

There are many studies which dealt with the conflict between man and woman.

In England, Mary Wollstonecraft wrote, *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1792), in which she demanded equality and better education for women, and made the first sustained critique of the social system which relegated women to an inferior position. In the early 19<sup>th</sup> century, a small group of middle-class women in the United Kingdom began to call for a better education, improved legal rights (especially within marriage), employment opportunities, and the right to vote. Equal-rights feminism was given theoretical justification by John Stuart Mill, who wrote, *The Subjection of Women* (1869), which was partly influenced by his wife, Harriet Taylor. From the 1850s onward, the campaign for equal rights for women became focused on winning the right to vote and suffragist movements appeared in New Zealand, the Soviet Union, Germany, Poland, Austria, and Sweden.

In the Philippine literature studies in traditional religious text, *Pasyon* Pilapil by Priscelina Legasto notes that it contains two contradictory, albeit archetypal images of woman: Woman as a source of evil as represented in Eve, and woman as the essence of God as represented by Virgin Mary. Biological reproduction which is construed the essence of femaleness (i.e. her ability to reproduce is what distinguishes woman from man, something over which he has no power) is negatively represented, as seen as a curse, a punishment to Eve because Mary negates her ability to reproduce. She has no carnal knowledge; she is a virgin, a mere

vessel or instrument through which God made man come to the world. Either way, the text reinforces gender ideology by denying women's only source of power.

Nick Joaquin's essay "From Formalism to Feminism: Rereading Nick Joaquin's 'The Woman Who Had Two Navels'" also notes that Joaquin insinuates mythic and archetypal motifs in trying to probe woman's ability to fascinate and hold power over man.

There are also researchers in literature who also studied the realities behind femininity and masculinity. Conflicts as an element of literature are also studies in the work, "Inner Conflicts in the Selected Short stories of Jaime Ann Lim" by Lynnie Anne Padilla. This study states that life in all stories is seen as a struggle in pursuit of what is ideal or acceptable for the main characters and this pursuit is often in discord with the desire of inner self. The character's failure to pursue this ideal, whether it is an established norm or a self-formulated standard, made them miserable or desperate. This undergraduate thesis concludes that in all the selected stories of Jaime Ann Lim, man is seen as striving to find something more in life. There is no certainty of happiness or meaning. Man is indeed a thirsty being and as a Crabb would say, man's satisfaction would only come through an anchorage on an external unchanging divine being rather than a temporal and feeling preoccupation in life.

### 3. Methodology

The study aimed to show the complications, intricacies and implications of the conflict between man and woman in the three selected Carlos Palanca Award winning plays. In order to achieve the study's objectives, the researcher selected three plays which portray clashes between members of the two sexes. The selection was vigorously done although restriction to a particular period was waived. Over a dozen of plays, some criteria are considered until the number was reduced to the three used in this study. The criteria that guided the selection were: the text must prominently feature a man-woman conflict involving the major characters; the plot must be complicated enough to involve an intermeshing factor—e.g., psychological, social/cultural political; the text must lend itself to psychoanalytic criticism and feminist reading; and there must be literary devices employed in the text to highlight or illumine the conflict.

The analysis and interpretation of the selected works were guided by the theories used such as the Freudian psychoanalytic criticism and the feminist perspective.

### 4. Results and discussions

In the play, *The Chieftain's Daughters*, a man as a father and a chief must behave in a manner dictated by his position or role, that is, as expected of him by the community. The pressure of traditional values and practices, referred to as unwritten law, compelled him to condemn his daughter, Sadiri, to death on the quartering block, for a charge on adultery. This position caused a conflict between him and his wife Nasudi whose material instinct bade her to speak out in defense of her daughter and challenge the wisdom of the chieftain's judgement. Among the devices used to highlight the conflict were dialectics and symbolism (the spear over which the chieftain Alay ran his hand in the opening scene). An emerging power struggle which accounted in part for Alay's insecurities as a leader of the tribe and the deeply entrenched patriarchal order which subordinated women to the men in the family and the male leader of the tribe underlay the conflict.

With the conflict resolved at last by the younger daughter Liwaliwa's revelation, Alay could relax his defenses and show another facet of his character—his humorous and gentle side, which must be Nasudi's influence to him. Toward the end of the play, the couple is seen in a lighter and even jesting mood that was so unlikely as shown to the elders in the early scenes.

In the Play, *Celadon*, Lourdes and Donya Trining pitted themselves against Nick. As an attorney representing the company that had designs on the old woman's land, Nick had to secure her signature on the contract and the deed of sale. Lourdes, the adopted daughter and heiress of Donya Trining pretended to be Nick's partner in the scheme. By emotional blackmail—i.e. threatening to abandon the diabetic-phlebitis-debilitated old lady—Lourdes succeeded in getting her to resign the adoption papers, thus making her the legitimate heiress. When Donya Trining refused to sign the agreement contract and the deed of sale, Nick resorted to violence; he struck one of the celadons. The old woman was almost hysterical. She had no choice but to capitulate.

The celadon, as a dominant symbol, stands for the insensitivity, vanity and trivial interest of the rich. The social and psychological content of the text—the long-drawn class struggle, the revolutionary movement led by the leftists with which Nick and Lourdes as fellow conspirators, were affiliated, Nick and Lourdes "winter of discontent," and Donya Trining's frustrations as a wife of a pederast or pedophile made a confluence of factors. For substitutive gratification, the old lady had her garden club, mahjong sessions and celadon hunting. Lourde's woes were of different kind. She saw herself as a victim of exploitation. She was reduced

to a drudge, no better than a wet nurse, maid or majordomo, by Donya Trining and her "papa". She had to pimp for the latter, that is, to find boys to deliver to the old prevent even when he was already in his sickbed, his body racked by cancer.

In the play *Brisbane*, the two women—a mother-daughter tandem, went beyond self-assertion to violate general expectancy. These sheming, grasping, and aggressive women would not allow any road block to foil their vaunting ambition. Pepita, the wife of Mateo, called all the shots. The second part of the play is about the execution of a sinister plot—a staged kidnapping of Mateo, the uncooperative candidate who would be placed under sedation or drugs, and held prisoner on a private island for a month and the installation of his son, Bren, in his place as a candidate for the governorship. Pepita and Chona were grimly determined to relish a comeback to the provincial capitol and there was no stopping them. Only murder was not part of their war chest or arsenal.

Pepita's desire for power could be compensatory. Her marriage was loveless. Mateo's eyes tended to wander; he flirted even with married women. For his part, Mateo found Pepita's desire for power immoderate and suffocating. He grew tired of being dominated and led by the nose. He cried "out" and fled to *Brisbane* with Carmen, his daughter-in-law. It was a grand escape from Pepita and Chona's scheme. He wanted warmth, affection, care and respect and more importantly, a woman to love not a master puppeteer to control his life.

The *Papaya* three growing under Carmen's window symbolizes grief, according to Iya Maura, but Carmen defied the augury. She exited from the house without regrets to join Mateo in *Brisbane*. *Brisbane* in the story symbolizes a kind of Pre-lapsarian Eden—a world of healthy instincts and needs. It contrasted with the world of scheming, corruption, wheeling and dealing, pacts with the devil, superficiality and hypocrisy that Pepita and Chona thrived in. Creatures of pure instincts like Carmen and Mateo were misfits in the latter world; they had to find a way out.

## 5. Conclusions

In the play the chieftain's daughter, highlights that the persona which a person presents to the public is different with what he is in the private. The play gives emphases to what man gives primacy to and what woman values more. Nasudi's love for her daughter comes first before all other considerations like reverence for the law of the tribe. For the chieftain Alay, his responsibility as a defender and preserver of tradition took precedence, especially as there was a threat to his leadership. The situation demanded that he show firmness, consistency, and unwavering allegiance to the unwritten law.

One of the insights gained from the play *Celadon* are: an oppressed or exploited woman's capacity for destruction (Lourdes implicated all the men the play; she dexterously led them on and played them off against each other, destroying everything in her path); Donya Trining found a safety valve against neurosis or madness in hunting for, and collecting celadons. But Lourdes demand for justice and redress for her grievances suffered a wrenching. It was Machiavellian and morally and spiritually bankrupt. Donya Trining was, in a sense, a victim of *bugos* marriage.

The play *Brisbane* unfolds the needs of internal requirements of individual's natures. One grows or strains after the fulfillment of those needs (or one's nature). Mateo and Carmen were drawn to each other not only their loneliness and frustrations, but also by the dictates of their nature.

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