

Estrella and *Lola Basyon*: An Open-Ended Construct of 'Self and Other'

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Abstract

This paper attempts to reconstruct the stereotype subjects. The story of Estrella and *Lola Basyon* is described as emerging configurations from the experience of colonization, and readings of the texts explore the recurrent themes of hybridity and ambivalence, which foreground the tension between colonizer and colonized stereotypes. This is Homi Bhabha's concept of the interweaving of metaphors and metonymy, which symptomizes cultural identity - the hybrid self or the so-called counter-archetype. The writer's use of metonymy creatively reconstructs the identity of both the colonizer and the colonized. The content-thematic and symptomatic readings reveal different postcolonial themes that appear in different guises throughout the selected short stories. As a postcolonial tool for writing back to the center, thereby understanding the notion of the open-ended construct of "self and other."

Key words: counter-archetype, hybridity, ambivalence, postcolonialism, 'self and other'

Introduction

"Fish-Hair Woman" articulates a female character as a "hero" professing a male stereotype of subjectification. Estrella, the female character in the story, acts as a redeemer and transformalist during the macabre war in *Iraya*. The assignment given to Estrella counters the Western tradition of the female archetype being passive and weak. Meanwhile, "White Turtle" through the character of *Lola Basyon* brings back the dreams of Iraya's dead children, which have later sprouted into corals in the colors of the bones. It posits that the mythical reptile is a transporter of dreams, dreams that had not been realized before but become true for this present generation; the dreams that have been nurtured for a long time by the children who are now parents of these young children. However, these bone-white dreams also refer to funerals, a frustration caused by the failure of not realizing the children's dreams. Here, the white turtle shows dual identity: the bone for children's dreams and funerals for death or frustration. These texts have shown the significance of transformation and inappropriation. This phenomenon of inappropriation was discussed by Kintanar (1992) in her paper. She posits that the idealized and romanticized figure of the docile and long-suffering Filipina in Philippine literature, particularly during the prewar years, has been widely documented and consequently rejected by feminist writers and critics. Recent examinations of our literary texts reveal that while a great part of the Philippine literary tradition clearly glorifies this meekness and subservience of the Filipina, the trend has dramatically changed (pp.1-8). Relatively, the symbols attached to the indigenous experiences of the Bikol female character seemed not authentic to the encounter with the native muse of Western archetypes because literary critics still believed in outworn clichés of the colonizers' symbols. This paper attempts to insist on the authenticity of the colonized; for the colonized, we know first-hand, and first-hand is what is culturally effective. The tension comes from the play of local specificities - the task assigned to Estrella as the archetype of salvation in a patriarchal tradition of male archetype dominance. Merlinda Bobis's "Fish-Hair

Woman" and "White Turtle" share a new set of conventions for reading for postcolonial readers, with Bobis's mythologizing story universalizing the female archetype transformation. Mythology confronts phenomena which seem likely to happen because it considers that every subject is conceivable and becomes possible, which also creates an apparent arbitrariness (Ritcher, 1989, p. 870). Hence, this paper articulates a female *Bikol* character who is "othering" or performing a counter-archetype of the female symbol because the woman character has evolved her characteristics and established her footing as essential and dynamic. At the context of appropriating self and other in a postcolonial perspective, this paper attempts to investigate the transformations that the female *Bikol* character undergoes. How can these changes be characterized, and how may she be considered symbolic or archetypal? Finally, how does this story illustrate the hybrid and ambivalent identity of the woman in a patriarchal culture that appropriates power and the counter-archetypal identity of the woman?

Methodology

This paper examines both form and content based on Homi Bhabha's concept of the hybridity of emergent culture, in which he appropriates Michel Foucault's discourse as a site of struggle; Jacques Derrida's difference and supplementarity, which posits that Western culture cannot be privileged over colonized culture because one is enabled by the other; and Jacques Lacan's notion of subjectivity in the text's content and form through the use of metaphoric and metonymic images with which the colonized persona identifies and summons the absent colonizer. The first layer of criticism uses a content and thematic approach to identify the text's content of the text, which discusses the central themes of hybridity and ambivalence. The second layer, which uses symptomatic reading and deconstruction, examines the form, which includes abrogation and appropriation of language, and her use of metonymy and metaphor to illustrate the binary of self and other. This paper also discusses how the texts "Fish Hair Woman" and "White Turtle" show rejection of the categories of imperial culture and the assumptions of traditional and 'fixed' meaning in language, to reveal the process by which language is taken and made to bear the burden of Filipino/*Bikolano*'s hybridity and ambivalence for cultural negotiation and infixity, which asserts position.

Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin (1989) characterize symptomatic reading as "readings that are not directed towards totalizing interpretations but readings that may enable us to isolate and identify significant shifts in the development of postcolonial writing (p.178)." In other words, these are the text's "unconscious", what is unspoken and inevitably repressed that aims to "reveal the discursive formations and ideological forces which traverse the text (p. 83)." Here, Bhabha's notion of emergent culture, which appropriates Michel Foucault's notion of discourse, will be used. This reading will show the configurations of cultural domination that enabled the writing of the text by the writer in question and which, consciously or unconsciously, prompted the same writer to make the characters in the text speak and act the way they do. Deconstruction will look into the metaphoric and metonymic images through which the notion of power inherent in the model of center and margin is appropriated and thus dismantled (1994, p. 83)." This time, Jacques Derrida's difference and supplementarity, and Jacques Lacan's subjectivity, examine the use of metaphor and metonymy to summon the absent colonizer, appropriate and abrogate his culture, and assert the characters' "self and other" sensibility. The paper ends with an analysis of how this binary opposition rejects the colonizers' assumptions of the colonizers about Western culture and the colonized culture.

Estrella and Lola Basyon: Appropriating Counter-Archetype

The "Fish-Hair Woman" is reminiscent of the powerful female shaman, babaylan or catalonan,

of the pre-Hispanic *Tagalog* and Visayan-speaking areas of the Philippines. The story is set in a village called *Iraya*. The setting is 1987. It is a time of civil unrest: government soldiers fight communist insurgents (the historical New People's Army). The villagers are caught in the middle, struggling to survive. The central characters are Estrella, the fish-hair woman who uses her 12-metre-long hair like a net to retrieve the dead from the river ("trawl another victim of our senseless war"); and Tony, the Australian journalist whom both had loved. The story is a multi-layered narrative of political conflict, mythical-cultural practice, and romantic love. It is told in the first person and the third person, with changing points of view. Sometimes we see through Estrella's eyes, and sometimes an omnipotent narrator. Woven through it are recurring images and smells – the sweet lemongrass tainted by the corpse-laden river, the fireflies that light the dead so they can be found, and Estrella's long hair that magically grows each time she senses violence and pain.

The "Fish-Hair Woman" has an affirmative note about the *Bikol* woman character. In this text, Estrella demonstrates dominance and leadership, a manifestation that a woman may handle greater responsibilities than a man; however, the text does not equalize man over woman, but only shows the assumption that woman is relative to man, who can handle greater responsibilities. This is a counter-archotyping that destroys the monopoly of the male stereotype and its patriarchal assumptions. Here, Estrella is an archetypal woman, associated with "Great Mother" (Guerin et. al., 1992, p. 152) representing the mysteries of life-death and transformation. However, this subjectification of Estrella does not end with being the great mother, but also a hero archetype, who is an archetype of transformation and redemption. Estrella is like a "sacrificial scapegoat" with whom Estrella thinks of the village's welfare of the village before her own welfare, to restore the land from the chaos of death caused by militarization. This is a sort of mythologizing used by Bobis in her text. Take note of this narrative: *"How little we know or wish to know of the history of our icons or our saints or our gods. It is enough that we invent for them at present and believe that they can save us from ourselves. But, no, I will not allow you to invent me, too, you who read this, so I will tell you everything. And if you need saving at all, understand that I had relinquished salvation after that last night by the river. 'Lambat na itom na itom/ pero sa dugo natumtom/ samong babaying parasira/ kang samong mga padaba/ hale sa salog ... // very black net/ but blood-soaked/ our fisherwoman/ hair to save-fish/ all our beloved/ from the river' ... (Bobis, 1999, p. 13)." In this writing, Estrella always desperately wants to save the dead with her hair, to net them back to dry land for a decent burial. Bobis, in turn, wants to save stories of the dead, to net them back into consciousness, and to memorialize them. Then the fish-hair woman's vocation is a netting of salvation, not to trap but to help free the psyche, to bury a body, in order to find a conclusion. This is similar to Frazer's insight on rites of blood sacrifice (Guerin et.al., 1992, p. 158). The dead bodies trawled from the rivers symbolize the existence of violence, a sacrifice made by the rebels to present another reality of the government. And the act of trawling is a sacrifice because this is part of a ritual of paying a tribute to the dead bodies. In this situation, Estrella is a magical guarantee of rejuvenation, an assurance of life, and a feeling of renewal. The dead bodies trawled from the river is a sacrifice of cleansing, re-calling the ideologies being fought by the revolutionary. Bobis uses this mythical character in her negotiation in relating to her new home - Australia though she loves her new home but life in the original cultural heritage is more sentimental than the other. Bobis writes: *"The myth of the Fish-Hair Woman is an old-current story. Old, because she evokes the time of larger than life heroes with magical powers. But this seemingly 'ancient' figure is only a vehicle for something ever present, never having been outdated: the quest for salvation. Very close to purgation and, of course, rebirth. A pattern of the psyche, again to refer to Joseph Campbell, my collective pattern. But for a while, fleshed out within my context, thus becoming a woman with twelve-meter hair. I could say I dreamt her up – or did she dream me up, so I could dream her? We're just trading time and context: her ancient world to my 21st century. Whatever happened, she is now a memorial with my own cultural patina – politics, aesthetics, and all. Now transplanted into new soil: Australia. How will she fare here? Will she have enough currency in this new trading ground with its own mythology and sensibility?**

(Bobis, 2001)."

The assignment provided by Bobis to Estrella is similar to the shamans, *babaylans*, *diwatas*, and *enkantadas* in our *Bikol* culture, in that deities are not only male; there are female deities, which further argues that gods are either men or women, thereby defying the Western ideology that there is one true God, as proffered by the colonizers' culture represented by the Christian faith handed down to us by both Spanish and American colonizers. Their presence is a counter-archetype that establishes their currency as representation of the male archetype and a hero. Fish-Hair Woman "reveals about the mind and character of people, and just as dreams reflect the unconscious desires and anxieties of the individual, myth projects people's hopes, values, fears, and aspirations." (Guerin et. al., 1992, p. 148). Take note of this narrative: "*Fish with your hair, woman.*" *Always that command which summed up my life. After the government declared its total war against the rebels, I realized the purpose of my being, why I was more hair than body, the span of it nearly thrice my whole frame. ... Where is she? Ay, washing her hair in the river, ... Hair of Estrella, have mercy on us* (Bobis, 1999, pp. 12-13)".

The "Fish-Hair Woman" articulates the counter-archetype of a woman and her hybrid and ambivalent mark. The *Bikol* female character's counter-archetype as the icon of salvation exhibits a displaced political position, demonstrates a dominant patriarchal character and order, and is able to define her double otherness by deconstructing the male/female binaries, thus creating male power from her assignment as "trawler of dead bodies." This characteristic articulates a partial escape from an archetypal pattern: the woman, rather than being a submissive and passive individual, becomes a strong figure reminiscent of a high priest and a hero. Estrella being the fish-hair woman, professes a powerful female shaman, *babaylan* or *catalonan* of the pre-Hispanic culture. This mythical character signifies that the *Bikolano* before colonization, already had an established consciousness that demonstrates *Bikolano* superiority equal to the first Catholic priests and educators in the country during the Hispanic Revolution. The fish-hair woman is a counter-archetype that rejects the assumptions of the colonizers of their superiority over the colonized, particularly when the *Bikol* character has aggressively emphasized the deconstruction of the imperial assumption that women are inferior to men. Moreover, the same mythical character defies Western ideology that there is one true God, as proffered by the colonizer's culture represented by the Christian faith handed down by both Spaniards and Americans, and reveals an open-ended construct in which both the colonized and the colonizer are in continuous negotiation. Meanwhile, considering the postcolonial membership of the text, this also posits the hybrid characteristic of the female character, which may give rise to a new gender-woman. It is hybrid in nature because it blends the characteristics of men into a woman, allowing her to reveal new characteristics/identities different from the assumptions attached to them - female. Bhabha (1994) defines hybridity as the construction of a new political object that is neither the one nor the other. Hybridity alienates our political expectations and, as it must, changes the very forms of our recognition of the moment of politics (p. 25). In this text, Estrella is in the position of negotiation, negotiating her hybrid identity as a woman, a woman different from patriarchal assumptions. Her identity, as an icon of salvation, and being a woman create a new, strong hybrid identity. Bobis only presents a temporal position to conceive the articulation of contradictory elements. According to Bhabha, the "emergence of transcendent history opens up hybrid sites and objectives of struggle, and destroys the negative polarities between knowledge and its objects and between theory and practical political reason (p. 25)." Estrella remains an archetype of a woman because of her affection for the Australian journalist. Here, Estrella reveals a common stereotyping of women: being beautiful and falling in love with a man. Her character's stature and complexion are able to attract not only the villagers but also the Australian researcher, which connotes that *Bikol* [Filipina women] are beautiful like the *mestisa* or *Latina*. This argument reveals a sense of superiority in the *Bikol* female character because of her ambivalent characteristics, over the assumption that it is not only

white that is beautiful, but also colored ones. Take note of this monologue: *"I am a Filipina, tiny and dark as a coconut husk, but what red fires glint on my head! ... "Fish with your hair, woman." Always that command, which summed up my life. After the government declared its total war against the rebels, I realized the purpose of my being, why I had come to be such a freak of nature, why I was more hair than body, the span of it nearly thrice my whole frame"* (Bobis, 1999, p. 12)."

Bobis's character defines and exhibits her double otherness as a female Bikol, deconstructs both the male/female binaries, but to reveal only her ambivalent and displaced characteristics of the Bikol character, Estrella. This is a counter-archetypal narrative: the characteristics assigned to men may be attributed to women, because archetypes are open-ended and universal. Estrella is a strong and brave woman. As the shaman of the villagers, she manifests bravery and strength as she trawls dead bodies from the river, but she also demonstrates weakness when the [fish-hair-woman] falls in love with the Australian researcher and surrenders herself to him. The fish-hair-woman shows that even how strong a woman could be, she would reveal her true self; the assumption attached to women by the patriarchal order, being passive and submissive to the will of man. Because when Estrella falls in love with Tony, she never considers her own decision and just believes in the promises of her lover, this situation articulates that women, though they have strong characteristics, still manifest weaknesses. Thus, the night before Tony leaves Iraya, Estrella surrenders herself to Tony, believing that her love for the Australian researcher would release her from her task as an icon of courage and salvation. This act of surrender is an archetype of a woman's submission to men out of love. This confirms that the yoke of patriarchy considers men superior and dominant. However, at the end of these circumstances, Estrella picks herself up and continues the task assigned to her by the community as the savior of the dead. Admission to stereotyping or subjectification relies heavily on one's self. The colonized character may negate or simply accept it, because denial is always a retroactive process, a half acknowledgement of that otherness, which may leave a traumatic mark. Estrella's character in "Fish-Hair-Woman" does this as she demonstrates that the point of intervention should shift from the ready recognition of images as positive or negative to an understanding of the processes of subjectification made possible and plausible through stereotype-archetype discourse. In the end, Estrella eventually succumbs to the call of duty as the Fish-Hair Woman, a counter-archetype and the hero of the village. And despite her love for Tony as Ramon, in an act at the height of mockery and injustice, she forces him to go to the river for her ultimate act of sacrifice.

Bobis has also twinned the identity of the Bikol character and the Australian journalist. Estrella, an icon of courage and salvation, asserts the dominant subjectification of a man; however, despite her strength, she also manifests inferiority, the submissive characteristics of a woman when she falls in love with Tony, the Australian journalist. Here, the Bikol character unleashes her mask of strength and recalls the inferiority of the dominant culture over women. Moreover, the superior identity of the Australian researcher-journalist was tainted by the effeminate tag "sissy." It transforms the superior mark of the "white" into an inferior one. Take note of the following narration: *"... Sissy Australian – bakla!" Ramon spat at Tony's back. Back. My back, most loved.", ... "He wasn't that good after all –" Ramon paused, slowing his words for effect. "Your pale sissy did not even know how to fight – like a man"* (Bobis, 1999, pp. 17-22). The colonized Bikol character, side by side with the colonizer (Australian journalist) created hybridized images in which both the colonizer and the colonized form part of his/her Self-identity, and vice-versa. This text has exposed Western essentialist claims regarding the purity and supremacy of their own culture over Oriental culture and has articulated the supremacy of the colonized over the colonizer. Through these images of identification, which Bhabha calls "dissembling" images or images of "doubling," the colonized subject has succeeded in occupying the privileged place of the colonizer and yet has retained his own "avenging" place. This process, according to Bhabha, is a situation of continuous embedding, in which it is impossible to find its origin (1994, p. 8). Bhabha once noted, "identification is never a

priori, nor a finished product, but only a site for ambivalence; it follows that a figure of contiguity that substitutes a part for a whole must not be read as a form of simple substitution or equivalence, but as a double movement that follows what Derrida calls the logic or play of the supplement" (p. 8). Hence, it follows also that the identity articulated by the indigenous character is not the single, coherent, and pure white-ideal ego proffered by Western culture. Rather, the identity of the local folk articulated by the texts shows ambivalence and contradictions. Conversely, when Estrella assumes responsibility as shaman of *Iraya*, it posits that the subjectification provided to the female archetype by the order of patriarchy is not coherent, and authentic Self is not what the male figure claims to be in Western discourse. Instead, it is an ambivalent and fragmented archetype characterized by counter-archetypes or othering. When Estrella performs as shaman or baylan, she has defined herself as the dominant archetype that counters her inherent inferior signification. This counter-archetype is what Bobis's text has posited: that the female archetype has succeeded in occupying the privileged place of the male archetype. Having an ambivalent and hybrid self, Estrella has an origin that is difficult to trace back, which, in Bhabha's argument, the subject cannot claim as a single point of origin and cannot speak of its Self without reference to its Other. Bobis's "Fish-Hair-Woman" therefore agrees that both the male and female symbols do not possess a single, coherent, and pure identity, but an emergent, fragmented, and hybridized one. This signification created a certain equality between men and women and a commonality of identities that effaces the stereotype subjectification of both archetypes.

Meanwhile, "White Turtle" tells of a *Bikol* epic chanter, *Lola Basyon*, who came to the Sydney Writers' Festival and chanted a story of the white turtle. The white turtle is a mythical tale that ferries the dreams of the dead children in the navel of the sea. *Lola Basyon* was invited by the Australian anthropologist to show her *Bikol* poetry at a writers' festival. The mythical turtle, which is only dreamt up by the *Bikol* epic chanter, is not white at all, but begins turning white in the local seer's consciousness and for her readers/audience. The white turtle keeps transforming, becoming a funerary attendant to dreams of dead children, and changing into bone-white like the corals under the deep sea, with a new patina of this mythical reptile. *Lola Basyon* is able to reach the reader's/audience's consciousness when the audience unconsciously mythologizes and transforms the turtle into a white turtle. The readers have fleshed out an old story, giving it an even stranger gloss by taking an old story and giving it back as something new. The *Bikol* chanter does not have a book, but she is invited to the festival through the Australian anthropologist. She does not quite fit in the context of the festival, but her presence signifies a re-valuing of the oral tradition.

The audience once thought that *Lola Basyon* should have attended a multicultural presentation instead of the writers' festival, but they later realized that *Lola Basyon* has a new story to tell. Here, Bobis introduced a new mode of storytelling, hybrid in nature, because she uses a conventional mode with a newer look. Bobis has opened up a space for translation in which the construction of a political object [white turtle] is a contemporary argument to reveal the difference between the East and the West, between Filipino and English, showing that the *Bikol*/Filipino character is not displaced from the Sydney Writers' Festival but is able to sing new songs. *Lola Basyon's* creativity in her readings invokes acceptance from the audience/readers. She is able to get along with Western writers and the audience because she has adapted to her new environment/culture and, at the same time, retained her native culture. This ability of the local chanter to establish her identity at the Sydney Writers' Festival, through the movement of split subjects and differentiated social movements on two planes, is what Bhabha calls the emergence of the interstices – overlap and displacement of domains of difference are negotiated (1994, p. 3)." *Lola Basyon's* notion of displacement, because of her multicultural style, does not hinder her from narrating [*Bikol*] stories. Her use of *Bikol* language fused in English posits a new site of struggle, which demonstrates that English language could not fully express the exact dimensions of what the colonized think and believe in. Bhabha says that this is an in-between space which provides the terrain for elaborating

strategies of selfhood that initiate new signs of identity and innovative sites of collaboration and contestation, in the act of defining the idea of society itself (p. 2). The Bikol chanter has articulated her ambivalence, not Self and Other but the otherness of the Self inscribed in the perverse palimpsest of colonial identity. Moreover, Bobis has also perfectly shown, through the character of Lola Basyon and the image of the white turtle, that even if the Bikol character has established her identity, she cannot really avoid the fact that her character is still displaced in a foreign land. Take note of this: *"The spell was broken. Everyone started moving and speaking in unison, some in wonder, others with the deepest unnamable emotions, but a few murmured their doubts. Dreams? Dead children? Suddenly, they remembered the story. Funerals. One man contemptuously dismissed this foolishness and argued instead against cruelty to animal. ... She wanted to explain to the men in the blue that it did not mean to cause harm or any trouble (Bobis, 1999, p. 51)."*

The white turtle that bore on its back the dreams of Iraya's dead children has buried the little girl's and boy's dreams, which later sprouted into corals, whose were those of the bones. It suggests that the mythical reptile is a transporter of dreams, dreams that had not been realized before but become true for this present generation, the dreams that have been nurtured for a long time by children who are now parents of these young children. However, these bone-white dreams also refer to funerals, a frustration caused by the failure of not realizing the children's dreams. Here, the white turtle shows dual identity: the bone for children's dreams and funerals for death or frustration. Bobis has shown the significance of transformation. The transformation of death and grief, which are told in a tale to become manageable. She uses a hybrid writing style to express her thoughts; she mythologizes, re-creates stories from conventional to contemporary, appropriating another style of retelling a story to become more than itself. Bobis writes: *"We tell stories, so we don't forget them. First we memorialize ... then we extend ourselves: we mythologize because we can't help ourselves either. What is myth, then but a memorial with a strange patina? There is an other-worldliness about it or a heightened sense of the world-even loftiness, perhaps? All stories are "tall tales", because in the telling, we are transforming and hopefully transcending something (Bobis, 2001)."* Though Lola Basyon, the Bikol character, was displaced in the writers' festival, she has managed to reveal her own self and gained the confidence of her readers and audience. The Bikol chanter sings [reads] the giant turtle in the writer's festival, and this white turtle materializes amidst the book signing at the writers' festival. This illustrates that the colonizers [Australian readers/audience] have understood the sensibility or consciousness of the colonized. When the mythical turtle appeared over the readers/audience, the crowd was afraid whether the white turtle was an endangered species or was not properly quarantined. It testifies that shared histories of discrimination, the exchange of values, meanings, and priorities may be collaborative and dialogical, but may also be antagonistic, conflictual, and incommensurable. In this text, the Bikol chanter explains that the white turtle does not mean to cause harm or any trouble; the turtle only wants to tell stories because her stories are written on her back and are only offered to Lola Basyon in a moment of music. The white turtle was just a conduit for narrating the life of the migrant writer, her aspirations and frustrations. This text manifests that Bobis through Salvacion Ibarra, a.k.a. *Lola Basyon* has transplanted her own sensibility, a new currency of *Bikol* that articulated that local writers could also be relative to Western writers.

The "white turtle" is a metaphor for the source of stories, creative energy, inspiration, and salvation. Bobis uses the mythical reptile to reveal her character's intentions, and through the local chanter, she is able to present the struggles of Asian writers in a foreign country and contend with Western writers. Bhabha reiterates that the social articulation of difference, from the minority perspective, is a complex, ongoing negotiation that seeks to authorize cultural hybridities that emerge in moments of historical transformation. And the right to signify from the periphery of authorized power and privilege does not depend on the persistence of tradition. It is resourced by the power of tradition to reinscribe through the conditions of contingency and contradictoriness

that attend upon the lives of those who are in the minority (1994, p. 2)." Bobis in her story, freely abrogates and appropriates the literary genre and language of the colonizer. Her story, fused with local color, seizes the language of the center and replaces it with a discourse adapted to the colonized place to create the Other (the ambivalent, hybridized, or fragmented Filipino/*Bikolano* identity/culture). She uses language as a site of struggle. Take note of the words "*Lola*," an English term for grandmother or an old woman, and "*Basyon*" which is a local term for Salvation, from a colonizer's name – the use of "*tapis*" and "*kimona*", native *Bikol* garments worn by women instead of a skirt and blouse, and the expression "*ay Dios ko!*", instead of Oh, My God!, are used by Bobis to emphasize an spontaneous discourse of how a local *Bikol* reacts to a magnificent event. Likewise, the expression of gratitude, "*salamat*" or "*maraming salamat*," thank you or thank you very much in English, is written in *Bikol* instead of the colonizer's language. These are only some of the *Bikol*/Filipino languages that Bobis appropriates for use in English to fully articulate the local color and meaning of the text. Though the narration is a fusion of three languages – the *Bikol* language, Filipino, and English, Bobis has successfully delivered her intention to her readers to make them see the "white turtle." Nevertheless, Bobis use of *Bikol*/Filipino language reveals that English could not fully serve her needs and that the local language can best illustrate the message of the text. This consciousness sums up Bobis's sensibility and her poetics as a source of stories and a conduit. Bobis recounts: "In this story, the white turtle is a metaphor for the source of stories, creative energy and inspiration, as well as salvation." As such, the white turtle is a 'precious, holy thing,' as I wrote in that story. In a way, this concept sums up my philosophy, or you might say, my poetics: the author is not the ultimate source of stories, but only their conduit. And these stories are either murmurings or explosions in the air, plot lines captured by the writer's ear and then telegraphed to the heart, so that it can speak or sing. I liken the process of writing to the workings of a magic cable: the story travels fluidly from the ear, the heart, or the artistic sensibility, then to the voice (2002). Bobis further argues that the author is not the ultimate source of stories but only their conduit, part of the chain. All stories are already out there, either as murmurings or explosions in the air, plotlines captured by the writer's ear, then telegraphed to his/her heart, so that it can speak or sing: "A magic cable which goes first to the ear, then stimulated to the heart or to the artistic sensibility, and then creates the voice (2001)." The white turtle called upon by the *Bikol* chanter through her poem/short story is a mythic story. Her [*Lola Basyon*] style of narrating her story rejects the dominant way of narrating stories. Lola Basyon establishes the *Bikol* way of relating stories. Likewise, *Lola Basyon's* Filipino outfit rejects the colonizer's assumption about the colonized, even though she looks multicultural. Because of her indigenous outfits, she still exudes confidence. This assertion also typifies the transformation of the writer herself when she [Bobis] migrated to Australia for her post-graduate education. Bobis transplants her *Bikol* sensibility into her new home, Australia which is shaped by the mythologies of her first culture, but Bobis is also anxious how to be fully understood in one's original tongue in a foreign land. This is the dilemma of the migrant writer, like her *Bikol* character [*Lola Basyon*] on how she could be accepted in the foreign land with her own *Bikol* sensibility, which is strange to them. Bobis writes, "the migrant writer has to work extremely hard to win this faith – of the publisher, the reading public, the critic, or the writers' festival directors, so that they finally invite the "marginal" to the "party" (2001)."

Appropriating 'Self and Other' in a Postcolonial Frame

In analyzing a literary text using a mythological and archetypal approach, requires visiting various archetypes or archetypal patterns. With this premise, this researcher attempts to seek out mysterious elements that reveal universal human experiences and to study in depth the "wooden hawks" (Guerin, 1992, p. 148) of great literature that Merlinda Bobis has drawn forward along the tensed structural wires of her "Fish-Hair Woman." This construction is how characters, stories, and natural elements such as sun and moon, darkness and light, fire and water are linked up with one another, seeing one literary work in relation to others of a similar type. Thus, for example, Hamlet's

revenge for his father's death can be linked to myths from other cultures in which a son's avenging of his father. Or the story of Hamlet can be linked with others in which the corruption poisoning a country has been eliminated through some action taken by the hero. These symptoms are basically present in mythological reading, which illustrates the patterns that can be explained in terms of archetypes or universal symbols. The motifs or themes that may be found in other mythologies, and certain images that recur in the myths of peoples widely separated in time and place, tend to have common meaning or, more accurately, tend to elicit comparable psychological responses and to serve similar cultural functions. Archetypal reading, on the other hand, is also called the "totemic, mythological, or ritualistic." It occupies a curious position among other methods: it requires close textual readings, and is concerned humanistically with more than the intrinsic value of aesthetic satisfaction; it seems psychological insofar as it analyzes the work of art's appeal to the audience, and yet sociological in its attention to basic cultural patterns as central to that appeal." Hence, this critical reading sought to discover the "cultural patterns which assume a mythic quality in their permanence within a particular culture." Meanwhile, Frazer and Jung cautioned that, to avoid circumscribing, one can delineate the method as a demonstration of some basic cultural pattern of great meaning and appeal to humanity in a work of art. Such an approach reflects a strong contemporary interest in myth and the influence of two figures whose work has been of great importance (Scott, 1962, pp. 247-250). These theorists asserted the validity of myth and its retention in social memory, which strongly appealed to the creative imagination. In examining the text, "Fish-Hair Woman" and its underlying mythological patterns, Estrella - the Bikol character, is a shaman, a myth-maker, speaking out of her unconscious primordial truth, which at the same time serves as a representation by the artist, Merlinda Bobis, and by Bikol women in general. Moreover, "included in the mythological and archetypal approach is the anthropological reading that seeks to restore humanity, a humanity that values the primitive elements in human nature." It seeks to reestablish the ancient race of man at its highest, being rational (Scott, 1962, p. 251). To appropriate the hybrid and ambivalent self of the *Bikol* character as a form of counter-archetype or othering under postcolonial labeling, this paper complements a postcolonial framework. This theory attempts to identify the general characteristics of writings born out of colonization and to present a different set of criteria or literary norms by which postcolonial writing ought to be evaluated. Postcolonial culture is inevitably a hybridized phenomenon involving a dialectical relationship between the grafted European cultural systems and an indigenous culture, with its impulse to create or recreate an enriched cultural identity – the emergent culture. This element of hybridity is prevalent in postcolonial and third-world societies, such as the Philippines, where hybrid culture threads the boundary between opposing cultures. This hybridity of the emergent culture, however, is problematic. An emergent culture is always in motion, opposing a dominant culture. In the process of opposition, the emergent culture remains, although in a concealed way, entangled with the dominant. The entanglement with the dominant may weaken, and the emergent may become the new dominant culture. Hence, while there is an element of hybridity in the nature of emergent culture, this hybridity is also in motion, like an open-ended construct in which the signifier or archetype, in a totemic sense, may move to either end. It keeps changing, so it is difficult to catch it or paint a picture of it. But an object in motion always passes through particular points while it moves in a certain direction. This process allows the subaltern the strategy of attempting to disarticulate the voice of authority (that of the colonizer's patriarchy) at the point of splitting or ambivalence. This notion of ambivalence or splitting is what Jacques Lacan identified as subjectivity, and Bhabha (1994) calls this dialectical playing of subjectivities; the word "I" reflects a part of both the signification of binaries.

Conclusion

Myths take their specific shapes from the cultural environments in which they grow, as in the story of "Fish-Hair Woman" and "White Turtle." Estrella, as a shaman, in "Fish-Hair Woman," is

associated with the hero-as-sacrificial-scapegoat motif, which prioritizes the welfare of the village over her Self. Estrella offers her counter-archetype mark to atone for the chaos of death and creates transformation. Meanwhile, *Lola Basyon* in "White Turtle" illustrates the themes of hybridity, ambivalence, and displacement. It has opened a space for translation for social and cultural negotiation between the colonizers and the colonized. The "white turtle" is used as a metaphor for the source of stories, creative energy, inspiration, and salvation, enabling the once-colonized subject to narrate the stories stored at the back of the mythical reptile. These texts posit hybridity and ambivalence. The stories articulate the hybrid nature of the *Bikol* female character, which is not pulled apart but sings new songs, a new creation from/within the binaries. The fish-hair woman, as an icon of salvation and courage, mirrors a strong woman: as the shaman of the village, she manifests courage and strength compared to men as she trawls dead bodies from the river. *Lola Basyon* signifies a female character who is courageous enough to present her indigenous poetics and orality at a male-dominated festival. Her displacement did not make her inferior because she managed to show her currency and sensibilities. Postcolonial assumption takes us far beyond the historical and aesthetic realms of literary study - going back to the beginning of humankind's oldest rituals and beliefs and deep into our own individual hearts. It erases, albeit any essentialist claims, about the inherent authenticity, purity, or supremacy of cultures because one is enabled by the other through the counter-archetype. "Fish-Hair-Woman" presents basic cultural patterns that assume a mythic quality within a particular culture of the *Bikol* folk in *Iraya*, including the existence of *shamans*, *babaylans*, *diwatas*, and *engkantadas*. These cultural and mythical symbols or patterns represent familiar and universal experiences in presenting symbolic practices such as rituals for the dead. The trawling is a symbolic representation of redemption. The "fish-hair-woman" has seamlessly narrated the story in a dream-like passion: a subconscious narration, but vividly presented through actual action on the ground. Her style of shifting from first person to an omnipotent point of view dictates a clear picture of life and ritual, narrating a task intended for men but performed by a woman - Estrella, a symbolic transformation and a counter-archetype. This symbolic transformation of the female character into a male capacity-responsibility signification articulates the so-called counter-archetypal process. It demonstrates the life and culture of indigenous folk and reveals the currency of the female stereotype-archetype, which alters the subjective signification of imperial culture that females are inferior and males are superior. The othering or counter-archetypal signification is an avenging power to show that the female stereotype appears superior to the male stereotype; without women, the superiority of men will be silenced by the absence of women.

Both "Fish-Hair-Woman" and "White Turtle" have attempted to free their female *Bikol* characters, like Estrella and *Lola Basyon* from the yoke of patriarchy and stereotyping. Estrella and *Lola Basyon* have exposed the conditions of female *Bikol* characters in liberating the symbolic order, counter-archetypal. Counter-archetypal speaks out from behind the veil of silence to create a border in which both the male and female archetypes develop a union of an emergent hybrid identity and culture. These narratives have raised our consciousness to reclaim and liberate the female stereotype identity imposed by Western culture. Finally, in a postcolonial perspective, "Fish-Hair-Woman" and "White Turtle" have documented a counter-archetypal or hybrid approach to interpellation from the conventional concept of articulation by tracing the writer's influence from the writer onto his/her texts, in which the writer has an unconscious contribution of his/her life to the textuality of the text: a space of intervention that may establish a hybrid-ambivalent culture or the Other. This hybridity and ambivalence demonstrate a notion that is not an identification of binary oppositions, but rather, going beyond them by decentering the center through a fusion of cultures. This hybrid culture is neither the dominant position nor the emergent opposition to it. It belongs to the boundary between the two. This hybrid-ambivalent culture/individual is, like the two sides of a coin, the same impure, both in one: the insider/outsider.

Implication

The hundreds of years of colonization have left the Filipinos with a hybridized existence that has seen the dominance of imperial influence over culture, practice, and mentality. Colonization has served as the great force in “othering” the indigenous practices and values of Filipinos. The belief of the West in its superiority has led to the propagation of stereotypes that portray the colonized as inferior and strange, the dominance of men over women, and the many binaries that created a stereotypical archetype. This is evident in television, film, and literature, where the male character demonstrates strength, leadership, and power. These stereotypes have reflected males as superior at the expense of marginalizing the female, which has proliferated over the ages. As a result, women’s discursive practices and identity are silenced and challenged by this subjectification. Thus, these texts, “Fish-Hair Woman” and “White Turtle” in abrogating and appropriating Western discursive practices and in representing and addressing the male archetype through Western images with which “Estrella” and *Lola Basyon* likewise identify, interrogate not merely an image of the colonial past but the power relations that enabled the discursive and disciplinary place from which questions of female archetypes may be strategically and institutionally posed. “Estrella” and “Lola Basyon” attempt to locate the postcolonial subject in the hybrid gap, within the play of the subaltern instance of writing. They articulate cultural difference as an enunciative category that opposes the notion of cultural purity and supremacy and posits cultural difference and hybridity. These texts, as an embodiment of the dynamic imagination of Homi Bhabha (1994) in their power as a woman and a myth - how these stories illustrate the hybrid and ambivalent identity of women in a patriarchal culture that asserts the sensibility of power and identity. The short stories are described as having emerged from the experience of colonization, and this reading of the texts explores the recurrent themes of hybridity and ambivalence, or the so-called counter-archetype, and the notion of an open-ended construct, foregrounding the tension between male and female stereotypes.

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