

# A Close Reading of F. Sionil Jose's Women Characters

LORETA LONGOS-FAJARDO

## Abstract

*National Artist F. Sionil Jose is observed by some readers to have a quasi-negative depiction of women characters in his fiction. This study is a serious attempt to identify and classify these characters in his more than twenty stories. Apparently, the study finds that the author in study does not stick to a single dominant image but instead, come up with emerging images of different types of women – women who suffer a lot, women who become victims, women who are strong and steadfast and women who nurture their fellowmen.*

*Keywords: images, character, victim, suffering, aggression*

## Introduction

In the present times, it has been observed that issues about women have come to the fore. Treatment of women, the place of women in the society, the portrayal of women in print and mass media and a lot more, have become subjects of researches and studies. Several factors could be cited for this development. Firstly, the proliferation of modern and post-modern theories have inspired some scholars and researchers to conduct studies focusing on women. Secondly, there is no longer a dearth of materials as references to pursue studies of this nature abound. Thirdly, the heightening issues on women empowerment and the

---

LORETA LONGOS-FAJARDO is Assistant Professor of English at the MSU-IIT College of Arts & Social Sciences. She graduated Cum Laude for the AB English degree from the MSU-IIT and finished her MA in English (major in Literature) at Xavier University Ateneo de Cagayan (XU-ADC). She likewise completed all academic requirements for an MA in Comparative Literature at the UP Diliman, Quezon City.

feminist movement, have ignited some researchers to have interest and enthusiasm to pursue studies about women.

For instance, contemporary critic on women studies Margarita Orendain (1997) opines that the roles women portray in Philippine literature are distinguishable. They can be wife, mother, daughter, sister, mistress, seductress, witch and outcast. Orendain has also observed that the possibilities of roles by which women are seen to portray and are actually represented in much of Philippine literature are defined in the absolute terms of the good and of the scourged. This view is substantiated by some studies that apparently point to some distinct characteristics that women characters in fiction possess. In effect, several studies about women in fiction have rendered varied characterization and opinions of women in general and the Filipino woman in particular. But Roces (2000) posits that in the past, women were rarely seen to be political agents unless they held political office and that since they were not seen to be empowered, the images of women have usually been associated with a particular phenomenon called 'victimization, exploitation and motherhood.'

Thus, as texts are produced and reproduced, it is intriguing to note that, in not a few of these texts, women are no longer portrayed as the submissive, faithful and long-suffering wives or the dutiful and self-sacrificing mothers. They are neither portrayed as the unthinking, masochistic sex object of male lust nor the cruel, vengeful wronged woman that appears in much of male-authored and male-influenced texts. Instead, they are portrayed as individuals who show control of themselves and who can stand on their decisions with aggression. Stories of Aida Rivera Ford and Estrella Alfon, for instance, show women characters whose strength and audacity could be considered far beyond what is expected. For example, in the male-oriented Filipino society, the mother in Alfon's story *Magnificence* (as mentioned in Padilla, 1995) fought for her daughter who would have been victimized by a family friend disguising himself to be a good "onlooker" for her children.

Further, Helen Lopez (1992), in her essay "The Outsider Within: The Cultural Representation of Women in Selected Tagalog Novels of the 1920s," makes a deep study on the popular Tagalog novels of the period covered and predictably finds that women characters were portrayed so as to reinforce traditional stereotypes within a patriarchal order.

Santiago (as cited by Kintanar, 1992) agrees with Lopez in these stereotypical representations of women. In her own survey of a wide

range of women characters in the novels of Jose Rizal, Amado Hernandez and Nick Joaquin, among others, she has found them generally portrayed as weak, indecisive, if not outright victims and wretches. More interestingly, her study draws a link between the condition of women as portrayed in these novels and the national conditions of the time these novels were written. They are significant not only as realistic portrayals but also as metaphors for the various crises the country has suffered.

With these developments, a study on the female characters in the short stories of F. Sionil Jose, a noted Filipino writer whose works span a long period, from the 1930s up to the present, is deemed an interesting addition and is, therefore, a significant contribution to the growing number of works focusing on women characterization. In addition, his intriguing depiction of women characters in his fiction has been noted by many readers and critics. Thus, it is on this premise that this study was conceived.

**Purpose of the Paper.** The purpose of this paper is to analyze the women characters in some of the short stories of Francisco Sionil Jose, to identify and classify them and determine how they have been molded into the images that they have become or have projected.

**Significance of the Study.** This study is perceived to be one good source for future investigations about depiction of women in literature. This is also perceived to make readers, especially the female readers, become aware and conscious of the depiction of women in fiction. By becoming conscious of how women characters are depicted, they can relate more with the female experiences presented in the text.

It should be noted that with a significant volume of studies made on the depiction and representation of women in literature, both in this country and abroad, readers become more aware of the significance and importance of women.

The study covers only some of the short stories of Francisco Sionil Jose from his two anthologies, *God Stealer and Other Stories* and *Wayways and Other Stories*.

### Analysis

At the outset, it is noted that the women characters in F. Sionil Jose's short stories project a myriad of personalities and qualities. In a thorough analysis of the characterization of these make-believe women,

images of a suffering woman, woman as a victim, woman as strong-willed, aggressive, and steadfast and woman as a nurturer emerged.

### 1. The Suffering Woman

The characters in the stories **The Heirs**, **Two Letters** (the first story in a 2-story format), **Riddle**, **The Exile** and **Tong** present women who sacrifice their personal pleasures and dreams for the interest of their loved ones or their families. These are women, who despite the miserable conditions they are in, give more premium to the welfare of their loved ones. Evasco (1992) in her essay, opines that one of the most dominant images projected by women in early Philippine literature is that of the silently suffering martyr. As mother, wife, lover, sister, or daughter, she is molded after the image of the ideal woman: the Virgin Mother (Mother Mary for Catholics) who suffers in silence and denies her wounds for the sake of love. These also include women who have settled with the idea of their prime role in life: bearing children. And together with this role, her personal whims must not be allowed to come to the fore.

Thus, specifically, the women characters in the short story **The Heirs**, project women being pinned to the limiting role of bearing children and to attending to their man's needs. They are taken as wives to produce heirs and "to keep house" for their husbands. The first of these characters is Josefina. As told, "Don Jacinto was going to have a woman to keep house for him...expected her to be a fecund bearer of children" and Josefina does not disappoint him.

Furthermore, she contents herself to being a domesticated woman who opts to always stay at home and submits to whatever her husband demands from her. As the daughter of another wealthy Spaniard in their community, she is perceived to project a strong personality considering the resources that her family has, but when she weds the ambitious Don Jacinto, a descendant from Spain's Vascon family and a holder of vast tracts of lands in their place, she succumbs to the pressure of producing several offsprings in accord to her husband's wishes.

The other women in this story show a parallel image when Don Felix Asperri, the son whom Don Jacinto considers as his graven image and his most logical heir, also takes a wife. Like his father, Don Felix is also bothered by the need to perpetuate his name, thus, he likewise displays the same demanding attitude to have many children. When

after several years, his wife could only give him a sickly-looking daughter, he vehemently demands for a son— “What is the use of this house if there are no male children to enliven it?” He would then accost his wife again and again demanding an explanation. This pressure to produce heirs becomes the wife’s source of unhappiness and desperation that later leads her to the brink of insanity. In a desolate prison where she was kept, she regresses, emotionally and physically, until she dies.

Loretta, the third woman in this same story, also experiences profound suffering in the hands of her husband. This woman who has married her half-brother, Antonio, Don Felix Asperri’s frail and weakling son, realizes the extent of her agony as her weak and frail husband abandons her in exchange for what he believes to be a budding writing career. With him, she experiences neglect and yet she hangs on. When she conceives their first child, she has to brave a lonely and desolate life without her husband. Despite the sufferings, she does not air her complaints but instead, lives in denial and decides on a self-imposed isolation. Eventually this leads her to her own death as she has kept to herself the risks and danger accompanying her pregnancy.

In another story, **Two Letters**, Nana Antonia is the typical mother who chooses to embrace hardships and sacrifices just so her children could pursue their studies. Despite having a fragile condition, she works like a slave because she dreams of a bright future for her children. As a mother, she takes pride in having sent her eldest son to a law school in the big city and looks forward to a secured future for her other children. She has big dreams for them that despite the physical difficulty she is suffering from, she is determined to attend to the forthcoming graduation of her eldest son. She consistently lies to him that everything is fine with her and the younger siblings. Unfortunately, the story does not mention if there is an end to all her sufferings. Another woman who has sacrificed her own happiness and who opts to keep her family intact despite the sufferings that she endures is Ella Jacinto in the story **Riddle**. In her youth, she used to dream big “talking big, owning the sky, dreaming of the good life.” But after her elopement with a former schoolmate who has projected an image of opulence and luxury, everything changes as he turns out to be “a slob, a braggart and a loudmouth” who could not provide her the comfortable life that he has bragged to offer her. Yet having borne him three children, Ella sacrifices her personal comfort and happiness and lives with her husband Jaime despite the physical and emotional maltreatment that she has to suffer. It is apparent that she tries hard to keep her family intact not wanting

her children to become products of a broken marriage. Thus, she swallows her pride even if she has been ridiculed by some people for having ended up with someone who is the complete opposite of her ideal man. It is also clear that, despite what other say, she is willing to forego whatever it is that people may think of her as long as her family stays intact and solid. From her reactions, it is clear that she gives more importance to her husband and children despite the suffering and maltreatment that she gets. And one can decipher that she is still hopeful of good things to come as she tells a former classmate, "(My husband) is all right. It didn't turn out to be as I expected. Time teaches a lot of things."

Meanwhile, in the short story **The Exile**, Nena presents a different style of suffering: she forgoes her own happiness for the sake of her parents and siblings. At a very young age, she is encouraged to help out in the deplorable condition of her family, thus, she volunteers to be a househelp of a prominent family in her community.

"She was twelve when she came to the old house. She helped in the kitchen most of the time; she was a tenant's daughter and had come to work for the family..."

But her natural charm and pleasant ways easily catch the attention of her politician landlord (Mr. Reyes) who decides to send her to school so she "could be more useful." When the Reyeses transfer to Manila, she is included in the entourage and several years after, she turns out to be exactly how Mr. Reyes has expected her to be. She has been metamorphosed into a bright and confident woman. Unfortunately, this transformation paves the way for her to become one of his mistresses. And her life becomes complicated when she would also fall for Pepe, Mr. Reyes' son. She then struggles tremendously as she is caught between the father and the son. Finally, her love for the younger Reyes prevails but is ashamed to admit to him her status as his father's mistress. Apparently, she does not like what is happening to her but has no option but to accept what happens to her.

Without doubt, Nena has been a great help to her family although she has pawned her life just so her siblings could acquire education. On reminiscing what she has done to her life, she prides herself with her accomplishments and how she has transformed the quality of life of her family. But definitely, her situation confirms her role in the family—she is the proverbial daughter who aspires to resolve the miserable condition of her family at her own expense.

Meanwhile, the wife of Nena's landlord and lover, is also a suffering woman as she leads a miserable life with her husband's womanizing and indiscreet philandering and physical assault. Mr. Reyes' display of infidelity is seen when he openly takes his mistresses to his house and treats them with special care and attention in front of his wife and children. Deeply insulted, the children know that their mother is living in agony but the latter prefers to be in denial and treats everything as a normal occurrence.

Another character who belongs to this type of image is Alice in the story *Tong*. Although her suffering is more of emotional than physical, it is more intense and complicated because it involves her happiness and the condition of her younger siblings. As a result, she has to forego her own happiness, save her brothers and follow the dictates of tradition. Thus, even if it would mean a lot of sacrifices, she has to accept her uncle's decision for an arranged marriage with a wealthy Chinese widower who has been a great help in his business.

The above discussion confirms that women, although they may have the option not to suffer, may choose to accept sufferings head on and become sacrificial lambs if only for the welfare and betterment of their families and loved ones.

## 2. Woman as Victim

The concept of victim dates back to ancient cultures and civilizations, such as the ancient Hebrews. Its original meaning was rooted in the idea of sacrifice or of the scapegoat. Over the centuries, the word *victim* came to have additional meanings. During the founding of victimology in the 1940s, victimologists such as Mendelson, Von Hetig, and Wolfgang tended to use textbook or dictionary definitions of victims as hapless dupes who instigated their own victimizations. However, this notion of "victim precipitation" was replaced by the notion of victims as anyone caught up in an asymmetric relationship or situation. "Asymmetry" means anything unbalanced, exploitative, parasitical, oppressive, destructive, alienating or causing inherent suffering. Today, the concept of victim includes any person who experiences injury, loss, or hardship due to any cause. From an article entitled "*Victimology Theory*", (<http://facultynews.edu/toccor/300/300lect01.htm>), a victim is an image of someone who has suffered injury and harm by forces beyond his or her control.

In the Philippines, not a few writers portray women as victims of circumstances and even of their own personal convictions and decisions. As a result, these characters live in limbo and become pathetically unself-conscious of other alternatives to living. Evasco, (1992) labels them as "Ninas Inocentes Type: Woman as Victim."

One of these victimized women is a beautiful, innocent and naïve young lady who catches the attention of a young military officer in the story **The Forest**. Attracted to the lieutenant, she easily gives in to his caprices and the relationship results in a pregnancy that he refuses to acknowledge. Having no plans to marry her, he proposes an abortion which she rejects. But determined to evade his responsibility, he abandons her. Confused and devastated, she jumps from a cliff and does not survive her injuries. She dies while undergoing treatment.

The decision to kill herself could have been triggered by the thought of having a doomed future after having been impregnated and abandoned by the soldier. Young, naive and innocent, she could not have realized that there is more to life than being a victim. But she has no one to share her frustrations with and so ending her life is the best option to make. Apparently, she is a victim of the soldier's sweet promises and her own hasty decisions.

Another woman victimized by the men in uniform in this same story is the nameless lady whose simplicity and innocence are greatly abused. Unfortunately, her suffering is only known after she is found unconscious in the hills when Red Cross paramedics discover her "lacerated breasts and the pubis that was mashed..." Subsequently, people recognize her as "the one who entertained the squad (of army) who got the pro kits in the Red Cross station." No one could tell what she has done to merit such brutality, but what is clear is that she is a victim of the soldiers' lustful desires—ironically a victim of men tasked to protect her and the other people in their community.

Meanwhile, in the second story of **Two Letters**, a clear victim of hasty decision-making and personal conviction is Elen. Wanting to have a taste of the cosmopolitan lifestyle in the city, this province-bred girl leaves her boyfriend (Siso) behind, inconsiderate and insensitive to what he may feel. As she copes with the city's complicated life, she unconsciously severs her ties with him and eventually forgets him. Unfortunately, her new life proves to be more miserable as she is sexually abused by the son of her landlord that results to pregnancy. Helpless and frustrated, she goes back to the province only to be loathed by her townmates who have been privy to what she has done to Siso.



Later, she suffers the consequences of her actions, when Siso, upon the instigation of his mother, directs his attention to other women. Apparently, what has happened indicates that she is a victim not only of circumstances but also of her own decisions. As an innocent woman who ventures out into the city, she is an easy prey to those who have taken advantage of her; her decision to go home and not to stand firm on her earlier decision is also indicative of a confused mind. It is clear that she has made arbitrary decisions but lacks the strength to fight life's challenges.

On the other hand, one of the leading women characters in the story *Flotsam*, is a clear victim of circumstances. A daughter of a very poor family in Cebu, Lita is determined to uproot her loved ones from their misery; she agrees to become a househelp of a Chinese copra merchant who also offers to send her to school. But the good gesture is not offered without a favor in return; this Chinese landlord takes advantage of her weakness and sexually harasses her. Not totally devastated though, she leaves her province and looks for some opportunities in Manila, hopeful to find work and continue her studies. Yet, misfortunes still follow her; finding no decent work to realize her dreams, she ends up working as a housemaid instead. Finding Aling Julia, a relative, could have saved her but she turns out to be a pimp who convinces Lita to become a prostitute instead. Becoming one aggravates the whole situation as she comes to love the job in time and forgets to pursue what she has planned for her life. Later in her middle age, having lost her youth and vivacity, she is seen traversing the dirty streets of Quiapo, Manila— old and wrinkled, peddling sweepstakes tickets. From how she is described, it is noted that Lita has regressed physically because of the cruel situations she has been into. Without doubt, one can say that she has become a victim of events beyond her control.

Another woman ironically subjected to victimization by her own fellow government employees and by unexpected events in her life is Marina Salcedo in the story *Progress*. Hoping to get her much-delayed promotion, she painstakingly hops from one department to another in the main branch of the government agency she works in. But what she witnesses instead is graft and corruption in various forms—from the lowly-paid rank-and-file employees to the highest officer.

But this is minor offense compared to how the high-ranking officials do it with vulgarity. When she gets to meet Mr. Julio Lobo, one of the most powerful men in the Ministry, she senses something nasty

as he drops hints that he wants to be treated out to an expensive restaurant. Thinking of her promotion, she forces herself to agree to a dinner date with him. Unfortunately, it would turn out to be the most traumatic night for her. Inside the restaurant, she could not parry the advances that he would make until she is forced to accompany him to a hotel. Inside the hotel, the lustful officer refuses to heed her pleas and succeeds gratifying himself at her expense.

The situations presented show how Marina has been cruelly victimized by the very people who should have helped her in her problem. Ironically, they are the same people who rob her of her integrity and honor.

Another lady who is a victim, this time, by her own personal decisions and conviction similar to Elen in *Two Letters*, is Shinae in the story *The Refugee*. Assigned as a tour guide of a Filipino History Professor who has visited Korea for a series of lectures, she gradually develops a strong fondness for the old professor especially since the latter does not have reservations in telling her that she has a strong resemblance to a former lover in HongKong. Because of constant togetherness, their friendship reaches a certain level of intimacy that makes her truly comfortable of what she honestly feels for him.

Yet, although the teacher admits that he has fallen for her charms, he has also become frank enough to tell her that he cannot reciprocate her special feelings. Bluntly, he tells her that she has no future with him as "he belongs to no one, dedicating his life to his self-professed advocacy in history and culture..." He even emphasizes to her that "{he is} decay and old age, {he is} not life."

Shinae does not know how to counter the professor's decision. Trapped by her emotions and blinded by personal convictions, she thinks that being true to her self is the most important thing in life. In the end, she is back to her lonely and confused life, as the professor leaves for another engagement in another country.

The last character in this category is the nameless wife in the story *Pride*. Like Shinae, this nameless woman is also a victim of wrong decision-making as she makes decisions without considering the feelings and ideas of her husband. Being used to a comfortable life as she comes from a rich and prominent family, she manipulates things so she can escape the miserable condition she is in. With the birth of their first child, she convinces her husband to accept a job vacancy in her uncle's company so he can earn enough for their growing family. But after being in the job for a while, he feels he has been led into a situation that

he is not comfortable in. Yet the wife insists that everything would redound to the welfare of their growing family if he resigns. Later the husband finds out that she is only considering her own whims and caprices and not their firstborn's so he decides to let go of his employment.

Sensing that her husband is serious about his plans to quit, she insists that he remain in his job if only for her and their child's sake. Unfortunately, she gets an unexpected lashing from her husband. Obviously filled up with pent-up anger, he strikes her. It is noted that the husband plays it safe initially but as her insistence persists, he stands for what he thinks is the right thing to do even if it would mean getting physical with her.

As analyzed, the women in this particular image have been victimized not only by circumstances beyond their control but by their own decision-making and personal convictions as well.

### **3. Strong-willed, Aggressive and Steadfast Woman**

The tradition of strong women runs through the history of Philippine culture. Legends and history tell us of women who have commanded armies and led revolts in times of war or who played important roles in the community as priestesses, healers and pillars of culture in times of peace. But although unsung, there are many more women in Philippine society who go about their everyday lives with independence of mind and steadfastness of purpose, whose strength and persistence have sustained their families in good and bad times (Guerrero, 1997). Notably what is more remarkable about this women is their being strong-willed, aggressive, audacious, defiant and rebellious. Moreover, they do not submit to the norms and standards of society but instead deviate from them and do what is not considered conventional.

One such character is Ramona in the story *Dama de Noche*. Determined to realize her grand dreams, she ventures to Manila and pursues her studies but fate proves uncooperative. The moment she knows her parents can no longer afford her studies, she searches for ways so she can still continue her studies. Luckily, she meets Mr. Pepe Sevilla who volunteers to help but his assistance is not more than enough so she befriends other people whom she thinks could be of help. Ironically, she joins in the company of men who do not give value to her being a woman but instead take advantage of her weakness.

But she does not allow her weakness to topple her. Her strength and audacity surface when she insists on leading an independent life

and declares firmly that she does not need anyone's help. When Mr. Sevilla tries to rescue her, she refuses him.

Though she fails in her dream, she is not one to wallow in despair but continues to struggle and fight for the kind of life that she must lead. With valor and determination, she still manages to go on living. Her response to the deplorable conditions that she has been led into is a display of bravery and her strategy to counter the trials and challenges is one that can only come from a strong-willed woman like her.

Another display of audacity comes from Dely in the short story *The Light Bringer*. As one of her company's trusted executives, she is privy to "all the domestic maelstroms" in their office yet she knows how to deal with the different personalities she is exposed to. With her at the helm of a particular department, the management is assured that everything would have a smooth operation. This strength in human relations does not get in the way of her emotional involvement with a married colleague whose wife is also her good friend. And yet it is this illicit affair that hinders her to divulge the sad news of her lover's demotion in the company and her own subsequent promotion. Mustering enough courage though, she still tells him the truth. Surprisingly, he is not prepared to accept the sad news, and this leads to a lover's quarrel. Condescendingly, he accuses her of having manipulated the whole situation; he tells her straight to her face: "...how did you know the real score? What did you use to pry it out? Intuition or sex?" Deeply insulted, she immediately decides to end their relationship. The decision is a difficult move but for Dely, it is a wiser option than to be tied down to a patronizing, inconsiderate and immature man whose only consideration is his own feelings and welfare.

Another display of valor is shown in the story *Respectability* by a nameless mistress who attempts to reconcile a father and a son who have long been separated from each other. Her strength is manifested when, despite the cold treatment given her by the nameless son of her lover, she insists and convinces him to see his long lost father whose ailment is beyond cure and whose days have been numbered. But the man's son is not convinced, thus, she brings up the issue of the involvement of his mother in the separation. She implicates and blames his mother for having caused the separation by presenting details that discredit her. But all of this is in vain as the son is still adamant, thus, in the end, she tells him, "I wish I can make you believe it—even if you don't give me the money he needs. I wish I can make you believe it—that he is kind, that he is good and that he is your father."

The story ends with the mistress not being able to convince him but successfully presenting to him the condition of his father. This story shows some parallelisms with Aida Rivera Ford's *The Chiefest Mourner* in the aspect of the mistress' insistence to air her side and to fight for what she believes is worth fighting for. Both the two characters in the two stories are successful in presenting a certain facet of their personality, that of being a sincere and a loyal person despite their being considered as the "other woman."

Another female character who belongs to this category is the mother of the character-narrator in the story *Something is Wrong With My Hearing*. Although the story is told from the point of view of the character-narrator, the story tangentially projects the image of this woman whose courage is quite unique. Widowed early in life, she became the toast of gossip-mongers as it was her own mother who has spread the news that she has poisoned her own husband to death. Obviously, this mother and daughter do not have a pleasant relationship because they espouse different values and beliefs. The mother has judged her daughter to be an atheist as "she never went to church...used dirty words, did not believe in God and was not home most of the time." Yet, she continues to live with her mother despite the animosity. Even if her own son is bound to be brainwashed by her mother, she never allows the latter's negative thoughts to overwhelm her. Likewise, she is not affected "when people talk about her quite derogatorily." She is "so distant and aloof that no one could get her to her door." These actions only prove that even if she appears vulnerable and weak, she has an inner extraordinary strength and bravery. Her emotional strength manifests when, despite the atrocity that prevails in their house and the humiliation and indifference that she gets from her mother, she still stays with her and never talks derogatorily about her and about their situation.

Aggression and strong-will are also seen in Linda in the story *Hero*. At the outset, her aggressiveness is seen when, as an idealistic university student who has lofty dreams for her country, she joins rallies and demonstrations "against the oligarchy, the Malacanang, and the Americans." However, realizing the futility of her efforts, she turns passive and accepts that one's heroism does not lead to a decent life and her idealism leads not to comfort and convenience. With a complete turnaround, she then works hard to get all the material things she needs even if it would mean giving up her honor and dignity. Moreover, she questions the importance that her father gives on one's heroism and the

significance of war. In a confrontation, she honestly tells him of what she feels "...I sometimes wonder, Papa...but really I don't care about your war anymore...I just want to get on and I don't want to be tied up, imprisoned by the past and its sentimentalism..."

Her father's physical degeneration and sentimentalism could have been a hindrance for her to pursue what she wants to do but she has not allowed these to encroach on what she thinks could make her happy and contented. Thus, she bluntly tells her father that one's patriotism no longer has a place in every Filipino's heart. For her, having pragmatic views about life is what is more important; she then tells him that everyone in the Philippines is a traitor. "...we are a nation of traitors, Papa. Every revolution we had was betrayed—even our student movement. I see some of my former friends—they are living it up in government, in business..."

Obviously for Linda, the only way to conquer poverty and misery, is to "join the bandwagon," get even with the enemies and acquire wealth through whatever means. And this is what she has done, although in the process, she has to lose her honor and dignity—she gets even with the moneyed and powerful men by selling herself and vending drugs so she and her father will be uprooted from their miserable condition. From what she has done, it is seen that Linda has shown much strength and valor to counter life's hardships and the conservative views and beliefs of her own father.

Another display of strong-will and aggressiveness is shown by Tita Ramirez in the story **A Man's Reward Is In Heaven**. When she is requested by her colleagues to tell their American guest about their sentiments of his coming to the country, she is initially hesitant to heed the request. But realizing that there is wisdom in their belief, she agrees to act as the spokesperson of the group. Thus, when all her journalist colleagues are gathered together, she lashes out at Dr. Robertson saying that the true motive of his coming to the Philippines is not to scout for people interested in fellowship grants in the United States of America but to show the presence of American imperialism under the guise of a humanitarian cause. With these thoughts, she admonishes her fellow Filipinos not "to simply accept what the Americans will give us."

What Tita has done obviously shows strong will and aggressiveness especially since she has been known to have partiality to Caucasian men and lovers. But setting aside emotional concerns, she has proven that her love for her country and her countrymen weighs more than her love for white men.

Another story that explores another style of strong will is the one entitled **Arbol de Fuego**. In this story, Lorna shows enormous strength and courage as she battles traumatic incidents in her life. Early on in her life, she has already shown some signs of bravery. "...I was very poor, in that little Nueva Ecija village, with not enough, never enough to eat...How did I go to school? By the sheerest guts, by the sheerest hardwork. Any kind of work..." Later, it is this same bravery that leads her to become pregnant swayed by the promises of young love. But not the type who would not fight back, she is toughened by the situation and searches for Arturo de Leon, the father of her lover to ask him to help her get out of the difficult situation. Luckily, she is taken care by Arturo with the promise "that he would stand by her."

Several months later, he is surprised to see a transformed Lorna though. She has become a liberated and an extremely confident woman who is out to conquer the world. Surprisingly, their constant meeting leads to an illicit affair but in the course of their intimacy, she divulges that she is actually using the whole situation to get even with Pepe, the man who impregnated her. Confident that Arturo cannot refuse whatever she asks, she then demands that Pepe, studying in the United States then, be asked to come home and marry her. Initially, Arturo shows some reservations but it is hinted that he will grant her demand especially that she is firm in her decision. The analysis clearly shows that Lorna has been consistent in showing her bravery and resoluteness.

On the other hand, a woman who refuses to be caged in an environment where she cannot freely express herself in is Ligaya in the story **The Wall Between Us**. Living in a strictly-managed dormitory owned by a particular congregation, she feels that she is deprived of her basic rights, thus when she is evicted for an "unforgivable" offense, she makes sure she gets out and never returns to the dormitory. She takes refuge in her lover's house but is reluctantly accepted because her lover, Abelardo, has left the house because of a sibling quarrel. Yet, she insists to stay and live with her lover's elder brother.

From how she manipulates things, it is clear that Ligaya has become a woman who is in control of her life and her destiny. With her decision to abandon her heavily-guarded life and to live an independent and free life, she manifests an aggressive attitude. She is prepared to face the kind of life that she wants to have. In addition, the way she responds to life's challenges is indicative of a strong-willed personality.

Finally, of the two women characters depicted in the story **Flotsam**, it is Mimi who is seen to exhibit strong determination and

valor to counter life's tribulations. Caught up by the outbreak of World War II after she arrives in Manila, she "meanders about, living with friends and distant relatives—not wanting to return to where she was born." Luckily, she meets a Red Cross doctor-volunteer who spares her from the brutalities of the war and sends her to school. But becoming the doctor's mistress does not give her contentment that after the liberation and after having finished her studies, she leaves him and marries someone else. Obviously, her action shows an aggressiveness and a confidence to be in control of herself. She has not allowed the harsh events to make her a loser; instead, these have made her become firm and steadfast to counter the painful experiences engulfing her. This is clearly one case of a woman who, according to Evasco (1992) has "fulfilled the natural human impulse to grow...and to expand her horizons of achievement."

### Woman as a Nurturer

To nurture is to perform the act of promoting development or growth. It also means upbringing or rearing. As a verb, it means to nourish, train or educate (Grollier Dictionary, 1994). Therefore, a woman who nurtures is someone who gives utmost care and attention to her family and loved ones so they could live a better life; she is someone who is concerned with the welfare of the people she loves; she supports and guides them and makes herself always available to provide them security and attention. This image is apparent in some of F. Sionil Jose's stories.

In the 2-story format of *Two Interviews*, the two wives in these stories may not be the focal characters but their image as pacifiers, mediators and supporters to their husbands has placed them in this particular classification. The first story, focuses on Nena, a very understanding wife who knows how to take care of her family despite the meager resources they have. Aside from being a very supportive wife, she also gives good advice to her husband as regards work-related matters. Even if her husband gives more priority to his work over the needs of their child, she does not fight with him but instead tries to understand the whole situation. When her husband, for example, shows a violent reaction over the non-printing of what he has expected to be an explosive news item in the publishing house that he works with, she pacifies him. This dutiful wife is able to tame him for as he prepares to confront his publisher and editor, she reminds him: "Hon, whatever it is, please don't lose your head..." Her reaction and pronouncements



show her wisdom as she gives him hints as to the possible repercussions that may happen if he insists on confronting the publisher. She is certain that if he would insist on fighting the publisher, their family would bear the brunt of his employer's anger.

From the foregoing discussion, it is apparent that the female character gives more importance to the welfare of her family as she chooses to stay out of the chaos that could lead them to nowhere. It is also very obvious that she prefers to suffer hardships and difficulties than to lead a chaotic life. And the way she nurtures her family could only come from a woman who puts premium on their welfare.

As mentioned, the second story of this two-story format does not explore much of the woman's character, yet the story presents a woman who has chosen to fully dedicate her life to her family and for this, she has neglected her own personal comfort. Her husband has noticed that after 10 years, "...she has developed a growing stoop in her shoulders." In addition, when he gives her one of those habitual domestic pecks on her cheeks, "she receives it with some annoyance for she was busy...and she never wanted distractions when she was working." Her dedication to her family includes being an "alarm clock", reminding her husband always of his countless appointments. After having borne him five children after ten years in marriage, she has forgotten how it is to live a luxurious life like what she had prior to her marriage. This is how this wife/mother nurtures her family; she forgoes what would have fulfilled her as an individual in exchange for the comfort and welfare of her husband and children.

Another mother who shows much concern for her son (Siso) especially when the latter is abandoned by his girlfriend, Elen, is Nana Antonia in the sub-story of **Two Letters**. Accustomed to rise early everyday, she is already rinsing the rice she would cook when she tells the newly-awaken Siso to "go back to sleep. You were out very late last night, I know. I'll wake you up when breakfast is ready." This mother's concern and love for her son is also observed when his eye is hit by some flying chips while cutting wood to be used for cooking. She "turned up his eyelid and examined his eye; it was not really hurt and she was relieved." Moreover, aware of the emotional struggle her son is going through, she constantly consoles him: "I don't know what it is that troubles you...you can't do anything about (Elen) now...she wanted so much to go to the city." When Siso asks her not to over-react to the situation, she insists that she cannot help it because "...the day that woman arrives, my son stays away all night, then he comes home only

to grumble and cry in his sleep." Typical of a concerned and caring mother, she encourages him to forget Elen and find other women who may be more deserving of his love and attention.

On the other hand, in the story *Offertory*, it is observed that a friend can nurture a friend. The story presents Lily as a true and sincere friend to Pepe at a time when he faces a physical and emotional battle. Mistakenly captured as a rebel during the Second World War, he has been subjected to several molestations and tortures that have rendered him impotent and sterile. Concerned of his welfare, Lily helps him so he could regain his lost confidence and self-worth. She "offers herself" to re-awaken his sexual urge. This gesture could be truly commendable if one is to measure how Lily shows her care and concern to save her friend from a lifelong devastation. Her actions speak well of someone who knows what friendship is all about—that it is more than just taking care of the person but also of sacrificing one's life for him/her.

Another character who is apparently concerned of the welfare of her family despite the ideological differences that each of them has, is the nameless mother in the story *Gangrene*. Although the story focuses on the father and the son, it is noted that the mother plays a significant function in the story. Anxious and worried in locating her eldest son who has decided to (go to the mountains with) join the rebels, she is in a quandary because her husband, who is holding a high position in the Philippine military, is tasked to chase the rebels. Yet, her maternal instinct prevails; when she receives no information about Willy, her son, "she keeps calling some of (his) friends, especially those whom she has met, who have been to the house, to let her know if they have heard from (him)..." Fortunately, her longing for Willy, though, is temporarily consoled by his letter that she constantly reads, "after all, for her...the oldest is always special..." Another proof that she is really a nurturing mother is when, in the hospital bed, after having been wounded and captured by the military, while conversing with his father, Willy enthuses that "...when I was hungry, I dreamed of Mama's 'paella' and her special chicken curry..." This statement clearly shows the nurturing nature of the nameless mother.

Meanwhile, in the story *Waywaya*, the main female character Waywaya, who is the daughter of the chief of their tribe (Taga Laud) is captured and turned into a slave by her rival tribe (Taga Daya). While captured, she experiences trials and tribulations that divest her of her physical and emotional strength. Helpless and defenseless, she is

subjected to doing lowly tasks yet she does not complain; she also gets to sleep in a place where pots and pans are kept. She specifically serves Dayaw, her captor and the tribe's future leader, "...when he woke up, she was in the room, fanning him with a small palm leaf..."

Clearly, despite the maltreatment she gets, she knows how to nourish the people of the rival tribe even if they have considered her as their enemy. Her nurturing quality again manifests when, after coming from the beach or the fields, she makes sure that Dayaw returns to his house with the "usual plate of steaming rice, the bowl of ginger broth which she had brewed, the perfunctory questions about how the night had been, if he slept well,...."

Finally, in the story **Something Is Wrong With My Hearing**, both the two female characters (the mother and her daughter) play significant roles in the upbringing of the narrator-character who is both involved in their lives. The mother of the nameless narrator-character, although maintaining a modern lifestyle and having liberal views about life, fully understands the behavior and attitude of her son that she does not even reprimand him nor give him tongue-lashing for his misdemeanors.

The mother-son relationship is so close that she consults with him "whenever she has suitors." In contrast, the narrator-character's grandmother shows her concern by making sure that he refrains from misdemeanor and foul language which he has allegedly acquired from his mother.

Despite the different styles of bringing up the nameless character-narrator, the two women have given him what he could ask for and this is arguably the greatest nurturing that could be done—giving him all their possessions, their care and attention

From the above analyses, it is generally observed that the female characters of F. Sionil Jose can be categorized into four images. It is further noted that of the four emerging images, nine women have been classified as strong-willed, aggressive and steadfast, four are considered as suffering women, another four are classified as victims and five women have been classified as nurturers. Notably the national artist in Literature in 2001 has portrayed more women who are strong and courageous than all the other images.

### **What could have shaped these characters into the kind of woman they have become?**

From the analysis made, it is also noted and observed that certain factors have contributed to the molding of the personalities of Sionil Jose's women characters. Firstly, they have been shaped by how they relate with the other characters in the stories. The latter play a significant role in their lives that their personalities have been affected by them. Secondly, these women have also been greatly affected by the setting, the locale and the place where they take residence. Thus, as every woman is subjected to certain circumstances, she evolves into a particular personality as a result of the events of her surroundings.

### **Conclusion and Recommendation**

The study yields four emerging images of women. They are the suffering woman, the woman as a victim, the strong-willed, and aggressive woman and the woman as a nurturer.

As women who suffer a lot, they are observed to have floundered in numerous sufferings but do not have enough determination to evade the injustice done to them. Another commonality these women share is they are prepared to make sacrifices even if it means foregoing their own happiness so the welfare of the majority prevails.

As victims, some of the women experience both physical and emotional brutality caused by the other characters. That is, they have been abused, exploited and oppressed with the people they deal with. Some women have also been victimized by their own decisions and conviction

As strong-willed, aggressive and steadfast women, ten female characters show the determination to pursue their ambitions despite hindrances and obstacles. In addition, when beset with problems related to their career and profession, they pursue what they want to do with their lives and defy other people's negative impression of them. They also stand firm on whatever decision they make regardless of the repercussion their decisions may bring. A few of these women have also become radical; they use their bodies to advance their interests unmindful of other people's impressions.

Finally, as nurturing women, they take good care of their loved ones despite the many trials that they encounter. They nurture and give importance to the welfare of their family and other loved ones.

### Findings

On the whole, in his 25 short stories scrutinized in this study, F. Sionil Jose projects variations in his characterization of women which give way to different images that emerge, namely: the suffering woman, woman as a victim, the strong-willed, aggressive and steadfast woman and the nurturing woman. Of these distinctive images, it is the strong-willed, aggressive and steadfast image of a woman that has the most number of depictions (as noted in ten short stories), followed by the nurturing woman (discerned in six stories), the victimized woman (also seen in six stories) and lastly, the suffering woman (observed in five short stories). These images are shown to have been motivated by the women's interactions with the other characters and by the social conditions they are thrust into.

There are also implications that can be forwarded from the results of this study. Firstly, a woman may yield different personalities depending on the conditions and situations she may be exposed to. In addition, a woman may choose to suffer and sacrifice her personal pleasures and dreams for the interest of her loved ones. She may be resigned to the idea that her prime role is to bear children and she may also want to wrestle with life's trials and tribulations just so she can provide for what her family and loved ones need. Another implication is that she may forego her own happiness and satisfaction for the sake of her parents and siblings.

From the findings, it may also be gleaned that the woman is free to make decisions which she believes to be the proper ones even if they would divest her of her dignity and integrity. She may choose the path that she wants to tread and be prepared to face whatever consequences her choice may bring. Furthermore, a woman may not submit to the norms and standards of the society but may perform actions which are not considered traditional. Lastly, a woman can have her voice heard and she may opt to live an unconventional life that sets her apart from the rest. She can also be brave enough to counter whatever issues may be thrown at her. Therefore, a woman can choose what she

wants to do with her life; and despite the odds her choice may bring, she still can stand on her decisions.

### Conclusions and Implications

F. Sionil Jose portrays women who go through difficult situations. From different contexts where the actions and interactions take place, from different circumstances the characters are cast into, the women characters are thrown into a hard, tough, arduous and, at times, grim and thorny existence. This pattern appears consistently in the short stories studied. To this recurring pattern of the grueling lives the women characters tread, the manner of interaction with the other characters and with the social conditions go in diverse ways. Active and passive interactions are traced. From these, different personalities which are shaped, are further shown to have conflicting traits and attributes. Thus, some women characters who are portrayed as strong and aggressive, also exhibit weaknesses and helplessness.

### Recommendations

In the light of the conclusions and implications of the study, the following are encouraged:

1. a comparative study of the findings obtained from the analysis of the images of women in F. Sionil Jose's fiction and that of other Filipino male writers;
2. a comparative study of the findings obtained from the analysis of the images of women in the fiction of Filipino male writers and Filipino female writers;
3. a further exploration of the delineation of women characters by Filipino authors using contemporary theoretical approaches to the study of women in literature other than formalism;
4. an application of feminist frameworks which may include the liberal-feminist tradition and the newer concepts of cultural feminism and post-structural feminism to the study of F. Sionil Jose's women characters;
5. an analysis on how the literature curriculum propagates images of women;
6. an analysis of instructional materials to create a comprehensive perspective on the representation of women's experiences; and

7. a review of teaching practices for a more gender-sensitive interaction in the literature classroom.

## Bibliography

### I. Primary Sources

- Jose, Francisco Sionil. *The God Stealer*. Manila: Solidaridad Publishing House, 1968.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *Waywaya and Other Stories*. Hongkong. Dah Hua Printing Co., 1980.
- Evasco, Marjorie P. "The Writer and Her Roots." *Women Reading: Feminist Perspectives on Philippine Literary Texts*. Ed. Thelma B. Kintanar. Quezon City: University of the Philippines Press, 1992.
- Kintanar, Thelma B. *Women Reading: Feminist Perspectives on Philippine Literary Texts*. Quezon City: University of the Philippines Press and University Center for Women Studies, 1992.
- Lopez, Helen. "The Outsider Within: The Cultural Representation of Women in Selected Tagalog Novels of the 1920s". Ed. Thelma B. Kintanar. *Women Reading: Feminist Perspectives on Philippine Literary Texts*. Quezon City: U.P. Press, 1992.
- Yap-Patron, Ida. *Interactive Reading: Responding to and Writing About Philippine Literature*. Quezon City: Great Books Trading, 2002.

### II. Secondary Sources

#### Books

- Abrams, M. H. *A Glossary of Literary Terms* (5<sup>th</sup> ed.) U.S.A.: Holt, Rinehart and Winston.
- Arambulo, Thelma. "The Filipina as Writer Against All Odds." Ed: Thelma B. Kintanar. *Women Reading: Feminist Perspectives on Philippine Literary Texts*. Quezon City: U.P. Press, 1992.
- Bogarod, Carley Rees and Jan Slotnik Schmidt. *Legacies: Fiction, Poetry, Drama, Non-fiction*. United States of America. Harcourt Brace College Publisher, 1995.

- Di Yanni, Robert. *Principles of Drama and Critical Theory*. New York. 1999.
- Figes, Eva. "Patriarchal Attitudes." *Feminist Theory: A Reader*. Ed. Wendy Kalmar and Frances Bartkowski. California: Mayfield Publishing Co., 2000.
- Hidalgo, Cristina P. *Gentle Subversion: The Adolescent Girl in the Short Fiction of Filipino Women*. 1998.
- Kalmar, Wendy and Frances Bartkowski. *Feminist Theory: A Reader*. London: Sage Publications, 2000.
- Kintanar, Thelma B. "Towards the New Filipina: Filipino Women Novelists and Their Novels." *Emergent Voices: Southeast Asian Women Novelists*. Quezon City: U.P. Press. 1995.
- Kintanar, Thelma Lorna. "The Short Stories of Francisco Sionil Jose." (Ed.) Edwin Thumboo. *Frankie Sionil Jose A Tribute*. Singapore: Marshall Cavendish International. 2005.
- Kirzner, m T. and W. Mandell. *Literature: Reading, Reacting, Writing* (2<sup>nd</sup> ed.).1994.
- Lumbera, Bienvenido. "Ermita as Nation: Reading History with Francisco Sionil Jose." (Ed.) Edwin Thumboo. *Frankie Sionil Jose A Tribute*. Singapore: Marshall Cavendish International. 2005.
- Reyes, Soledad S. "The Subversive Role of Female Characters in Early Novels." *The Romance Mode in Philippine Literature and Other Essays*. Metro Manila: De La Salle University Press. 1992.
- Roberts, Edgar V. and Henry E. Jacobs. *Literature: An Introduction to Reading and Writing* (4<sup>th</sup> ed.). New Jersey: Prentice Hall. 1995.
- Rodriguez, Milagros D. and Camilo Villanueva. "F. Sionil Jose: Chronology and a Selected Bibliography, 1946-2004." (Ed.) Edwin Thumboo. *Frankie Sionil Jose A Tribute*. Singapore: Marshall Cavendish International. 2005.
- Santiago, Lilia. "The Filipina as Metaphor for Crisis." Ed. T. E. Kintanar. *Women Reading: Feminist Perspectives on Philippine Literary Texts*. Quezon City: U.P. Press. 1992.
- Tan, Arsenia B. *Introduction to Literature*. Metro Manila: Academic Publishing Corporation. 1995.
- Tope, Lily Rose. "Women and Nationalism in F. Sionil Jose's Three Filipino Women." (Ed.) Edwin Thumboo. *Frankie Sionil Jose A Tribute*. Singapore: Marshall Cavendish International. 2005.



Thumboo, Edwin (ed.) *Frankie Sionil Jose A Tribute*. Singapore: Marshall Cavendish International. 2005.

Ventura, Sylvia M. "Sexism and the Mythification of Woman: A Feminist Reading of Nick Joaquin's 'The Summer Solstice' and Alfred Yuson's 'The Hill of Samuel.'" Ed. T.B. Kintanar. *Women Reading: Feminist Perspectives on the Philippine Literary Texts*. Quezon City: U.P. Press. 1992.

### **Publications / Magazines / Journals**

Alburo, Erlinda K. "Towards a Feminist Perspective: A Reader's Guide to Contemporary Philippine Literature by Women." *Philippine Quarterly of Culture and Society*. Vol. 22. 1994.

Badinas, Gloria. *The Filipino Woman Character as Portrayed in Four Narratives*. Aday. No. I. 1994.

Yandug, Arlene J. "The Social Milieu in Sionil Jose's Stories." *Kinaadman*. Vol. XXV. No. 1.

### **Dictionary**

Webster, Meriam. *A Complete Dictionary*. New York: Macmillan and Company, Inc. 1990.

### **Unpublished Thesis**

Cotejar, Lilia A. *The Women Characters in the Short Stories of Selected Filipino Women Writers*. Graduate Thesis. Xavier University, 2000.

Torres, Eugene F. *The Selected Plays of Wilfredo Ma. Guerrero: As Feminist Materials*. Graduate Thesis. Xavier University, 2000.