



The Unconscious Conflicts, Desires, and Traumas in Selected Contemporary Short Stories in the Philippines

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Abstract: This analysis investigated the application of psychoanalytic theory to unveil the unconscious motivations and inner struggles within characters of contemporary Philippine short stories. Inspired by Freud's concept of the unconscious mind, the study examined how seemingly trivial actions, dreams, and dialogue exposed hidden desires and conflicts. It further explored how characters grapple with past traumas, a core concept in psychoanalysis. This analysis employed a direct content analysis approach to explore how contemporary Philippine short stories depict unconscious conflicts, desires, and traumas. The concise format of short stories was advantageous, allowing for a focused examination of characters' inner lives and the subtle clues revealing hidden desires, conflicts, and fears. Purposive sampling identified works that demonstrably engaged with these themes. A close reading of the chosen stories followed, meticulously examining the text for key elements and recurring patterns. Thematic analysis techniques were then used to identify and analyze these recurring themes. Literary devices like dreams, symbols, and free indirect discourse were pinpointed within the stories, as they offer insights into unconscious motivations. Researchers then analyzed how these devices connect to relevant psychoanalytic concepts, including Freudian theory of the unconscious, unresolved traumas, and defense mechanisms. Recognizing the study's focus on the Philippines, the analysis likely considered the influence of societal expectations and traditions on the characters' unconscious conflicts. This involved examining how the specific cultural context shapes the stories' portrayals of the unconscious mind. By examining language, dreams, fantasies, and behaviors, psychoanalytic therapy sheds light on underlying conflicts, desires, and defense mechanisms influencing an individual's psychology. This study focused specifically on three elements of the unconscious: conflicts, desires, and traumas. Analyzing literary works demonstrated how these unconscious forces significantly impact thoughts, feelings, and actions. However, the analysis acknowledged limitations such as subjective interpretations and confirmation bias. Further research exploring other aspects of the unconscious offered a more comprehensive understanding of these complex dynamics.

Keywords: Psycho, Phallic, Trivial, Unconscious, Dynamics.

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INTRODUCTION

The human psyche is a complex tapestry woven from conscious thoughts and unconscious desires, conflicts, and past traumas (Freud, 1933). Literature, particularly the condensed form of the short story, offers a portal into this hidden realm. This

analysis delved into the unconscious conflicts, desires, and traumas explored within selected contemporary kinds of literature. This analysis explored how Filipino authors utilize the power of the unconscious to illuminate the complexities of the

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human condition within their contemporary narratives.

Sigmund Freud, the pioneer of psychoanalysis, revolutionized our understanding of the human psyche by proposing the existence of the unconscious. This vast realm houses repressed desires, unresolved conflicts, and formative experiences from childhood that continue to exert a powerful influence on our behaviour, even if we are unaware of their impact (Feist & Feist, 2010). Psychoanalysis, the therapeutic approach derived from these theories, aims to bring these unconscious elements to light, facilitating self-understanding and healing.

By examining selected contemporary Philippine short stories through a psychoanalytic lens, we gain a richer understanding of the characters' motivations and inner struggles. Authors explored how seemingly insignificant actions, dreams, or slips of the tongue might reveal underlying desires and conflicts. Additionally, the analysis illuminated the characters' grappling with the psychological repercussions of past traumas, a theme central to psychoanalysis (Veneracion, 2019). Furthermore, considering the Philippines' unique cultural context becomes crucial. Stories can explore how societal expectations and traditions might shape characters' unconscious conflicts, offering a nuanced understanding of the interplay between individual psychology and cultural norms (Espiritu, 2011).

This exploration of psychoanalysis in contemporary Philippine short stories not only enriched our appreciation of this vibrant literary landscape but also underscored the enduring relevance of psychoanalytic theory in understanding the complexities of the human experience. By delving into the characters' unconscious desires, conflicts, and traumas, we gained a deeper appreciation for the universal struggles that transcend cultural boundaries.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

This study aimed to explore how Filipino authors utilize psychoanalytic concepts to illuminate the characters' inner lives. The research delved into how psychoanalytic theories, particularly those concerning the Freudian unconscious, are employed to understand character motivations, the lingering effects of past traumas (Veneracion, 2019), and the interplay between individual psychology and societal expectations within a Philippine context (Espiritu, 2011). By analyzing selected contemporary short stories through this psychoanalytic lens, the study seeks to uncover the hidden depths of the characters' psyches and enriched our understanding of both the

literary works and the complexities of the Filipino experience.

Research Question

This content analysis aimed to answer the question: What are the unconscious conflicts, desires, and traumas present in the selected contemporary short stories in the Philippines?

Selected Short Stories

- Phallic Symbols by Exie Abola.
- You Think You Know by Michelle Tiu Tan.
- Red ang Luha ni Michael by Jimmy Alcantara.
- Armor by John Bengan.
- Zoetrope by Richard Cornelio.

METHOD

This study employed a direct content analysis approach to examine the portrayal of unconscious conflicts, desires, and traumas in selected contemporary Philippine short stories. Contemporary short stories offered a particularly fertile ground for exploring the unconscious. Their compressed form allows for a heightened focus on the characters' inner lives, made it easier to detect the subtle clues that reveal their hidden desires, conflicts, and fears. Psychoanalytic frameworks, particularly those that emphasize the role of dreams, free association, and symbolism, can be powerful tools for deciphering these hidden messages within the narrative (Keen, 2002).

The study employed purposive sampling (Polkinghorne, 2005) to select contemporary Philippine short stories that demonstrably engage with themes of unconscious conflicts, desires, and traumas. The researchers conducted a close reading (Richardson, 2003) of the chosen stories, meticulously examining the text for key elements and recurring patterns. Following this, researchers have employed thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006) to identify and analyze these recurring themes within the stories.

The study involved identifying literary devices like dreams, symbols, and free indirect discourse within the stories (Keen, 2002). These elements offered insights into characters' unconscious motivations. Next, the researchers have analyzed how these devices connect to relevant psychoanalytic concepts. This involved exploring the characters' behaviour through the lens of the Freudian unconscious, unresolved traumas (Veneracion, 2019), and defense mechanisms (Feist & Feist, 2010).

Given the study's focus on the Philippines, it likely considered the influence of societal expectations and traditions on the characters'

unconscious conflicts (Espiritu, 2011). This involved examining how the specific cultural context shapes the stories' portrayals of the unconscious mind.

Thematic Analysis

Research Questions	Phallic Symbols <i>Exie Abola</i>	You Think You Know <i>Michelle Tiu Tan</i>	Red ang Luha ni Michael <i>Jimmy Alcantara</i>	Armor <i>John Bengan</i>	Zoetrope <i>Richard Cornelio</i>	Thematic Analysis
	Story 1	Story 2	Story 3	Story 4	Story 5	
Unconscious Conflicts	"... <i>Buti pa si Angela</i> , my younger sister, she doesn't eat too much. That's why she's thin. That's why Daddy... he doesn't like me anymore."	He's an asshole, I know, but part of me envies him for not caring. Sometimes I even wonder why I can't do the same. I suppose I was afraid I might get disappointed... I was overcome by a sudden need for validation.	<i>Naa-addict na ako sa ginagawa ko ...di ko napaglabanan ang tukso. Di yata naintindihan ng mama ang gusto kong palabasin...</i>	He wished someone from the landlord's house would come out and check. Surely they wouldn't take him down here, not with all these people around.	I comforted myself by thinking this child would turn out an axe murderer or a terrorist, or a psycho, and relief laced with perpetual doubt rippled through me. "Please, Fran, say you still love me."	Consumed by personal interests comparing themselves with other characters, wanting to have different situation than the current event, and focusing on own emotion and thought without considering others
Desires	"I need to find a boyfriend who doesn't mind that I'm fat." "I want to kill him."	"I don't want a relationship." But with Joanna it was different. I simultaneously looked forward to and dreaded doing it.	<i>Ito na ang pagkakataon para sorpresahin si Mike.</i>	Before the Death Squad entered the picture, he had already made his decision. If the Death Squad were truly after him, they would have to trace him down the stage. Ronnie knew that he still had one thing left to do before killing himself." He would be dead by the end of the week, but only on his own terms.	In my mind's eye, I stayed in that stall until the moments and leap seconds extended into lifetimes, but I knew it took only a few fast breaths, pulling myself together, gathering enough wits to soldier on for the rest of the day, before going back out to resume the life I'd put on pause.	Willingness to act with determination committed to relationship, life, or death, and willful to do things for their own satisfaction
Trauma	"Hans left me because I was too fat." That part repeats in my head: the man whose face I can't see pulling off the blanket	I had heard those words before, but they still stung. What if I never saw her again? The thought was too frightening	<i>Huwag na nating pag-usapan ang nangyari sa CCP. "Ayoko kasing mag-isa."</i>	This death, it turned out, would have an audience. Ronnie's straight male lover, whom he'd supported through	There was another lifetime, of course, in which these tears were shed, though the notion of our	The role of betrayal and fate fear of being left or being alone, betrayal of loved ones, accepted their fate despite negative effect on them

Research Questions	Phallic Symbols <i>Exie Abola</i>	You Think You Know <i>Michelle Tiu Tan</i>	Red ang Luha ni Michael <i>Jimmy Alcantara</i>	Armor <i>John Bengan</i>	Zoetrope <i>Richard Cornelio</i>	Thematic Analysis
	Story 1	Story 2	Story 3	Story 4	Story 5	
	the one her mother would have put on her when she was a child.	to consider seriously.		college, had left to marry a girl he'd gotten pregnant.	child's death seemed as faraway and far-fetched as the idea of dead stars twinkling down at us forever.	

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Consumed by Personal Interests

There's a strong connection between personal interests and the desire for autonomy, the freedom to make one's own choices. Loewenstein and Moore (2004) explored how self-interest can operate unconsciously and influence a person's judgment. Additionally, Psychologists Richard Ryan and Edward Deci wrote about personal interests in their Self-Determination Theory which emphasized the importance of autonomy for motivation and well-being (Deci & Ryan, 2022). According to Humayon *et al.*, (2018), personal interest is a major factor in motivating people to do the right things that they like. An intense and motivating interest in anything will boost a person to do it wholeheartedly. The idea of pursuing the interests of a person allowed one to feel a sense of control and agency in life. This led to greater creativity, persistence, overall happiness, or disappointment, hatred, and demise.

Envy

Envy is a complex emotion that arises when a person sees someone else has something they like, and wish they had it too. It can form through desire, discontentment, or resentment. It can be a powerful emotion that can sometimes lead to negative thoughts and behaviors (Jalal & Ramachandran, 2017). Envy, in the context of literary analysis, is an emotion produced due to characters consumed by their comparison to other characters.

In the story of Phallic Symbols by Exie Abola, the beginning phrase "*Buti pa si Angela...*" strongly showed the envy of the speaker towards the character Angela. This was supported by the following statements about Angela not eating too much, being thin, and his Daddy not liking her because she's not like Angela. The character was envious with how Angela looks, and how she is fat, and does not get the appreciation of his father.

The line "...but part of me envied him for not caring. Sometimes I even wonder why I can't do the

same." in You Think You Know by Michelle Tiu Tan similarly showed this underlying conflict of the character. Envy towards Don not caring is literally stated by Vince in this line. He wanted to be like Don who has great and vast experience with different women, but he could not because he can not even say his true feelings to the girl she likes. The envy here showed his desire to just be like Don, which he is not.

The root of these all is the comparison of themselves to other characters in the story where they felt inferior towards a certain person which causes them to feel envious. It is an inner unconscious conflict within the characters as they addressed these issues on their own terms. This is evident when Vince, in the story, eventually lived like Don, the man he envied. He slept with a girl he did not like, just like what Don had done multiple times. He realized it but he met in his own terms because of the envy that he felt beforehand.

Anticipation

Anticipation is the feeling of looking forward to or expecting something, often accompanied by excitement or suspense for his or her own interest. The ability to anticipate is necessary for survival and contributes to living a successful life for all organisms. As a result, animals and people behaved as if the anticipation of waiting makes this expectation more certain in the future (Kuznetcova, 2018). According to Zubernis (2022), anticipation is a psychological process that people engage in to mentally prepare for a certain outcome that they expect to happen in the future. That ability allowed humans to take advantage of experiences that benefit them and avoid ones that would be dangerous, increasing the chance of survival.

In the story Armor by John Bengan, the line "He wished someone from the landlord's house would come out and check," showed Ronnie's anticipation that someone will help him see what is happening outside for him to decide to *fight or flight* for his life. He already knew his life is in danger, and

hoping someone will check will help him decide his next move reveals his idea of the possible outcome of the situation. His will to live longer than he had planned for his life significantly raised his level of anticipation in the situation he is in. In the same story, the line "Surely they wouldn't take him down here, not with all these people around." Exhibited his anticipation of not being killed with an audience in broad daylight. Ronnie's will to live and the concern issue of him being chased by the DDS to be killed built up his anticipation, especially with the societal issue of small- and big-time drug users and dealers assassinated in a crowd.

Similarly, the story You Think You Know by Michelle Tiu Tan exhibited the conflict of anticipation through the line "I suppose I was afraid I might get disappointed.." Vince's expectation of being disappointed with the result of his action has made him afraid. It conveyed that Vince has himself mentally prepared for the outcome, which led him to not doing it instead to avoid that negative emotion.

Richard Cornelio's Zoetrope also manifested the conflict anticipation in the line "Please, Fran, say you still love me." Joaquin still had high hopes of love from Fran before they have fully decided to live separate lives. It conveyed the inner conflict of staying together or leaving each other which in the story reveals they have chosen the latter.

Another line "*Sana'y gumaling ka na*" from the story Red *ang Luha ni Michael* by Jimmy Alcantara depicted hopefulness on the mental situation of Ricky. Michael, or Mike, had known about the condition of his lover, Ricky, and is still hopeful that the situation of Ricky will get better.

The characters in the studied works of literature have different anticipation given their different circumstances. The underlying emotion of anticipation manifested by the characters are result of their unconscious will to live, to avoid disappointment, or to be loved. These pieces of literature indicated that the strong willpower of a person can determine their unconscious conflicts.

Self-Centeredness

Jones (2023) described self-centeredness as a psychological construct that can influence functioning. Self-centered functioning, which is intimately related to egoism, egocentrism, an exaggerated importance given to the self, and ego-inflation, favors and strengthens the "hedonic principle" (Dambrun, 2017). In the selected kinds of literature, self-centeredness is deemed as one of the unconscious conflicts of the characters in the story.

In the story Red *ang Luha ni Michael* by Jimmy Alcantara, self-centeredness is evident in the line "*Naa-addict na ako sa ginagawa ko ...di ko napaglabanan ang tukso*". Ricky, who later revealed in the story that he has mental problems, was not able to stop himself from painting everything in red. He was not able to think critically if what he was doing is right or wrong. He did not consider the consequences of his actions. Furthermore, Ricky did not consider the feelings and ideas of other characters in the story. This statement was supported by the line "*Di yata naintindihan ng mama ang gusto kong palabasin..*" where he painted the face of the mailman without consent. The mailman ran away but Ricky did not bother. Although it was revealed at the end of the story that Ricky has some mental issues, it is still evident that self-centeredness is displayed.

In another story, the line "I comforted myself by thinking this child would turn out an axe murderer or a terrorist, or a psycho, and relief laced with perpetual doubt rippled through me." from Zoetrope by Richard Cornelio is a thought of a mother who is about to abort her child. Fran was convincing herself that her baby would grow into a criminal or a psycho to strengthen her determination to have it aborted. The act of comforting herself with the negative future the baby holds affirms that there is hesitance in doing the act of abortion.

It is conspicuous that the thoughts and actions done by the characters in the selected works of literature are the fruit of their unconscious conflicts. There are underlying emotions and circumstances where they have done their actions for their satisfaction. Ricky, who is not in his right mind, has done ridiculous things in their apartment, and Fran, on the other hand, has thought of aborting her child.

Willingness to Act with Determination

Determination refers to a firm and unwavering commitment to achieving a goal. It's a combination of willpower, focus, and perseverance that allows someone to overcome obstacles and see things through to completion. This can be linked to the Self-determination theory (SDT), a broad theory of human personality and motivation concerned with how the individual interacts with and depends on the social environment (Legault, 2017). This theory explained intrinsic and various types of extrinsic motivation and outlines how these motivations impact situational responses in different domains, as well as social and cognitive development and personality. The selected works of literature have characters with underpinning motives as to why they are determined to act. It reveals their desire for satisfaction.

Commitment

Actions that are done because of full or lack of commitment are desires hidden within the character's mind. It can either be due to their past experiences, experiences from people they know, or their personal choice. There are several lines in the works of literature where commitment is patent.

"I don't want a relationship," is a line from the story of Michelle Tiu Tan, *You Think You Know*. It displayed a strong conviction of Vince not getting into a relationship. He was not committed to a relationship until the end of the story.

In relation, the line "Ronnie knew that he still had one thing left to do before killing himself," from *Armor* by John Bengan stated the commitment of Ronnie to do one thing before ending his life. He compelled himself to join a gay pageant, a thing he had been doing since he was in college, before committing suicide. His strong determination to do this had him done incredible preparation from costume to question and answer portion. His sound commitment was a product of his motivation. In addition, the line "Before the Death Squad entered the picture, he had already made his decision. If the Death Squad were truly after him, they would have to trace him down the stage." of the same story is disclosing Ronnie's commitment to join the pageant even if the Death Squad is after him. Either he will commit suicide or get assassinated by the Death Squad, he was very firm with his decision to join the pageant.

Another commitment to carry on with is shown in the story *Zoetrope* by Richard Cornelio. The line ".gathering enough wits to soldier on for the rest of the day, before going back out to resume the life I'd put on pause," is a commitment to living the life while her daughter is battling cancer. Fran continued to live despite the unforeseen sickness and acted her role as a mother, a lover, a wife, and a woman.

The stories both showed the desire to live despite their wretched lives and displayed their strong commitment to actualize it. This is clear support that they have inner desires to do what they are intended to do.

Self-Satisfaction

Academic Encyclopedia stated that through the notion of satisfaction, we can see the closeness of the concepts of happiness, psychological, and subjective well-being. Satisfaction is a subjective assessment of the quality of certain objects, living and activities conditions, life in general, and relations with the people, the people themselves, including oneself. The highest degree of life satisfaction is what we call happiness (Ilinykh & Udaltsova, 2016).

The line "I need to find a boyfriend who doesn't mind that I'm fat," from *Phallic Symbols* by Exie Abola proved her preference to find a boyfriend who will accept her as she is. She did not think solely about love, money, or attitude in a relationship, as long as it was someone who would not mind that she was fat. It is a matter of satisfaction on her end that she is accepted by her boyfriend. "I want to kill him." is another line from the same story in which Miss Maya revealed his desire to kill the father of her student, Jenny, for impregnating his own daughter. This expression was a result of her despise for the father of Jenny. It pointed out how emotion plays a role in achieving desires to satisfy a person.

Similarly, the story of *Red ang Luha ni Michael* by Jimmy Alcantara indicated a line that displayed the desire to show the love he felt for his love. "*Ito na ang pagkakataon para sorpresahin si Mike*," depicted how Ricky anticipated the day to come when he can surprise Mike since he works for both of them. It shows his desire to make his lover happy.

Relatedly, John Bengan's *Armor* in the line "He would be dead by the end of the week, but only on his own terms," showed strong self-satisfaction even in the matter of death. The character, Ronnie wanted his death to be according to his plan. This indicated that his desire is to expire according to his plan.

Another line that showed self-satisfaction is "But with Joanna it was different. I simultaneously looked forward to and dreaded doing it," from *You Think You Know* by Michelle Tiu Tan. It is highlighted how Vince is "dreading" to do stretch after session. It was a simple routine done with every student, but with Joanna, he deeply desired to do it. There was an evident satisfaction in Vince doing the routine because he has a perceptible desire for Joanna.

The self-satisfaction contents present in the stories was brought about by the desire that is felt by the characters. These are the indicators that their actions are valid as it is the outcome of their desires.

The Role of Betrayal and Fate

Betrayal meant that one party in a relationship acts in a way that favors his or her own interests at the expense of the other party's interests (Fitness, 2001). It is a complex concept that touched on themes of trust, loyalty, and violation. It occurred when someone you trust or have a bond with acts in a way that harms you or goes against your expectations. This was intentional or unintentional, but the result is a deep sense of hurt and emotional pain.

Abandonment

Abandonment is the act of leaving someone or something permanently or for a long time. It can evoke feelings of loneliness, insecurity, and grief. According to Fritscher (2022), fear of abandonment is the overwhelming but unwarranted fear that people who they love will leave them physically, or emotionally. Fear of abandonment is also referred to as “fear of aloneness” (Broadber, Palihawadana, & Rao, 2022). It is a complex phenomenon that can stem from a variety of developmental experiences, including loss and trauma (Fritscher, 2022).

A literal analysis in the line “Hans left me because I was too fat.” from Phallic Symbols by Exie Abola can be derived as abandonment: physically and emotionally. The character was left by her lover because of her physical appearance. In connection, it can be recalled that the same character mentioned she needed a boyfriend who does not mind if she is fat. It became her recovering from being abandoned by her past.

In the same context of abandonment, the line “I had heard those words before, but they still stung.” from You Think You Know by Michelle Tiu Tan was a response to the line “Stop torturing yourself over someone you can’t have.” because the character, Vince, was left behind for dreams. The abandonment he experienced still had an effect on him as it still stung. In the same literature, the line “What if I never saw her again? The thought was too frightening to consider seriously.” also presents a concept of abandonment by just the thought of it.

Additionally, Jimmy Alcantara’s *Red ang Luha ni Michael* also depicted fear of abandonment in the line “Ayoko kasing mag-isa.” Michael had released Ricky from the basement because he thinks Ricky is recovering and he does not want to be alone. However, the outcome was different.

Abandonment is present in the literary works where characters experience abandonment from the people that are close to their hearts.

Betrayal

Betrayal impacted the future decision-making and selection process of a person. In this analysis, certain cases of betrayal were presented in the different works of literature. Exie Abola’s Phallic Symbols in the line “That part repeats in my head: the man whose face I can’t see pulling off the blanket the one her mother would have put on her when she was a child,” described the trauma of the character with her father who impregnated her. In this case, the betrayal she felt can be put as immeasurable since it is her own father who betrayed her.

Another betrayal occurred in the literature of Jimmy Alcantara entitled “*Red ang Luha ni Michael*” in the line “Huwag na nating pag-usapan ang nangyari sa CCP.” Ricky refused to talk about what happened in CCP, when he was fired from work because of his level of creativity. His refusal to talk about it might have a deep reason behind it.

In the literature *Armor* by John Bengan, the line “Ronnie’s straight male lover, whom he’d supported through college, had left to marry a girl he’d gotten pregnant.” Presented a betrayal from a lover. He became so miserable because all his cash and other valuable belongings were taken that it leads him to think of committing suicide.

Acceptance of Fate

In the literature *Armor* by John Bengan, Ronnie’s acceptance to his death is already shown in the beginning of the story as he has already decided to commit suicide. However, his death turned out differently. In the line “This death, it turned out, would have an audience.”, Ronnie accepted the change of course in the manner of his death.

Another line from the literature Phallic Symbols by Exie Abola, “There was another lifetime, of course, in which these tears were shed, though the notion of our child’s death seemed as faraway and far-fetched as the idea of dead stars twinkling down at us forever.” exhibited their acceptance on the death of their child.

CONCLUSION

Psychoanalytic theory provides valuable insights into the unconscious mind of the characters in different works of literature. By analyzing language, dreams, fantasies, and behaviors, therapists can uncover underlying conflicts, desires, and defense mechanisms that shape a person’s thoughts, feelings, and actions. This content analysis focuses on three aspects of the unconscious mind: conflicts, desires, and traumas. It is evident in the presented works of literature that unconscious conflicts, desires, and traumas have an impact on the thoughts, feelings, and actions of a person. However, it is crucial to acknowledge that the subjective nature of interpretation and the possibility of confirmation bias necessitate a cautious approach. Further exploration of the different aspects other than presented in this analysis can be applied to provide a more comprehensive understanding of the unconscious dynamics.

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