

ARTICLE

Filipino Sexuality and Repression in Kerima Polotan's *The Virgin* and Aida Rivera-Ford's *Love in the Cornhusks*

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Abstract

In his essay, "The Father and the Maid," N.V.M. Gonzalez extols Aida Rivera-Ford's "Love in the Cornhusks" (together with Manuel Arguilla's "How My Brother Leon Brought Home A Wife") as a literary work that "provides the occasion for describing how much lived life in Filipino terms a story may achieve" (1; emphasis mine). Such praise can be extended to Kerima Polotan's "The Virgin" as well, which offers a seemingly straightforward but rich dive into the "lived life" of Filipinos. Miss Mijares, Polotan's protagonist, resembles Rivera-Ford's Constantina Tirol in many ways. Both women, with Nature and Society as their backdrop, as Gonzalez says (12), reflect on, and then react to, their new realizations, situated within their respective geographical and cultural environs, the rural areas where Christians and Bagobos interact, perhaps, or the urbanized city with its employer-employee strata. Hence, the consequent thoughts and behaviors we may observe from these two protagonists provide fertile ground for literary analysis concerning lived Filipino reality. "Lived life," which itself seems like an unnecessary pleonasm, is nevertheless an apt description for these short stories, an active life that is complex and breathing, one that develops and unfolds. How can one find, and eventually describe and dissect, the "life that lives" in the brief narratives of Constantina Tirol and Miss Mijares?

Keywords: Kerima Polotan, Aida Rivera-Ford, fiction in English

On Theory

It is a daunting question: and the first step should be to find a vocabulary that allows one to name and understand these forces enabling a living life. Psychology is most suitable for this task as the field deals with the affect (i.e. emotions), behavior, and cognition (i.e. thought processes) of people. The link between psychology and literature is nothing new: notable psychologists such as Sigmund Freud and Carl Jung have long elaborated on the relationship between the two, promulgating such a psycho-literary analysis. As Jung says, “The human psyche is the womb of all the sciences and arts” (152). Therefore, the process of its creation (art-making) and its eventual product (the artwork) can fall under this realm of study and its corresponding frameworks and conceptualizations. Freud’s work centers on the artist-work relationship, unable to consider one without the other; the work is nothing more than the culmination of an artist’s wish-fulfillment. Yet later on, it is the neo-Freudian Jung who delineates between a psychological analysis of the *artist* on the one hand, and the *work* on the other. Jung calls for an “analysis of a definitely circumscribed and concrete artistic achievement,” (152) creating a novel but related sphere of inquiry from Freud’s earlier notion that we must primarily consider “the living and creative human being as a unique personality” (152). I make this careful distinction because I am concerned with the artistic achievements of Polotan and Rivera-Ford in themselves, without delving into these authors’ personal views and experiences that may have contributed to such outputs (which would be the route of classical, traditional Freudian psychoanalysis). Yet, despite forgoing the biographical links of *The Virgin* and *Love in the Cornhusks* to their respective authors, the psycho-literary perspective remains a valid and important tool for literary analysis, in the neo-Freudian, Jungian sense. In this vein, these short stories by Polotan and Rivera-Ford would be classified as *psychological* in the sense that they “nowhere [transcend] the bounds of psychological intelligibility” (Jung 156), as opposed to *visionary* literary works that overstep those boundaries, as in the bizarre and ultra-fantastic works of Goethe in *Faust, Part Two* and of Dante in *The Divine Comedy*. We are thus faced with the psychologically

intelligible in *The Virgin* and *Love in the Cornhusks*—though this *intelligibility* does not imply that these stories are simply clear and understandable without effort. There still are distortions, repressions, and symbols still present in the literary works of Polotan and Rivera-Ford that require critical (and in this paper, psychological) unearthing.

The theme of both *The Virgin* and *Love in the Cornhusks* is predominantly sexual (accompanied by corresponding repression). Majority of the plot takes place in this realm, e.g., the past, ardent memories of Tinang with Amado, or the ruminations of Miss Mijares on physical touch and her eventual submission to the company of a man, and so on. Thus, the field of psychoanalysis, instituted by Freud, is especially relevant: it views sexual impulses, commonly unconscious, as energies in the psyche that may be manipulated or distorted in their path to action. Further, Freud considers these distortions and manipulations as mental illness, typically neuroses (*A General Introduction to Psychoanalysis* 2). The crucial transition, however, from conscious to the unconscious (that is, from the plain to the distorted) is termed *repression*; and this usually has to do with impulses “unsuitable for consciousness” (Freud, *General Introduction* 256) or those rejected by society, banned by law, despised by the self, and so on. Rarely, a sort of quasi-pleasure (as is demonstrated with Miss Mijares below) can be found in the repressive process: as soon as the undesirable impulse is buried deep in the unconscious, it is as good as forgotten; and thus, the pleasure gained is akin to that of losing stomach pains after a while when one forgets that they are hungry. Yet the burial or concealment of these impulses does not mean they disappear. At times, the desire multiplies and intensifies, to the point that it becomes uncontainable, and the impulse once again reveals itself through either the dream mechanism or destructive behavior (neurosis).

Freud’s idea of an inner, personal sexual repression, when employed for the analysis of literary texts, exposes itself as conceptually incomplete. One can praise its rigor and depth, yet, it is half the equation. It almost considers the individual as an isolable entity. The lacking complement here would be an external, socially-oriented philosophy that reconnects

the individual to the world in which she operates, or, to put it in Jung's terms, to situate the character within the carefully delineated world of the artist. Foucault's influential *History of Sexuality* offers both thematic and critical links to psychoanalysis. The work itself simultaneously criticizes and praises psychoanalysis (Allen 170). It argues that Freud and his disciples never "offered a fully satisfactory analysis of social power" (180): the external, societal structures affecting or enforcing changes in people. Despite some disagreements [i.e. mainly on the historicizing and "[conformist, normalizing] functions of psychoanalysis" (Foucault 5), see also Allen (177)], Foucault confesses that "the doubts I would like to oppose to the repressive hypothesis are aimed less at showing it to be mistaken than at putting back within a general economy of discourses on sex in modern societies since the seventeenth century" (11). His efforts at linking the repressive hypothesis to concrete, sociological grounding confirm, at least, a possible congruence between the two tracks of study, and affirms the initial proposition introduced above, concerning a more holistic framework of literary analysis. Additionally, Foucault made some implicit concessions to certain aspects of the Freudian repressive hypothesis. The pertinent example is in Foucault's analysis of the power of taboo: "Calling sex by its name thereafter became more difficult and more costly ... the interplay of prohibitions that referred back to one another: instances of muteness which, by dint of saying nothing, imposed silence. Censorship." (17). The theme of prohibition and silence is characteristically Freudian and repressive, the casting away of sexual impulses into the unobservable unconscious, yet Foucault extends the scope of the discussion to social institutions such as the Church: "... the [Catholic Counter-Reformation] ... attributed more and more importance in penance ... to all the insinuations of the flesh: thoughts, desires, voluptuous imaginings, felicitations, combined movements of the body and soul" (19). In addition to the individual process of Freudian repression, Foucault said that "there are two great systems conceived by the West for governing sex: the law of marriage and the order of desires" (39-40). Foucauldian repression is now socially regulated in at least two ways: (1) sexual intercourse is permitted (and thus propagated) only between couples united in marriage (pertinent to the

understanding of the married Constantina Tirol, below) and (2) that sexual desire is something animalistic, primeval, uncivilized if uncontrolled. Hence, this paper forwards this sort of psychosocial literary analysis, fusing psychoanalysis (from Freud and Jung) and the sociological framework of Foucault, a strategy that aims for holistic discussions on relevant literary works, such as the short stories by Polotan and Rivera-Ford.

The Filipino Context

It would be counter-Foucauldian (and simply illogical) to apply the ideologies of *The History of Sexuality* and Freud's *Psychoanalysis* to the late twentieth-century Philippines, to fit the demands of Polotan's and Rivera-Ford's short stories without first noting their contextual overlaps and differences. Historical data tells us, in summary, that:

The traditional gender roles in Filipino society are strongly influenced by centuries of Islamic culture, Chinese mores, and 425 years of deep-rooted Spanish Catholic traditions. However, since the 1960s, traditional Filipino gender culture has been transformed by tremendous Western—European and American—influences, except in the Muslim-dominated southern lands[.] (Leyson 825)

The Church (Catholic in the Philippines and Spain, Protestant in other parts of Europe) remains a common institutional stronghold on culture, powerfully influencing the limits and requirements of gender roles. For example, Leyson further notes that women were “supposed to reach marriage in a virginal state [and were] expected to take care of the domestic tasks, go to church, bear and educate children, and support her man in his [endeavors]” (825). This theme recurs prominently in the two short stories: first, the desirability, or even the necessity, of maintaining a state of premarital virginity is problematized and explored in Polotan's *The Virgin*; and second, the constricting boundaries of the marital union are dramatized and questioned in Rivera-Ford's *Love in the Cornhusks*. Despite the similarity of the general theme, there remains an ideological

gap in the vocabulary that discusses these phenomena of sexuality and repression, that is, in the specificities and nuances effected by local culture and tradition. This paper finds the bridge in *Sikolohiyang Pilipino* (Philippine Psychology), instituted by Virgilio Enriquez. The body of knowledge discussed in his influential work, *From Colonial to Liberation Psychology: The Philippine Experience*, is vast and encompasses the wide varieties of Filipino life. Modern developments have only deepened and broadened the scope of *Sikolohiyang Pilipino*. Therefore, for this paper, I delineate specific ideas of *Sikolohiyang Pilipino* that are closely linked to the aforementioned psychosocial framework and are appropriate for the literary works at hand. My considerations are threefold: (1) *hiya*, usually translated as shame, or more to the point, a sense of propriety, (2) *karangalan*, “the inner strength of a person that allows them to face the rich and the mighty with confidence and resolve” (Enriquez 58), and (3) *pakikiramdam*, the “value of shared inner perception ... it refers to heightened awareness and sensitivity” (Enriquez 76) which a “person seeks to clarify ambiguous and therefore critical situations to arrive at an appropriate response” (Enriquez 76). Instead of just recapitulating Enriquez and subsequent Filipino psychologists, this paper would view these terminologies at work through practical demonstration, in discussing the short stories of Polotan and Rivera-Ford. Further, these concepts will be operationalized and contextualized within the general Freudian and Foucauldian themes. For example, *hiya*, when considered as an emotion rather than a behavior, may work to reinforce Foucauldian social constrictions instituted by the Church, or else may function as a personal alarm that jumpstarts repressive tendencies. I consider both these Western and Filipino schools of thought equally in the paper, necessarily for they also bridge the literary and the experiential. Freud and Foucault base much of their research on literary and philosophical sources (Freud’s Oedipus Complex is a clear example, based on the play by Sophocles) whereas Enriquez was predominantly anchored on more concrete historical events and issues, in the vein of modern scientific inquiry required in the social sciences.

Considering the Texts

The title alone of Kerima Polotan's *The Virgin* readily invites readings and interpretations on the theme of virginity and purity. Casper's observation, that Miss Mijares's condition was the "involuntary virginity of spinsterhood" (*Desire and Doom in Kerima Polotan* 62), for example, already invokes the Freudian concept of the unconscious ("involuntary"); though in this case, it can be understood as a hidden or buried psychic force, or as a state she was forced into, one she had no choice but to follow. We find in the text explicit clues as to some of her reasons for maintaining such rigid chastity: "When she was younger, there had been other things to do—college to finish, a niece to put through school, a mother to care for" (Polotan 215). Three main actions are foregrounded here: (1) attending to her education (2) attending to her niece's education, and (3) nursing her ailing mother. These last two echo what Leyson outlines (see above) as responsibilities women are expected to assume. Such expectations can be traced to various cultural markers pertinent at the time; I go no further than Modesto de Castro's *Pagsusulatan nang Dalauang Binibini na si Urbana at ni Feliza*: both a literary work as well as "a repository of lessons meant not only for nineteenth-century readers, but also intended for twentieth-century readers" which "presented models of exemplary conduct and behavior worthy of emulation" (Reyes 3; 4). We observe that the duties expected of Miss Mijares, especially (2) and (3), demand her to take the role of parent, that is, of managing her children's (in this case, niece's) affairs: "Ang magulang ay dapat mamahala" ("A parent must manage and aid [their child's affairs]"; de Castro 171; my trans.). Her mother too, physically incapable of caring for herself, reverts to a childlike state of dependence, requiring Miss Mijares to assume a maternal, caring role. These obligations, unfortunately, come at the cost of sexual and romantic exploration. Miss Mijares, before she could even experience the bliss of love and sex, is forced to shoulder the burdens that come with it; that is, for example, caring for a child that resulted from marital relations, attending to her matriculation and her physical well-being.

Hence, these nurturing and caregiving duties are decreed to be preferable behaviors, not only in themselves as virtues, but especially in comparison to other impulses (such as indulging in the courtship of

men). Desires are displaced, enforcing a hierarchy of ordered desires (Foucault 40), with the sexual and romantic at the bottom of the ladder, and the motherly topmost. These responsibilities, interestingly, require Miss Mijares to put other women (i.e. her niece and her mother) before herself. Even more intriguing is that the first (1) responsibility on the list (attending to her education) effectively splits Miss Mijares into two: Miss Mijares-as-student and Miss Mijares-as-sexual-being, which may not coincide into one person. Again, the sexual impulse is less allowable than the striving for educational achievement, therefore Miss Mijares-as-sexual-being is buried in favor of Miss Mijares-as-student.

We find here the key obstacles to the actualization of her sexual desires: these obstacles are characteristically feminine beings (her mother, her niece, and even herself-as-student) and are traditionally noble duties (educating the youth, and herself, and attending to the elderly). Miss Mijares exemplifies what *Sikolohiyang Pilipino* terms *tagasalo* (literally, the “catcher;” my trans.) which Udarbe describes as a family role, one that a family member assumes because they “[feel] that someone must be in control of the situation and must set some form of order” (61-62). Her proclivity for control and order then characterizes her middle adult life (as a high-ranking manager) as much as it did her childhood until early adulthood. It is this personal trait, in conjunction with the pressing responsibilities from external factors, that inhibited her sexual desires and cut off any hope for their fulfillment.

One may refer back to Freud’s Oedipus Complex when discussing sexual jealousies and desires (i.e. its basic formulation that the son, desiring his mother, antagonizes his father), yet the framework, for this case, should be reversed from a male-centered to a female-centered one. It is Jung who gives us the concept of the Electra complex, a neo-Freudian elaboration, wherein the daughter is pushed to enact “revenge on her mother ... because that mother had robbed her of her father” (69). The character of “mother” is readily interchangeable with female figures and female relatives, while that of “father” can stand for strong, desirable male figures in general. An unresolved Electra complex (as with any other unresolved drive), can manifest itself in dreams or,

worse, in neurotic emotions or behavior. For Miss Mijares, it is the intrusion of ideas about sex, even in the most benign of situations. Take for example, during jeepney rides, “when a man pressed down beside her and through her dress she felt the curve of his thigh” (Polotan 215). This fixation on the physicality of others indicates a highly active sexual imagination and how she perceives others, she does so to herself, in turn emphasizing her physical sexuality in that, “[she] learned early how to dress herself to achieve an illusion of hips and bosom” (Polotan 214). Such behavior, in small doses, is not abnormal: as Estrada-Claudio argues, a woman’s body is a crucial part of her sexuality (97). Yet, these behaviors turn problematic when considering the process of holistic sexual development. On one hand, sexual desire is active in the internal psyche of Miss Mijares. Yet on the other hand, the narrative presents an ever-dutiful Miss Mijares with “unimpeachable integrity” (Casper, *DADIKP* 70): this Miss Mijares who cannot neglect her family members, abandon her education and, later, her employment—forcing her to forgo any attempts at exploring her sexuality with other people. Estrada-Claudio argues that this is another crucial aspect of sexuality, one that complements the personal, bodily component (97). We recall de Castro’s admonition as well: “Kung ang isang dalaga ay magpakita sa lakad, sa kilos, at pagtingin ng laban sa kabaitan, ay parang nag-aanyaya sa lalaki, na siya’y aglahiin nang masama.” (“If a young woman displays, through her walk, her movements, and glances contrary to the edicts of goodness, it is as though she is inciting the man to ravish her.”; 75; my trans.). The conservative view is that lascivious behaviors are doubly punishable: not only are they forbidden by civility and manners, but they also justify subsequent harassment. In simple terms, considering what we can observe in Miss Mijares’ thoughts and the sociocultural context she resides in, we can conclude that the internal (what she wants and how she views herself) and the external (the societal norms so firmly instituted) are not in congruence.

In this light, we recall that the Electra complex demands that the daughter overthrow the mother figure to win the father figure; this may take place literally or figuratively, but it must be a proactive decision to overcome the obstacles to those desires. As we come to find in the first

half of the short story, this does not happen. Miss Mijares takes no decisive step in overcoming any of her obstacles, and thus any sexual yearnings within her continuously succumb to the aforementioned Foucauldian hierarchy of desires and responsibilities. We must then also note that the Freudian repressive hypothesis is at work here; it is repression that allows for a hierarchy of desires in the first place, rendering some prominent and urgent (the responsibilities of the *tagasalo*) and others buried (sexual desires). A third factor ties the frame together: the maintenance of *karangalan* which Enriquez defines as “the inner strength [of] confidence and resolve” (58). *Karangalan*, despite being internally processed, is nonetheless a social value (Pe-Pua and Protacio-Marcelino 56), and so any “inner strength” is still dependent on external validation (in this case, the validation of established social norms, see Leyson above). I posit that Miss Mijares finds some momentary sense of quasi-pleasure in upholding the nobility of her responsibilities as nurturer and caregiver; in doing so, she keeps her conscience clear, attuned to the prescribed behavior for women, outlined by de Castro above. For the time being, she holds firm to the belief that “Love stood behind her, bidding her time, a quiet hand upon her shoulder (I wait. Do not despair.)” (Polotan 215). She views her responsibilities as a sacrifice, a necessary one, that will soon be rewarded.

The turning point happens unexpectedly, through chance, when her mother suddenly dies (and we are returned once again to the role of the mother in the Electra complex):

“But it had taken her parent many years to *die*. Towards the end, it became a thankless chore, kneading her mother’s loose flesh, hour after hour, struggling to awaken the cold, sluggish blood in her dying body. In the end, she had died ... and Miss Mijares had pushed against the bed in grief and also in *gratitude*” (215, emphasis mine).

Her gratitude may come from thinking that her mother is now free from suffering, or that she no longer has this additional burden of kneading her loose flesh; but her gratitude, too, is that of relief. Miss Mijares hit

two birds with one stone: she not only got rid of what she calls “this thankless chore,” but it also happened without her needing to enact the violence herself.

In the narrative, all this takes place in retrospect. Therefore, at the beginning of the true action of the plot, Miss Mijares finds herself in a position of great freedom: there is no present concern for the matriculating demands of her niece, her mother is now in the care of another world, and her education is completed as she is now employed, placed in a high position. What we have analyzed thus far is the complex psychosocial background of the character of Miss Mijares, “the empty shadows [of] nine years gone” (215), one that Polotan blends seamlessly into the present action of her short story. Miss Mijares, once with motherly duties yet without the motherly (or wifely) benefits of love and sexuality, now finds herself in a new, unshackled state of being.

It is unsurprising, given this psychological context of liberation from the three-fold constraints, that Miss Mijares “finally succumbed to the physical presence of the *first strong* male that she encountered” (Bernad, *The Hand of the Enemy* 41; emphasis mine). The text does not offer definitive proof that this job-seeking man was the *first* exactly, yet it is clear that, in dealing with men outside of the professional setting, she has not had much experience and is all too naive. Only in later meetings with the man did she notice “his two front teeth were set widely apart” (Polotan 217) making her look away and feel sick; there were no traces of such repulsion in their first meeting at the office. Back then, the characteristics highlighted were his best physical qualities: “He went to where Miss Mijares sat, a *tall, big* man, walking with an economy of movement, *graceful* and *light*, a man who knew his body and used it *well*.” (Polotan 214; emphasis mine). I would agree with Bernad’s description of *strong*, in that it stands not just for strength per se but for desirable masculine characteristics: “tall, big ... graceful and light.” The latter pair, though, may appear to be traditionally feminine traits, yet we must remember that this man is viewed by Miss Mijares in comparison to other desperate job-seekers who had “dirt crusted handkerchiefs [and] trembling hands” (Polotan 214). This time, de Castro’s edicts work

in her favor, ““Pagkatapos ng pagpupuri sa Diyos, ang pagpilitan ng tao ay ang paglinis ng katawan” (“After the praise of God, the next endeavor of man is to cleanse the body”; 63; my trans.), extolling the merit of cleanliness. Thus, for her, lightness and gracefulness were blessings compared to dirtiness and uncouthness. She even went to check that he had a complete set of ten fingers; her standards, we can surmise, were not so rigid and strict given the sample of men she had in her purview.

We have established thus far that Miss Mijares is granted two crucial things: the freedom to explore, and the man with whom she can do the exploring; all that is left is to embark on the road to sexual fulfillment. This is all but straightforward. Her journey is symbolically mirrored by two jeepney rides, one nightmarish, the other stimulating. On the first night ride, “The houses were low and dark, the people shadowy, and even the driver, who earlier had been an amiable, talkative fellow, now loomed like a sinister stranger over the wheel” (Polotan 217) though she felt that “she had *dreamed* of this” (Polotan 217; emphasis mine). We are brought explicitly to the realm of Freudian dreams: unconscious desires, as was discussed earlier, attempt to assert themselves into consciousness through disguise in dream formation. The jeepney is the crucial site of sexual exploration: first, her journey is paralleled by the physical traveling of the jeepney, replete with unexpected troubles and unsuccessful endings. Second, it is a public mode of transportation, therefore (at least before she attaches herself to the carpenter) providing her with some chance to be seated beside some new, other man: “And yet Miss Mijares did think of love. Secret, short-lived thoughts flitted through her mind—in the jeepneys she took to work when a man pressed down beside her and through her dress she felt the curve of his thigh” (Polotan 215). And finally, the sinister driver, the dark houses, in this first travel—all these connote an unwelcoming journey full of foreboding, which she undertakes alone and inexperienced.

It is on the second ride that “the cold tight fear of the old dream was upon her” (Polotan 218), and yet, the crucial difference is that the carpenter is now with her. He seems at first “monstrous” but afterward “sweet and overwhelming” (Polotan 218). With their final interaction,

their conjugal navigation in the rain, we are told of dreams again: “Miss Mijares’ young *dreams* fluttered faintly to life” (Polotan 218; emphasis mine), yet this time with a positive twist, a far kinder light than the gloom and terror she encountered in the first ride. Perhaps Miss Mijares finds security in this newfound companionship: it is then that her long-repressed drives have now begun to find physical actualization. Dalisay praises the ending as “effusive ... Miss Mijares *yields* to a man’s touch ... The repetition of “she turned to him” emphasizes the action, *is* the action” (93; emphasis mine). Indeed, Miss Mijares finds the bridge to sexual actualization that has been missing until now. Yet, I take minor issue with the language of both Dalisay and Bernad who use the terms *yield* and *succumb* to the *man*. I argue that, while Miss Mijares does succumb and yield, she does not do so to the *man* per se, but to her bottled desires which, up until then, she was not free or empowered enough to let loose.

Throughout the short story, much of the expressions between Miss Mijares and her carpenter are shared unsaid: “She gestured, bestowing pardon” (Polotan 218); the fixing and the returning of the bird-shaped paperweight (wherein there may be a metaphor, a correlation between the bird and the male appendage) which to her “looked like a dove” (Polotan 216). Yet, there is meaning in this silence. Polotan dramatizes a blend of two concepts: the first is the Foucauldian argument that, in discussing sex, there is “an injunction to silence, an affirmation of nonexistence” (4), prompting us to resort to euphemism, innuendo, or, as shown above, metaphor. The second is Enriquez’ *pakikiramdam*, which Pe-Pua and Protacio-Marcelino observe as the behavioral outcome of a culture accustomed to “indirect communication” (56). Early in the narrative, both Miss Mijares and the job-seeking carpenter possess their respective “inner perception” (Enriquez 76), that is, their own evaluation of the situation. Yet it is through their continuous interaction that it becomes “shared” (Enriquez 76), culminating in mutual understanding, in her turning to him after “he had moved and brushed against her” (Polotan 218), recognizing in his touch an invitation. This invitation after all must be given indirectly, since even if they share a mutual understanding, sexuality is still taboo, not to be spoken of directly, out

loud. *Pakikiramdam* thus evolves its use: it is not only a method of indirect communication, but also a protective mechanism (Mataragnon 478), preventing punishment by being discreet. In the end, as Dalisay points out, the emphasis on action, not the spoken word, is another triumph of Miss Mijares: the subtle solution she has long been looking for that may account for her desires without bringing her widespread, social condemnation.

Whereas Miss Mijares concludes her narrative by attaching herself to a man, Rivera-Ford's Constantina Tirol undergoes the process in reverse. As Grow observes, Tinang was all but abandoned (42). It may seem like a blatant misreading since Tinang is clearly stated to be married, yet her union to her Bagobo husband Inggo is not Grow's, nor the short story's, nor my main concern. Rather, the spotlight is on her past relationship with the ex-tractor driver Amado. Similar to his reading of Miss Mijares, Casper finds in Tinang an "inexperience fumbling toward a definition" (*New Writing from the Philippines* 88). This is echoed by Gonzalez: "Tinang is incorrigibly innocent. She makes us uncomfortable over her being still concerned about the household and the farm" (11). Her marriage to Inggo, a Bagobo, may have seemed to her a move toward independence, yet Tinang still intently observes the goings-on at Señora's, from the watering of the plants to the new maid in the kitchen, reimagining how she had once managed house affairs. Indeed, she remains very much attached to her former situation. And again, as with the dark and foreboding jeepney rides in *The Virgin*, a sense of unwelcome is painted in *Love in the Cornhusks* through, for example, the dogs' barking and lunging, violent and aggressive. Thus, I find that the señora's estate is the metaphorical site of Tinang's sexual journey, as the jeepney ride was for Miss Mijares. This is corroborated by both the contents of Amado's letter and the memories of Tinang, "It was only Amado, the tractor driver, who could look at her and make her lower her eyes. He was very dark and wore filthy and torn clothes on the farm, but on Saturdays ... his hair was slicked down and he would be dressed as well as ... the school teacher" (Rivera-Ford 212). The details of their relationship are not explicitly mentioned, yet we can surmise a mutual understanding of affection while they worked and resided in the

señora's estate: "My lover is true to me. He never meant to desert me. *Amado*, she thought. *Amado*" (Rivera-Ford 212). Clearly, before his apparent desertion, Amado was her *lover*. As to the extent of the consummation of their relationship, we are told only that "[he] embraced her roughly and awkwardly, and she trembled and gasped and clung to him...." (Rivera-Ford 212). The rest of the truth is in ellipsis, which is the core of the story. We are once again returned to the Freudian repressive hypothesis and the Foucauldian concept of silence; a lapse in memory is a gap of consciousness. Through the ellipsis, we are told of events left unsaid and unexplained. One feels Tinang's great anxiety that even remembering the act is almost as shameful as redoing the behavior; and so, what is the root of that shame? The narrative indirectly provides the answer by way of comparison: *now*, Tinang is married to Inggo; *before*, Tinang was not married when she and Amado made love—it is only within marriage that one is allowed to consummate sexual relationships. To remember, to luxuriate in remembrance of pleasures with another man, while bonded in marriage to another, contradicts in principle the insistence of monogamy Leyson outlined above. The climax, here, is Tinang reading the letter because it is then that she is made to resurface all those memories with Amado and, most damnably for her, that she wishes to be with Amado once more.

We recall from the narrative that Tinang had thought that Amado betrayed her by leaving her, breaking all connections, friendly, romantic, or otherwise; and it is only the clarification (which came with the too-late letter) that resuscitates her love for him. Before reading his letter, her psyche had exerted all efforts into repressing an illicit and (what she thought was a) terminated romance; hence, we are presented with ellipses. Bernad writes, "The letter *brings back* memories and *dreams* of what might have been; but these *dreams* are now a danger, like the snake; the child must be protected, must be nurtured, and in the urgency of that duty, the belated letter falls forgotten" (*Bamboo and the Greenwood Tree* 89; emphasis mine). The logical extension of Bernad's observation is that the dreams were once lost and buried—only if they were lost and buried could they be brought back, affirming the argument that repressive

forces were at play. Its attempt at resurfacing, as discussed above, returns us to the realm of dreams. In this instance, we are presented with a character (Tinang) within a narrative space, and it is the character dreaming within the realm of the short story, a dream within the artwork. We can reasonably surmise, attuned to Freud's framework, that the psychic forces once at work in suppression are now relaxed due to the incitement of the letter. Her mental processes are thus now more active, inciting daydreaming and imagination. And it is in this fanciful state which lasts a while that Tinang is consequently and quickly reminded of the constraints of her chains: her marital responsibilities to Inggo, not to Amado, and even to the fruit of her marital union with Inggo, her baby. If Miss Mijares journeys from limitation to freedom, Tinang undergoes the opposite: as soon as she dares to dream of freedom, as soon as possibility once again presents itself, she is plunged back into the strict rigidity of the marriage union.

All this is further complicated when the context of religion is considered: Inggo, a Bagobo, is a non-Christian (Gonzalez 8). Tinang, however, is a Christian, and in her wish that her son be baptized, she shows an understandable inclination to Christianity. More than an inclination, Gonzalez elaborates, "Once the child is baptized, Amado may become Bagobito's model. Tinang doesn't say so, but we feel that some such possibility is in her mind" (11). Amado may not have been explicitly described as Christian, yet the fact can be surmised from Señora's exclamation: "Even Tinang looks like a Bagobo *now*" (Rivera-Ford 209; emphasis mine). The transformation was only noted *after* her marriage to Inggo, at present; thus, it is likely that her past relationships presented no such obstacle and thus had not altered Tinang's being.

The hold of the Christian pastoral code which Foucault traced to the end of the 18th century seems to be in full force in mid-20th century Philippines, the approximate setting of *Love in the Cornhusks*. And yet, Tinang's situation has difficulties beyond the strict regulations of the Church concerning marriage, monogamy, and temperance, as discussed above. Beyond that, we must consider two things: (1) if Tinang were to choose her true love now, the Christian Amado, she commits adultery,

and (2) if she were to remain faithful to the rites of matrimony, she would be choosing a non-Christian over a Christian, a betrayal she attempts to undo by having their son baptized. Tinang is stuck in a lose-lose situation.

In this vein, we observe that both Miss Mijares and Tinang end up with partners from social groups that were, at the time, undesirable and far different from their own: the job-seeking carpenter is of a lower socioeconomic status than Miss Mijares, is not attractive, and even, for a brief moment, disgusts her with his physical deformity; Inggo is a Bagobo whose “body [stinks] of tuba and sweat, squatting on the floor only in his foul undergarments” (Rivera-Ford 210). Let us briefly recall an aforementioned passage from *Urbana and Feliza*: “Pagkatapos ng pagpupuri sa Diyos, ang pagpilitan ng tao ay ang paglinis ng katawan” (“After the praise of God, the next endeavor of man is to cleanse the body”; de Castro 63; my trans.). Thus Inggo is doubly undesirable: he fails the first test by being a Bagobo, and the second by being unable to maintain proper bodily cleanliness. The “horror” with which Tinang “saw that [her shoes] were coated with thick, black clay,” (Rivera-Ford 211) and later on, the “shriek” (Rivera-Ford 213) that she lets out when she saved her baby from the snake oppositely parallels of Miss Mijares’s turning towards, and going with the carpenter. Tinang, instead of yielding to or peacefully accepting her newfound situation, found herself in a losing struggle against her current constraints. I do not think her actions betray racist sentiments at its core—why would she marry him in the first place if she was so prejudiced? More reasonably, she is confronted with the incongruence of two ideas: the possibility of her ideal dream, that of conjugal bliss with Amado, and, the permanence of marriage bonds—more so considering that she and Inggo have a child. Prior to this recognition, which came upon her as she walked homeward after having read the letter, she had been quite pleased with her current way of life. It is the letter that marks the shift from contentment to despair. She found out too late that she was content only because any other way of life seemed impossible to happen.

And so, like her actual journey homeward, Tinang is not free to pursue any other path except the one she is currently on, demonstrating the Foucauldian idea that marriage is both constricting as it is liberating. It permits sexual practice (without which Tinang would have no child) but it also limits Tinang to one partner for life. I argue that her shriek, therefore, is a scream of *hiya*, the sense of propriety that overwhelmed her at that moment of realization. Tinang had desired to escape the bounds of marriage, and thus desired to transgress the accepted sociocultural norm of monogamy. The *hiya* at play can be understood through three of its modern dimensions summarized by Clemente, Galang, and Arpon: (1) as *damdamin* (emotion), (2) as *katangian* (characteristic or trait), and (3) as *pagpapahalaga* (value-judgment)—with the third most fitting with the initial definition of Enriquez, that shame is the result of a perceived transgression. We observe that there is a disjunct between Tinang's judgment (her preference for the pleasures of Amado's love) versus the inscribed social norms of monogamy. Yet furthermore, the scream is an expression, and the despair and anguish she feels are emotionally charged. Apart from being able to logically evaluate her circumstances, she is emotionally affected by the loss she suffers. First, fickle chance and the inefficiency of the postal system in rural areas caused the letter to arrive too late, and second, now that it did arrive and she read its contents, she finds she cannot but refuse despite her inclinations otherwise. This refusal is not something to be taken lightly: it goes against one of the two primal forces that Freud had identified in the human psyche: the pleasure principle which normally strives toward fulfillment, not away from it (*GPT* 22). For Tinang, this pleasure is not something childish or fleeting, like frolicking once again in the fields; rather, this is the promise of mutual love, one encompassing sexuality, yes, but also romance, companionship, and livelihood. Conversely, her relationship with Inggo is not as all-encompassing: starting from religion, they are already divided, with Tinang hoping to initiate their son into her own camp. We can only imagine what the story does not explicitly narrate, the extent of her past with Amado, but also the life she lives with Inggo, though it is poignantly telling that, in visiting Señora, Tinang goes alone despite

baptisms usually being a family affair (or at least, involving both parents).

Thus, Tinang's dilemma lies in her being tied to her inadequate relationship with Inggo while being offered an unattainable and tantalizingly ideal relationship with Amado. Yet the root of all this is still pleasure, sexual and romantic: "I was always in despair until I imagine your personal appearance coming forward bearing the sweetest smile that enabled me to view the distant horizon" (Rivera-Ford 211). The factor most important to Tinang is the love and attraction she feels for Amado; her thoughts immediately go back to the time when "it was only Amado, the tractor driver, who could look at her and make her lower her eyes" (Rivera-Ford 212). This starkly contrasts with the undertones of disgust with which Inggo is remembered: "She laughed when a Bagobo with two hectares of land asked her to marry him" (Rivera-Ford 212). It seems that her evaluation of the two suitors from the past still rings true at present. At its core, Tinang feels a stinging impropriety in evaluating her sexuality because it is she who still finds pleasure from (at least the thought of) Amado, a source now forbidden for her to access.

In this line, we recall Foucault and his analysis of the Christian-religious roots of proprietary enforcement. He observes we are made to believe that "we are [*at fault*] with respect to our own sex" (9). Confronting the letter is a horrifying process for Tinang: it immediately exposes her to something deemed undesirable: adulterous tendencies or extramarital sexual fantasies. What is most shocking is that these tendencies and fantasies come from her, her mind, and so she intones "Do not punish *me*" (Rivera-Ford 213; emphasis mine) even though it is her baby who is in danger from the snake's looming presence. The short story's conclusion, then, is all the more affecting, with her fervently praying "*Ave Maria Santisima*" (Rivera-Ford 213), a prayer to a holy figure, female and chaste. With the last line, "[among] the cornhusks, the letter fell *unnoticed*" (Rivera-Ford 213; emphasis mine), Rivera-Ford returns us to the repressive hypothesis. Tinang's ultimate response in the face of these

dark, forbidden impulses symbolized by this letter of opportunity, is to bury them, forget them.

Through and through however Tinang exemplifies that experience alone cannot produce a mature and holistic understanding of sexuality and its accompanying demands. Her plight demonstrates that the Foucauldian shackles of marriage (within which the capacity for sex and sexuality are constrained) are hidden—Tinang herself did not feel its grip until it was too late to get herself free. Yet, this is not to say, to use Foucault's words, that Tinang is "at fault," rather, we as readers and observers look at her sociocultural context—that she is a woman, a sexual being, and a member of an anti-sexual society, or that she is a practicing Christian—all which render her an unsuspecting victim. If the tale of Miss Mijares is an optimistic one, that the spring of sexual fulfillment will come sooner or later, the narrative of Constantina Tirol is cautionary, alerting the reader of the dangerous and vindictive fangs, social or religious, governing human sexuality.

With all this taken into account, it is clear that the "lived lives" of Filipino women are deeply explored by Rivera-Ford in *Love in the Cornhusks* and Polotan in *The Virgin* with a pronounced highlight on female sexuality, its inner machinations and external constrictions, dramatized through identifiable Filipino characteristics. One discovers the promise of sexual freedom after a rigid and burdensome past, the other bemoans the loss of past and potential romance, finding herself in inescapable shackles—the tragic conclusion brought before us is that desire and obligation are incompatible aspirations, due to various forces, societal, cultural, and personal. It is a testament to the artistic achievements of both Rivera-Ford and Polotan that, even in brief narratives, they nonetheless present meaningful elaborations on this theme, crafting incidents and contexts that both withstand and enrich a Filipino-rooted psychosocial literary criticism and, on a grander scale, work towards the understanding of lived life.

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